

Re: Baby talk and prejudices about absolute time and determinism

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From: PD (*pdraper_at_yahoo.com*)

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Uncle Al wrote:

> *PD wrote:*

>>

>> *This morning on the radio there was an interesting news item about
>> researchers who are exploring how children learn language so
quickly.*

>

> *The blind debating the deaf about jukeboxes.*

>

>> *(In two years, they become quite efficient communicators, starting
from*

>> *ground zero.) One of the key questions is how a child learns to*

>> *distinguish whole words from the homogenous stream of syllables
that*

>> *occurs in fluent speech.*

>

> *It is called "parsing."*

Which explains nothing about how that skill is learned, or what methods
can be used to facilitate the training, does it?

>

> *[snip]*

>

>> *Learning how the universe really works may be fun, but it may not
be*

>> *particularly useful for survival of the species!*

>

> *Psychology has only passing correspondence to physical reality. It
> is a soft science of convenience shouting "ANOVA!" and muttering
> "heteroskedasticity."*

>

> *If you think designing a working flush toilet is irrelevant to*

> *"survival of the species," try using a low volume flush Envirowhiner*

> *atrocitiy. Improving freshman German 101 will not happen. There is
no*

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- > *reason to make it facile or relevant to student needs. Quite the*
- > *contrary – there is strong motivation to make it elegant and*
- > *inefficient, to create artificial perceived value through*
- > *inaccessibility.*

In response to the previous two paragraphs, I think it's worth opining that physics is the easiest of the sciences to learn, precisely because it requires so little memorization and flat capture of detail. (It *does* however require facility with a larger skill toolbox and also some willingness to battle intuition which may be faulty.) I think it's worth emphasizing to students this about physics, and I worry that too many teachers do indeed "create artificial perceived value through inaccessibility."

The fact that psychology is a softer science should not be a value-judgement but an indicator of how messy it is. The problem with psychology is the inability to control a large number of unconstrained variables. This is also pertinent to why it is hard to empirically distinguish between one psychological theory and a competing one. The only place where psychologists will get firmly into trouble is by claiming more certainty about their model than they can really claim.

I'm of the opinion that physics is appealing because it IS easier and cleaner than most other sciences. That doesn't make it a "better" science.

PD

- >
- > *The sciences create worth through successful performance. The Liberal*
- > *Arts create worth through failure followed by dialog and critique.*
- > *Why did Hester Prin get the "Scarlet Letter?" It was the highest*
- > *grade they awarded.*
- >
- > --
- > *Uncle Al*
- > <http://www.mazepath.com/uncleal/>
- > *(Toxic URL! Unsafe for children and most mammals)*
- > <http://www.mazepath.com/uncleal/qz.pdf>