

On Learning and Behaviour

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The behaviour of an adult, responsible for at least themselves and most likely one or more dependents through resource, comfort, and safety is determined by a combination of factors: genetic, developmental, and environmental.

The juvenile stage sets the habitus for later years and has an enormous effect, both on the outlook and the enjoyment of that individual and on the institutions, structures, and people with whom they interact.

Plato saw a need for educational institutions that would provide a sound education for children whatever their privilege of birth and for the metropolis or society in which some of those children would later become leaders and publically responsible actors.

The rise of humanity from subsistence to one in which select members might find time and other resource to express the joy of life and gifts and lessons for prosperity saw an environmental and cultural advance with concomitant increase in population density and reduction in non-familiar distance that far outpaces the punctuated modifications in body plan and brain structure that evolution may afford.

Studies of twins separated at birth suggest that environmental effects reduce over the course of a lifetime and that towards maturity genetic influences have become more pronounced. Of course, as members of the genus most able to escape the genetic tyranny, we can hope that our educational, governmental, and cultural institutions allow the individual to overcome at least some of those genetic biases.

The decision to act must originate within the individual so that the impetus remains over the lifetime of that person. Personal drive is the quintessence of character and behavioural disposition is strengthened through self-guidance and conducive environment.

Just as different language groups have different word orders, so too do different individuals have different brain structures. Learning through repetition of supposedly sound motifs does not bode well in general as the associations in one student may connote different behavioural modes in another. Rather, a fertile environment with appropriate boundaries and responsive guides can allow an insight in the student that leads to a beneficial conclusion, builds upon previous achievements, and ensures that errors in the unique habitus of that individual do not occur.

Habitual errors introduced during the plastic stage that is development can have devastating consequence during adult life. Traumatic revelation, cultural *faux pas*, and the insidious manipulation by baser elements in life and society can lead to the ruination of a person and a civilisation. The accepted practice of pædophilia in the frills of Greek culture became remanifest as the orgiastic excess of the pseudo-Epicurean twilight of the Vandalised western empire. The noble and virtuous crusades to liberate Jerusalem became remanifest as the hording and Machiavellean deceit and duplicity of the expanding pre-Enlightenment Church. The drive for godliness in the nascent western democracy became remanifest as the post-McCarthyist cloak and dagger cleansing of litterbug and hero directed from a central control room.

The Sphinx, monument and testament to the fleeting nature of existence, reminds us that the only day is today. We eat, we drink, we dance. To dance tomorrow, our bread must be baked, the wine must be served, and our credit must be good. The Sphinx dances no more than the nation of China. To reach the fulfilment that each and every individual deserves, each individual, like the Sphinx and like China, must navigate the perils of development and incompleteness.

Modern society is complicated. Any given individual will be expected, as an adult, to interact with various different niches in society and adopt various different contextual dialects and forms of complex communication. While most individuals can expect to habitually maintain a great portion of their routines, there are those days and situations which would surprise most.

Parents, schools, and governments can not hope to plan for every eventuality nor can they hope to be available or useful in all situations. Quite apart from the obvious natural right for an adult to be master of their own destiny, in any given situation the situated decision-maker is best suited to act appropriately.

While a child is in the care of their parents and tutors they have the

freedom to explore. They have the right to be guarded from the jealousy and greed that taint our escape from the clutches of sex and death. We owe our future generations the ability to construct a mental and neural edifice that will protect them from the threats of powermongers and the non-existent threat from the deep and from the firmament. The sky will not fall on us, but there are those who will launch projectiles, poison our food, deceive our colleagues, and steal our memories for reasons even Ganesh can not recall yet still hides. The drake, born in the fires of damnation, pierces the lessons, the schools, and the safeguards of society so that there may be more damnation, more fires, and more drakes.

The capable and willing student, their potential unmarred by the reality of unforeseen accident or inequity of an imperfect culture, the student destined to benefit from society and remain free from the burdens of public responsibility, and the child to whom we must pay special care in order that they not be robbed of the advantage of education, the student cursed by the demographic hangover of an era of demagogue, are all born equal with inalienable rights to the freedoms of an unchosen existence. The student who aims to accept public responsibility must have their ambition tempered by respect for this simple fact. In adulthood they might achieve their goal of office or standard but they must maintain a modesty that reflects a true understanding of the innate sanctity of life and dignity owed to all people.

Those who chose to contribute to the continued existence of beings able to frolic in the joy of pursuits not mundane, our teachers, impact not only the students but also the adults with whom those students and teachers interact. The school masters provide a scaffold and shelter so that the cognitive architecture of our young citizens may be honed.

Achievement at school must not be measured by ability to extract aid or response from friends or family, must not be measured by petty onomatopœic polysyllaby, must not be measured by championship trophies gathering dust in the approach to the office of the headmaster, but must be measured to lay the foundation of a cathedral that withstands the test of time — to perfection.

Each discipline requires mastery of concepts, terminology, and fact. Independent streams need not be covered in synchrony. Just as knotted wood can not be used below the waterline but may be used for cabinet drawers or pegs for cloaks, so too must fundamental lessons be mastered before the grace notes and nuances of high tea conversation be deliverable or appreciated.

A child must learn to hold a stylus before they can learn to write the

letters of an alphabet. A teacher has experience, patience, and the knowledge to associate words with objects and actions in the world in which the student exists. A teacher may assign a task of describing a day in the life of the parents or the ambition of the child, but the teacher must neither give the child an ambition nor attach value to the profession of the parent. A teacher must not leave holes in the lessons or mind of the student, either to maintain the reliance of the student or to disguise elements or facets of society.

The role of the teacher is not as judge or sculptor. While each individual child is unique with character and preference, each class must have skills, tools, and knowledge as milestones. More important than the accumulation of imperfectly completed lessons is the total completion of each class. So too, each teacher is unique with preferences and character, which contribute to the myriad enjoyments of later life. But they must be manifest as the occasional anecdote or vignette, not as the biased exclusion through distaste or inclusion through foible.

A motor vehicle should be designed with the primary goal of safety and efficient conveyance of the passengers to their destination. The industry that apportions classes of defect in construction of a vehicle based on religious belief or role in the community has violated a tenet of society, violated that compact for security of person and property. We do not accept the motor vehicle that requires a butcher, a baker, a soldier, a sailor, and a judge to be present for the purchase of a vehicle so that their specific penalties are cooperatively cancelled. No matter what the profession or outlook of the learner driver, that driver must be able to have faith that the construction of that first vehicle is unbiased and sound. The learner driver must master a number of skills and rules before proficiency is acquired. Our compact affords us the trust that the roads are not filled with mobile expressions of violence and anger.

A proficient driver, once tested, is allowed the freedom and use of major arterial and cross-country routes that are both more and less dangerous. More dangerous because the margins for error have a sharper tolerance and less dangerous because the drivers are accomplished. There are arenas for drivers keen for competition and glory, the derbies, circuits, and rallies of motorsport, where the customs of etiquette are held aside within defined boundaries and where the risks and skill are greater. Just as we do not expect learner drivers to compete in the high performance world of Formula 1, so too should we not expect students to be exposed to the politics of a

banana republic.
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