

## The Binary World

**“WE LIVE IN A BINARY WORLD,”** the man said with a matter-of-fact certainty. Then, quietly, mostly to himself, “don’t let anyone tell you any different.”

“It’s a binary world!” he yelled for emphasis. “We got X’s and O’s floating around in our heads.” (I’m pretty sure he meant ones and zeros.) “They messed me up,” he said. “Take my word for it; they’re working on you, too,” pointing at no one in particular.

“There ain’t no gray! They want you to believe there’s gray.” He paused. “But there ain’t no gray! It’s X or O, yes or no... maybe don’t mean a thing.”

Wow! I thought. Here’s a guy no more than 40 with 75 years worth of wisdom etched on his face. He’s found employment on a comfortable, chair-high stone wall along a shady, well-traveled city sidewalk enjoying the great outdoors. Me? I’m late for someplace else. The guy’s obviously got the world figured

out. I dropped five bucks in his paper cup, which prompted a “Thanks, buddy. You got nothing to apologize for.” And that earned him another five. It’s not often you run into someone not demanding an apology.

I soon found my own rock in the shade and sat down to contemplate the revelation this man had given to me. Well, he hadn’t actually given it to me. Ten bucks for two minutes is \$300 per hour, or more than half-a-million a year. You’ve got to stop, sit down, and think about advice you pay that much for. It was worth it, though. I was working on a theory that this insight about a binary world fit into quite nicely. In fact, no pun intended, it appeared to be the last bit of information I needed.

My theory is that each of us needs some way to justify his or her actions. Essentially, you need a pretty good response when, for example, your wife asks you where you’re going with that ice cream scoop. Or, why you didn’t get a haircut while you were out. Even at work you’re going to be asked, sooner or later, why reserves are



so high or how come everybody else’s illustrations are better than yours. What would be nice to have is some easy-to-remember, simple, non-technical excuse with an element of panache. Something that actually has the effect of excusing you, getting you off the hook, diverting attention, and getting you out of harm’s way.

I’ve long figured that it would be nice to find some natural laws that one could legitimately claim guide our actions and over which we have no control. The important elements are “natural law” and “no control.” That way, the rhetorical question “what did you expect?” has been answered by your actions, and the excuse “couldn’t help myself” has an understandable meaning. And the best part, no personal blame. It’s just those darn rules.

### The Analog Fallacy

If the world were actually analog, as it appears to be, it would be a tremendously difficult task

to assemble all the rules. What with even just the shades of gray to consider there would be an infinite number. The subjectivity of deciding which applied and when would make decision making and choosing a direction in life virtually impossible. We’d always find ourselves in the review-and-analysis stage, collecting input from our trusted advisers and never getting anywhere.

Then also, such a set of rules would be so extensive that, even in their volume, they would still, somehow, be incomplete or indefinite. We’d need to develop regulations to interpret them, and a regulatory authority. They’d become a metaphor for tax laws and regulations.

For individuals like you and me, a simple justification for our actions (like super-sizing the fries or ordering a pizza with extra cheese) couldn’t be found in an analog world. We’d be at the mercy of some court of public

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opinion, accused of violating the “spirit” of the rules. I suspect that everything we wanted to do that had fun of any kind written on it could be excused only by what others might call “loopholes.” That would be totally unsatisfactory!

### The Binary Solution

But in a binary world, there are only two rules to find. And, the further insight I received on the sidewalk this morning is that they’re mutually exclusive.

Take my current situation, for example. I was in the sun, but now I’m in the shade. I could’ve stayed in the sun or moved into the shade. There are just two choices. Now that I’m in the shade, I could stay, or I could move into the sun. Still, only two choices. If you break life down into its simple binary components, it’s simple. I’m either awake and can stay

awake or I can go to sleep. I’m either on the way or I’ve arrived. I’m either on the toilet or I’m not.

That’s the revelation. In a binary world you can exist in only one of two states—the one you’re in, or the other one. Of course, to account for the nuances and the variety that give color to life, you simply apply the one rule many times in succession.

Therefore, life is like a computer program. It appears complicated on the surface, but underneath it’s just a bunch of buzzing zeros and ones. Flipping back and forth is what life is all about. There’s nothing wrong with flipping. Plus, we now have an explanation for Microsoft’s growth, expansion, and world dominance. Its products have tapped into the essence of life and are in harmony with nature. Therefore, they’re like a living

thing and we can’t live without them.

OK, so now I had the basic structure thanks to my sidewalk encounter. However, like shelves, this is a great theory but useless without books. I still had to discover the two states that described the extremes of the human condition that we flip between in order to make my theory of—well, I still don’t know what to call it—complete.

While contemplating this I see that my friend down the sidewalk has moved off his stone seat in the shade and into the sun and I notice I’m getting a little chilly myself. So, as I get up to move—Yowzers! it suddenly hits me. As quickly as a sweet cinnamon pastry has me going back for seconds, it hits me: More is always better.

Clearly, that’s one of the binary states of human existence, the state of “more.” I’m getting a thumbs-up from my friend down the sidewalk. Maybe I said “Yowzers” out loud.

If you have any kind of balance in your life at all, about half the time you want more—more money, more vacation, more time, a sequel, volume 2, more gigabytes, another pint, or, like me right now, a cinnamon roll. However you phrase it, when you’re feeling like that, you’re in a state of “more.”

The rest is easy. Ask yourself, how many Cinnabons® can you eat in one day? Yes, that’s right, there’s a limit even for the one thing that makes you still look forward to going to the airport. The classic, the CinnabonStix®, the one with caramel and pecans, the mini . . .

Eventually, even licking your fingers clean gets to be a chore.

And what are you thinking as you wash it all down with coffee? Yeah, that’s right, you’re thinking that enough is enough! Suddenly, without any conscious thought at all, you’ve flipped from the state of “more” to the state of “enough.” If that can happen with a Cinnabon®, it can happen with anything.

So, there you have it. The theory of more and enough, or, as I like to call it, the theory of Me.

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