Learning Machines

Nobody asked but …

I, just this morning, got involved in a debate about in which forms the standard curriculum should be designed. My position is summed up in the question, "what forms would nature design?"

Well, nature has already designed and implemented all of the necessary forms of education among all things. A thing exists because it can learn how to exist in its environment. Pertinent to our concerns is that every human being can learn to cope with his or her environment. All humans are learning machines. Nature's design was that humans would evolve, both within one's lifespan and through generations. Learning is the process by which this happens. Nature has optimized all things to experience at will, and to retain conclusions thereby — the process is trial and error and correct incrementally. To correct incrementally means to remove all confirmed falsities, layer by layer, until only truth remains. As Arthur Conan Doyle put these words into the mouth of Sherlock Holmes, "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth."

We often observe that young children are amazing learning machines, motivated by boundless curiosity. But we forget that all humans are amazing learning machines, they have just been tampered with by more-or-less well-meaning sticklers. Walk around the sticklers. There are two types of beings in the world — those who are more rigid than you and those who are less rigid than you. Do not be discouraged by the first group, know yourself, be encouraged by the second group — and learn by observing the trial-and-error of all three.

— Kilgore Forelle