

Neither "ataraxia" nor "not ataraxia", but "Joy as the goal"

Post by "Kalosyni" of February 27, 2026 at 7:28 PM

Here is a better article:

Quote

...psychologists call "[the curse of knowledge](#)." The curse is actually a [cognitive bias](#), or a systematic error in our thinking. In this case, a communicator mistakenly, and often unconsciously, believes that everyone in the conversation shares the same knowledge, understandings, and experiences they do. The result is that they skip over the vital information others will need to comprehend their message.

The curse of knowledge is why laypeople find scientific studies tangled, students find geometric proofs baffling, and everyone finds instruction manuals tortuously frustrating. The researchers, teachers, and technical writers had difficulty imagining what it was like to not know what they knew and so communicated their ideas ineffectually.

Nor does the idea have to be complicated to fall prey to the curse. Everyone is susceptible. Thankfully, there is a mental tool that can help us break the curse: the "ladder of abstraction"

The link:

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[Boost your communication skills with the “ladder of abstraction”](#)

The “ladder of abstraction” reveals why people communicating about the same thing may be doing so at different levels — and how to fix that.

bigthink.com

And another quote:

Quote

Hayakawa’s point is that words often contain more ambiguity than we typically account for. Their effect extends beyond their dictionary definition. They also evoke feelings, imply meanings, and suggest nuances that shift based on the identities, histories,

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expertise, and personalities of the user and recipient alike.

Consider, for instance, the abstract phrases we bandy about in political discussions — things like *liberty*, *free enterprise*, and *social justice*. Each sounds agreeable when viewed from the ladder’s tippy-top rungs. But as Hayakawa points out, scuttle down to the bottom rungs, and you’ll find that people can have wildly different opinions on the concrete details. The words they use may be the same, but their meanings are not.

“Definitions, contrary to popular opinions, tell us nothing about things. They only describe people’s linguistic habits,” Hayakawa argues.

And a third quote:

Quote

According to Hayakawa clear communication, “as well as clear thinking,” involves a “constant interplay of higher and lower level abstractions.” In other words, by traveling up and down the ladder, we reveal the meaning behind the details and vice versa.

A brilliant example of such rhetorical balance comes from Jared Diamond’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*: “We all know that history has proceeded very differently for peoples from different parts of the globe. In the 13,000 years since the end of the last Ice Age, some parts of the world developed literate industrial societies with metal tools, other parts developed only nonliterate farming societies, and still others retained societies of hunter-gatherers with stone tools.”

Notice how Diamond starts with abstract concepts like *history* and *different peoples*. These concepts seem simple enough, but to clarify his meaning, he takes a few steps down the ladder. To *history*, he adds the characterization of “the 13,000 years since the end of the last Ice Age.” *Different peoples* is elaborated on to include “literate industrial societies,” “nonliterate farming societies,” and “hunter-gatherers.”

The rest of Diamond’s introduction to his book continues in this vein. He uses concrete details to show how more abstract concepts connect to the real world; meanwhile, the abstract gives meaning to the facts and details.