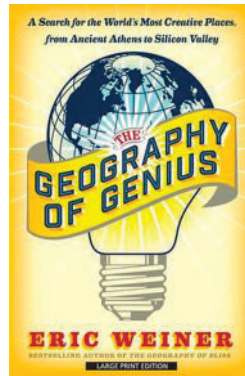




THE GEOGRAPHY OF GENIUS: A SEARCH FOR THE WORLD'S MOST CREATIVE
PLACES FROM ANCIENT ATHENS TO SILICON VALLEY.



THE BOOK

**The Geography of Genius**

A search for the world's most creative places from Ancient Athens to Silicon Valley

by Eric Weiner



INTRODUCTION

Did you ever wonder what makes a genius? Best selling travel writer Eric Weiner did, so he wrote a book on the subject.

Dismissing the old adage of the lone genius, Weiner embraced the geographical theory of genius creation and set out on an epic journey to discover how it works. His book invites you to travel along as he explores hot spots of historical genius from Ancient Athens to Silicon Valley.

Weiner's account of his journey is an entertaining romp through 'genius', past and present. With frequent and insightful scholarly references and colourful conversations with experts, Weiner breaks down the environmental and geographical elements that created geniuses from Socrates to Beethoven and beyond.

Weiner's self-proclaimed 'colossal fools' experiment is a thought-provoking journey into genius and how it is formed. It may be far more treasure map than recipe book but *The Geography of Genius* is the perfect first step to understanding genius and discovering it in yourself and those around you.



5 BEST QUOTES

"Culture is the enormous yet invisible ocean in which we swim."

"Silicon Valley's success is built on the carcasses of its failures. In the Valley, failure is fertilizer. Like all fertilizer, though, it must be used wisely by a skilled farmer, otherwise it is useless and smells bad."

"Geniuses are always marginalized to one degree or another. Someone wholly invested in the status quo is unlikely to disrupt it."

"We are at our most creative when we have something to push against. Creativity does not require perfect conditions. In fact, it thrives in imperfect ones. The block of marble from which Michelangelo carved his masterpiece, the David, had been discarded by other artists. They considered it defective, and they were right. But Michelangelo saw that defect as a challenge, not a disqualifier."

"When people from similar backgrounds get together, are isolated from dissenting views, and are trying to please a strong leader, the result is consensus around the preferred position, even if it is clearly wrongheaded."



7 BIG IDEAS

1. “WHAT IS HONoured IN A COUNTRY IS CULTIVATED THERE”

This astonishingly insightful quote from the great thinker Plato is a vital key to the creation of genius.

Ancient Athens honoured wisdom, Renaissance Florence honoured art, the Vienna of Mozart’s day honoured music (it still does). Each of these cities saw an explosion in creative genius in their honoured areas. Look at what your country, city, or school culture is honouring and you will see where geniuses will be likely to emerge. Consider the power of Silicon Valley today.

2. MOTIVATION

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is internal, a drive that comes purely from within, like wanting to improve your skill in a given field. Extrinsic motivation comes from external sources and there is no better example than monetary payment.

Mozart wrote almost nothing without payment and was known to discard work if the buyer opted out. For Mozart, extrinsic motivation was the catalyst. However, once at his work, Mozart’s intrinsic motivation, his personal desire to be the best, took over and he would work at all hours of the day and night. Without the combination of motivations, Mozart may not have created his vast works of genius. This is why people work better, even if they are being paid, if they also care about and value the work they are doing on a personal level.

3. CONVERSATION

Weiner is keen to expound that genius isn’t born, it is created and cultivated. One of the most common ways that genius has grown throughout history is through conversation. The symposia of the ancient Greeks, the clubs of eighteenth-century Scotland, the adda of turn of the century Calcutta, the coffee houses of Edwardian Vienna; each cultivated and honoured lively conversation. It is through the meeting of minds and ideas that genius is able to thrive.

Weiner says that geniuses don’t necessarily have better ideas than others but they have many, many more. Conversation is an excellent way to cull the bad ideas and elevate the good ones. He does stress, however, that, while ideas are formed and built in conversation, they are usually perfected later in solitude. The blend of environments is what’s needed to create true genius.



7 BIG IDEAS

4. CONSTRAINTS

It may seem like peace and prosperity should be the most fertile breeding ground for genius but in fact the opposite is the case.

A society that has all its needs fulfilled has no need to strive for more. Constraints and obstacles can be great motivators, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Being an illegitimate child, the avenues of notary or lawyer were closed to Leonardo Davinci. This constraint gave us one of the world's greatest artists and thinkers when he was forced to choose an artists' workshop over university. It is also no accident that many geniuses, with Sigmund Freud being a notable example, are first or second-generation immigrants. The constraints and obstacles faced by many immigrants inspire greater creativity and drive

5. SCHEMA VIOLATIONS

A schema is a psychological term for how you organise the world in your mind. Schemas can be simple or highly complex, from how you might expect to see someone use a fork to how you might think about social roles. A schema violation is when such an organisation is broken.

Whether you break a schema yourself by, say, making your breakfast in the wrong order, or observe a schema violation in another, someone walking backwards for instance, these disruptions have been shown to increase creativity. Beethoven lived in famously messy homes and Freud liked to sit crossways on his armchair. Such schema violations, deliberate or not, may well have helped to stoke their creativity.

6. IGNORANCE

"The only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing," said Socrates. Indeed, a healthy dose of ignorance is a major facet of genius creation. More specifically, the ability to admit to ignorance and to constantly strive to remedy it. If you believe you know everything, there is no need to learn and grow. An understanding of how much you don't understand is integral to growth.

7. OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND TOLERANCE

A closed society has little chance to grow. Without an influx of new and different ideas, stagnation is highly likely. The first great example was Ancient Athens. They had an open-door policy that let anyone into their city even, at times, at the cost to their national security. This led to an enormous influx of ideas and, to quote Plato again, "What the Greeks borrow from foreigners, they perfect".

The willingness of the Greeks to embrace the ideas and concepts of other nations and to then filter them through their unique culture and perspective was crucial to the genius that flowed in the ancient city. Without being open-minded and tolerant of new ideas, genius is inevitably stifled.

**3 ACTION STEPS****1. UNDERSTAND THE GENIUS IS EPHEMERAL**

‘Genius’ is not easily definable or obtained. It is an ephemeral concept that is generally applied by society. Don’t strive to be a genius or even to completely understand it, just learn its facets and how to apply them.

2. DO IT AT HOME/SCHOOL

Your influence over culture as a whole is negligible but your influence on the micro-culture of your family or students is immense. Practice genius habits with your family or pupils to create your own geographical genius hub.

3. FIND ‘THE INTERSECTION’

Weiner teaches that creativity doesn’t happen ‘in here’ or ‘out there’ but in the spaces in between. Genius is born at the intersection of person and place. Take the risk to discover your family’s intersection between who you are and where you are.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The key takeaway of *The Geography of Genius* is that genius is hard to pin down. There is no simple recipe that creates a genius. However, there are certain ingredients that seem to help.

A mixture of motivations, obstacles, conversation, constraints, schema violations, open-mindedness and tolerance all seem to be part of the mix. By practising these or introducing them to your children/students, you have a chance of creating something close to genius.

True genius is far too complex a beast to nail down but the facets of genius are available to all of us. By moulding your actions and environment to mimic history’s geniuses you can at least stoke your creativity and find a spark of genius in yourself or the people who look up to you.



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The Geography of Genius

by Eric Weiner

Weiner travels from ancient Athens to Silicon Valley chasing one question: why do certain places, at certain moments, produce so much genius? The answer is rarely the lone individual.

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