

In Defense of Simplicity

By Tim Dooling

Simpler is always better. This is a statement which I believe to be axiomatic, yet it always sparks interesting debate, so here is my defense of simplicity.

Life is a complicated place, and there is no shortage of charlatans who are willing to make things sound vastly more complicated than they need to be in order to further their own agenda. (see my essay entitled “Lemonade Stands” for details). The reality is that people who seek a complicated answer fall into two categories: Bullshitters or Realists.

Bullshitters

Bullshitters have no means or desire of understanding reality as it is, instead it is much easier for them to craft an explanation of reality as they would like it to be. Hence any explanation of anything turns into a logically open-ended and overcomplicated circle of thoughts. (aka BS) They tend to be quite affable, fun-loving, and nice people, but they are horrible accountants. Broadly speaking the professions which attract this type of person are: Stockbrokers, Technology Salespeople, and infomercial pitchmen.

Realists

Realists are very exacting and struggle unless they have a deterministic understanding of how anything happens. A realist, wants to know the root cause, process, and reasons for the world existing as it is. They tend to be vulnerable to analytic paralysis. While they can be socially awkward and cynical, they make fantastic rocket scientists, engineers, and production managers.

Humanist

Outside of these categories lies the domain of the Humanist. The Humanist can be rather fatalistic, since they tend to understand the axiom that shit happens, and in life there are many things which simply are beyond our individual control. The strength of the Humanist lies in their ability to not allow the complexities of life to affect their progress through it. Instead relying on our evolutionary tools, also known as instincts or heuristics which allow us to navigate a very complex reality with relative ease. If the stove is hot, don't calculate the difference between it and the burning point of human flesh, just move your hand. Humanists make good race-car drivers and human cannonballs, but otherwise seem to be completely unemployable by Realists or Bullshitters.

One fine day in the springtime, the Bullshitter, Realist and Humanist all wake up in bed together one morning. The realist quickly senses a full bladder and begins:

Realist: “Oooooo....I really have to pee, but if I get up lightning could strike me, and there are an infinite number of points between me and the toilet, so I'd better just stay here in bed.”

Bullshitter: “Ooohh, Realist...you are just soooo kinky....as long as I keep talking I have no idea whether I have to pee or not.....as a matter of fact yesterday, I did get struck by lightning on my way to the toilet, and I got past that infinity point when I multiplied it by an imaginary number....soo fun”

The Humanist gets up, goes to work, and comes back to find the Bullshitter still delivering monologue to the worried Realist on the now terribly soiled bed.

Consuming more information does not help you make better decisions — rather, it helps you be more confident about bad decision you are making.