Research Should Promote Understanding

Manfred Diaz [1]

Basically, I'm not interested in doing research and I never have been... I'm interested in understanding, which is quite a different thing. And often to understand something you have to work it out yourself (...).

— David Blackwell *1983*

Abstract

1. Introduction

Every scientist, or aspiring scientist, is or should strive to be as curious as a seven years old (Gopnik, 1996). Science is the act of formally asking *why*. In this essay, we start asking *why* there is, at a fundamental level, a difference in reinforcement learning (RL) *research* and *understanding*. To many, this is a subtle, uninteresting, and almost philosophical difference: there exists plenty empirical and, in a particular sense, theoretical evidence that progress is being made.

David Blackwell

The question is how to remain curious in an environment where the incentives structures to do so (**?**). incentive structures in academia, life in general, that beat curiosity out

at

1.1. A Recurrent Dichotomy

"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." – Picasso

"Every kid starts out as a natural-born scientist, and then we beat it out of them. A few trickle through the system with their wonder and enthusiasm for science intact." – Sagan

References

Gopnik, A. The scientist as child. *Philosophy of science*, 63 (4):485–514, 1996.