What does it mean to be smart?

Philip Bitar
Version 2015-08-27

Victoria asked what it means to be smart, so why don't we talk about it!

In my book *Why Human Life Makes Sense*, Edition 3 (2015), I start with the fact that humans are goal-directed, and I show how we can understand human nature in these terms.

Goal-directed behavior

I define *skill* in two equivalent ways, as follows.

Skill is the use of the simplest, most accurate means for achieving a goal of interest, with accuracy primary and simplicity secondary.

Skill is the use of the most efficient, most effective means for achieving a goal of interest, with effectiveness primary and efficiency secondary.

Then I note that *intelligence* is skill. Thus, to say that someone is *smart* is to say that they are skillful.

Notably, *skill* is defined with respect to a goal of interest, and so is *intelligence*, when properly understood. There is no such thing as being intelligent or smart without reference to a goal of interest.

Creativity, in turn, is novelty in the realization of skill. *Brilliance* is creative skill. And *genius* is superlative brilliance. Notably, creativity is not just novelty. Creativity is novelty in the realization of skill.

Beauty also refers to the realization of skill because the idea of beauty implies a standard, and the standard, in turn, implies the idea of skill.

I present the foregoing insights in chapter 1 on knowledge, where I explain, in detail, the nature of knowledge.

Automaticity

In chapter 3 on mind, I explain how our mind realizes skill. In particular, skill is the result of *automaticity*: we acquire skill as we develop automaticity in achieving a goal of interest. Thus, intelligence and being smart are the result of automated skill.

Meaning of words

Keep in mind that the vernacular meaning of words is based on usage, such that the meaning of words can, through use and misuse, broaden and change. For example, the phrase "I couldn't care less" has been misstated as "I could care less" such that the latter now means the former, thereby violating a literal reading. As a result, it is impossible to claim that the vernacular meaning of a high frequency word can be defined so as to cover all uses.

Just the same, if we would like to define words in a way that is logically coherent and that also accurately characterizes the most frequent meanings of the words, I believe that the foregoing definitions of *skill,* and the related words, achieve this goal. Thus, I believe that the foregoing definitions skillfully achieve the goal of interest.

Meeting format

I will seed the discussion with the foregoing theories of knowledge and mind, and then we will discuss any ideas of interest to the members.