

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog
of Brad DeLong. Since 1999.
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Lightcap: Sokrates vs. Machiavelli on the Educational Process—Comment

Tracy Lightcap: *Sokrates vs. Machiavelli on the Educational Process / Lecture* <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/08/sokrates-vs-machiavelli-on-the-educational-process-lecture.html?cid=6a00e551f080038834026bde8e351c200c#comment-6a00e551f080038834026bde8e351c200c>: ‘The great book *How Learning Works* has a typology that I like to use in explaining what I'm trying to do and what education is about. It has four categories of expertise...

- Ignorant and Unconscious:** This is a way to describe a good part of the population. They don't know much and they are unconscious of how little they know. Of course, this can apply to even highly educated people in fields where they don't know anything, if they are unwilling to admit their ignorance. This is important thing to keep in mind as you learn more.
 - Ignorant and Conscious:** This is where. most freshmen and sophomores are in college. They have learned just how little they know and they are being forced to deal with it. Usually, they do. Some drop out instead. Some do only what is necessary to pass in subjects that don't require much development of expertise. It's easy to fail on this.
- Expert and Conscious:** This is where we want juniors and seniors to be. It is where you have expertise and you can apply it if you are careful and work hard. Good subjects (and courses) give you opportunities to do this.

- Expert and Unconscious:** Unfortunately for you, this is where most of your professors are. They are expert and they apply their knowledge in ways that have become second nature to them. That means they often have a hard time breaking down all the steps they follow to reach conclusions. "Why didn't they get this? Everybody knows it! Besides, we went over a lot of it before!" You have to be patient and ask us about what you don't understand. We try to get across what we are doing, but sometimes we forget a step or two or forget that what you had in a related course isn't obviously relevant to you in this course. You have to remind us. And tell us when we are going right over your head. But this is what where we are aiming to get you and where, if you are diligent, you will end up. I might add that this is what people pay you for.

When I give this talk, I invariably have students come up to me afterwards and thank me. They have never been told why they are being educated and what they are expected to get out of the process. It's all been "Get a degree! You'll get paid more." Almost nobody tell what they are being paid for and why a degree is important.

This is really strange...

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