

# On Complexity

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## Or ... The Second Naivete

“Wouldn’t it be great if things could be that simple!” How often have you heard that? These words float on a sigh that comes from deep down, and with a hard edge from life lived with a tiring complexity. Spiritual Trust is put in this category.

On a transcontinental flight some years ago, my friend and I interrupted our conversation about the women in our life to talk to a stewardess who seemed at a loose end. Somehow we ended up talking about the wonders of Jesus, and she asked many questions. In the end, with buzzers coming alight down the aisle, she broke away saying, “It sounds too good to be true!”

Why does confusion and complexity seem to be the reality for so many intelligent people? Paul de Riceour discussed this in his famous book, the Second Naivete. Roughly put, he described three stages in mental and spiritual development.

First, we are “childish”, completely naïve, because of our ignorance of how the world works and its many deceptions and wonders. Life is a fishing line hanging in the water, straight and simple and hopeful. Decisions are made on the “me-now” principle.

Secondly, through living life and through education, we gain a knowledge of complexity. In adulthood, there seem to be no answers. Everything is shades of grey. The knot in the fishing line is unable to be undone. Most people today seem to be here.

Thirdly, it may happen that we then gain wisdom to add to our knowledge. We will walk with two feet (see *“On Inward and Outward”*.) We may possibly even grow into an appreciation of ambiguity or irony or paradox. The threads of the knot become evident and achievable. A new simplicity is born, unlike the first, a second naivete, a wisdom for life. Its central ingredient is a trust beyond knowledge, well founded and enduring, which may be cause or consequence. Among the shades of grey, you know where the black and the white shades are coming from. This is what Jesus called being “child-like”, and without this, no one can see the Reign of God.

It is this third quality of wisdom that we hope for in political leadership – someone who can see beyond the complexity, and make a good wise principled decision for the future of us all. Sadly, many leaders are being chosen for their simplistic policies, since a large part of the electorate is only guided by self interest. Simplicity is not simplistic. Simplicity goes beyond the complexity, and does not deny the complexity of things.

The journey to simplicity can begin anywhere. Here are some suggestions. Simplify your lifestyle by giving away a larger proportion of your income to the poor, or by giving more time to the needy. Give away half your possessions every five years.

Simplify your relationships by developing deeper honesty and integrity, so that you are not juggling different roles and value systems between the different sectors of your life. Be the same person whoever you are with.

Simplify by stopping still, developing a sense of place, instead of keeping on moving. Learn to love silence, by beginning with two minutes complete silence in your own space (there is always ambient noise). Don't watch any television for a month – you'll be amazed what has not happened in that time! Take time for quietness, by giving your attention to examining and appreciating a small thing.

The point is, to **do this will stress and stretch you** in some acquisitive corner of your self. Perhaps a fearful piece of your life-story will arise in your memory.

The journey to wise simplicity is only made if these returning enemies can be defeated. Don't run away from them. Listen to these stories afresh, accept them and learn from them anew, and move on. Do not avoid them. Recognise and Reject, Accept and Let Go, and Take Action. (*See "Essential Skills"*)