

A New Way of Seeing Everything
Summary from January 15, 2016
Melissa J. Mills

Welcome to class.

Introductions

Overview of the Class

- About seeing the world as a dynamic unfolding
- About understanding what it means to be human
- About imagining what we want and strategizing how to move in that direction.

We are driving by desires.

We have two main desires... They mark the poles of Maslow's hierarchy.

- To be safe
- To learn, explore, satisfy curiosity.

Some key traits that characterize our species

- We like to make things better.
- We are creatures seeking meaning.
- We are social. Being accepted by our community is a deep-seated need. If we don't feel accepted by our community, we don't feel safe.
- We flourish as we learn to exercise our creativity to meet and overcome the challenges presented by the evolving universe.
- We are highly adaptive.

We can look at Maslow's hierarchy from two perspectives. One, the regular one, places our safety and physical needs as the base. And of course, it is. Unless we are safe and alive, we can't do anything else.

Another way to look at the hierarchy is from the standpoint of the individual. Assuming the individual is safe, the predominant drive becomes curiosity, learning, and the desire to make a contribution that is bigger than oneself.

One can see that the two triangles overlies one another. The job of a society is to create an environment of safety. The job of an individual, in safety, is to learn and explore and contribute.

This course, "A New Way of Seeing Things" is going to explore the science that underpins this idea. We will draw on neuroscience, cognitive and moral psychology, cell biology, physics, history, philosophy, and our own experiences.

Our planet has evolved into a set of parameters never before navigated by our species. Humans are up to the task of surviving through this just by doing what we do best as humans. That is, seeking those things that are built into our systems as intrinsic rewards, and promoting the characteristics of sustainable cooperation in our networks of association.

This course is going to explore how this all works, and practice doing it.

Because the human brain works on the basis of habit, one of the things we're going to work on in this class is practicing our ability to intentionally guide habit formation. To this end, each week, I'm passing out a "Fun Fact Exercise." Each exercise focuses on a specific aspect of how humans think and operate.

Please do your best to practice these exercises throughout each week. I will practice them, too.

The first one is about considering that "ethics" and "morals" are ideas that grew out of the idea that our character is a result of our habitual actions. The exercise is a hard one: to work on becoming aware of that which we do habitually.

I am grateful for your participation. I am trying to see things in a new way, too. I am not very good at it yet. Having your company on this adventure is a great help!