Simpler, Not Better

Simpler, Not Better.

Dear friend,

A philosophical insight I had recently -- we should seek to live simpler lives, not 'better' lives.

In today's modern world, we are always seeking to 'improve', and make our lives more 'optimized' and 'efficient'. However the problem is this:

> Often when we try to "improve" our lives, we end up **complicating** our lives more.

And when we complicate our lives more, we actually get *more* stress, anxiety, and cares.

What I think we should do instead is to *simplify* our lives-- for us to have *FEWER* cares, for us to have *less* stress, and less 'decision anxiety'/"paralysis by analysis".

For example in photography, we generally seek to upgrade our cameras and gear to 'improve' our photography-- for us to take better photos.

But the problem is when we upgrade our equipment, or buy new lenses or gear -- it ends up *complicating* our photography lives/workflows more!

For example, if you buy a new digital camera, you will have to deal with the stress of new RAW file types, which means you will probably have to change/modify how you post-process your photos.

Or, when you upgrade your phone, there is always hidden frustrations/annoyances you might not know -- for example when you upgraded your iPhone and your new iPhone no longer has a headphone jack (which means you need to figure out some annoying solution to use your old headphones, or perhaps you now have the headache of having to find the "best" bluetooth-wireless headphones).

Or if you buy a newer and "better" car, you have to deal with the stress of insurance, maybe finding a new mechanic to fix your car-- or if you buy a new electric car, you have to deal with the complication of figuring out how to charge your car (also consider the stress that a lot of electric car owners have from "range anxiety").

Why isn't "simple" seen in a more favorable light?

In modern society, we are always told to upgrade. Why aren't we taught to "de-grade", or too *simplify* our lives?

The answer is simple -- because if you have a product to sell, you want your customer to purchase/buy the thing.

Generally when we try to simplify our lives, the easiest is by subtracting -- by *GETTING RID* of, donating, or throwing away stuff.

And that is the hard thing about living in a consumerist society -- we are all seeking to improve our lives. But we have been suckered into believing that in order to improve our lives, we need to purchase/ADD that "new new thing" to our lives. But in reality, to live a better life often means to simplify our lives. And to simplify our lives means to subtract the superfluous. Bruce Lee has a similar saying, something like: "What we seek is a daily decrease; not a daily increase." Or Bruce Lee's other saying, "I fear not the man who knows 10,000 moves, but the man who has practiced 1 move 10,000 times.

Why is a simpler life a better life?

This is my idea: Our lives are short, and there is only so much human metabolism/energy we have in a single day. We are limited with time, energy, focus, and attention. It is impossible for us to do everything in life. **I think it is better to choose a few things and focus on doing them really really well**.

And by simplifying our lives, we cut out the superfluous distractions in our lives, in order for us to focus on what is truly meaningful in our lives, and **for us to focus on how we can make the biggest impact on society**.

Seek simpler solutions

I am a huge fan of "satisficing" in life -- the concept that we can satisfy+suffice certain decisions by choosing a simple and elegant solution.

In other words, to "satisfice" means to make a decision is 80% "good enough", and for us to move on. Why is this good? Well let me explain with these two scenarios:

- Maximizer Option (Scenario A): It takes you 100 hours to make a decision which is 90% "good enough".
- Satisficer Option (Scenario B): It takes you 10 hour to make a decision which is 80% "good enough"

Which would you prefer? I would choose Scenario B (Satisficer) because I only spend 10 hours for the 80% "good enough" solution. However for Scenario A (Maximizer) option, we spend an additional 90 hours for a very marginal 10% improvement. To me, that is not an effective way for you to utilize your time and brain power.

In other words, to satisfice is good, because **you can do more with less.**

Minimalist workouts

It is evident that working out, stressing our muscles, and lifting heavy stuff is good for our mental health and physical health. But I don't want to workout at the gym and make it feel like I'm a railroad worker in Siberia. I often feel bad for people who waste so much time in the gym doing pointless repetitions, or spend hours in vain.

For myself, I like the concept of "short and sinister" workouts (I think I got this phrase from Pavel, the Russian fitness expert who introduced kettlebells to the states).

For example, when I go to the gym, I try to keep it as minimal and effective as possible.

To give you an idea, here is a random workout day when I do deadlifts: - Enter the gym - Go to powerlifting stand - Do a few "dive bomber" back stretches, and hip thrusts to warmup - Do 5 repetitions of 135 pounds for deadlift - Rest and stretch out my back - Do 3 repetitions of 185 pounds for deadlift - Rest - Do 2 repetitions of 225 pounds for deadlift - Rest - Do 1 repetition of 275 pounds for deadlift - Rest - Do 1 repetition of 315 pounds for deadlift - Rest - Do 1 repetition of 365 pounds for deadlift - Rest - Add 2.5 pounds to each side of the bar, and attempt a "1 rep max" of 370 pounds.

Essentially when I'm doing "1-rep max" style of powerlifting in deadlifts, I keep my repetitions super low (generally less than 3 repetitions). And when I'm done with my deadlifts, I just leave. The whole workout doesn't take me more than 25 minutes. And this is great, because I now feel the epic post-workout "pump", which gives me energy and helps me get on with my day-- and do more important things to myself, for example writing, making photos, making videos, making music, studying philosophy, reading poetry, or writing my own rhymes.

Compare this "short and sinister" workout with the guy who goes into the gym and does "isolation exercises" for 2 hours. To me, it is a vain use of time.

Anyways, my apologies that this essay is a bit all over the place. But the basic principle is this:

Don't seek to "improve" your life, but simplify your life.

To simplify your life means:

1. Get rid of more stuff
2. Try to avoid accumulating new stuff-- because new stuff consumes your attention, often complicates your life, and adds additional stress to your life
3. Try to have fewer commitments in your life, or fewer obligations
4. Don't over-complexify certain decision-making processes. Instead, seek for **simple and elegant solutions**. This often means to have a "<u>satisficing</u>" mentality, instead of a "maximizing" mentality. To learn more, study the work of <u>Gerd Gigerenzer</u> and his work on simple 'heuristics' (simple decision-making rules of thumbs which simplify our lives)
5. Determine what is truly important/meaningful to you in your life-- and figure out how you can tune out all other distractions which detract you from focusing on that.

Or the easiest way is to remember this acronym:

KISS (Keep it simple, silly):

ERIC