

Perry Scheme of Intellectual & Ethical Development

Dualism (positions 1-3)

The world of knowledge is perceived in terms of right or wrong, good or bad. For the student in these positions, concepts such as truth, importance, and correctness are external givens; learners view themselves as receptacles ready to receive truth. For students in this stage, answers exist, and the college student's task is to find and master them. At all three positions, the student would view him or herself as having minimal right to use his or her own opinions and would have developed little capacity for handling academic tasks that require one to deal with conflicting points of view. Students in this stage would believe that rewards are proportional to work.

Examples: "I understand that the instructor wants us to learn the best problem-solving strategy, but what difference does it make if we get the right answer?"

"I don't understand how this paper can be a "C." I worked on it all weekend, more than I have on any of my other papers, and they got higher grades."

Multiplicity (position 4)

In this stage a plurality of points of view or evaluations for a topic or problem is acknowledged. This plurality is perceived as an aggregate of factors without internal structure or external relations. Thus, anyone has a right to his or her own opinion. The learner has no criteria established to evaluate the merits of one opinion against another. Typical response: "Since authorities don't know, everyone's opinion has equal validity."

Examples: "I don't understand how he can take off points in my paper on *The Catcher in the Rye*. It's all opinion, and my opinion is as good as anyone else's."

"Sir, I don't understand how I can get an "F" on this paper. After all, it's all subjective."

Relativism (positions 5 and 6)

There is a movement to a recognition of knowledge as relative and contextual. In this sequence, all knowledge and values are disconnected from the concept of rightness or truth. With position 5 emerges the capacity to think in complex analytic ways; the student can identify assumptions, draw implications, and evaluate points of view. The individual can think about thought. With relativism of knowledge may come the loss of old signposts and the experience of being lost and alone in a chaotic world. Yet movement along positions 5 and 6 brings an awareness that much of what "truth" the student "creates" will emerge from the individual's own experience and judgment as well as from external factors.

Examples: "I prefer math because it's so clear-cut, but I'm finding that sociology class really interesting. Sometimes it's good to deal with ideas where there's no "right" answer."

"Everyone keeps talking about how important it is to choose a major, but I have to decide if that's a good choice for me. I might be better off with a FOS."

Commitment in Relativism (positions 7, 8, and 9)

The individual gradually accepts the responsibility of the pluralistic world and acts through commitment to establish identity. Perry identified two components to commitment: 1) coming to terms with the content of one's commitment by selecting a particular career, a set of values, or a stance toward marriage; 2) the individual's recognition that within the self are many diverse, conflicting personal themes. Commitment involves finding their particular balance point on the various polarities (being controlled vs. being impulsive; being contemplative vs. active; realist vs. idealist, etc.)