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I am told it is normal to feel lost in your twenties.

Proof: being twenty years old is a homogenous mixture, equal parts the attractant of exploration and the solvent of directionlessness, always hoping ambition acts in accordance with chemotaxis. My exploration occurs cognitively. By way of research, of the never-ending questions, of the late nights and the countless hours in the lab, of the constant realization that one paper turns into two papers turns into four papers, painfully reminiscent of Pascal's triangle.

Recall: a never-ending thread of calls for abstracts to conferences and journals I don't feel qualified to submit to; a self-awareness of my tendency to constantly chase something as abstract as fulfillment; the lingering feeling that what used to be significant now results in a failure to reject the null hypothesis, often manifesting itself in what can only be described as loneliness. But not in a sad way, anymore. What can I conclude from these heuristic assumptions? I don't know. I think that I may have exhausted all of my possible degrees of freedom, rendering further estimation infeasible.

Consider the following: I am wandering in the near-perfect vacuum of space. Suppose the gravitational laws in this space approximate those on Earth, the same way that 3 approximates π. I might step forward or backward, or left or right, or straight up or straight down onto the surface that is solidly void-like and Vantablack. Soundlessly, I might add, as there is no matter present to carry sound waves. Assume fixed and non-periodic boundary conditions are at play, finite but too far away to ever encounter, at least, considering the time constraint of the average human lifespan. I am innately conscious that my previous footsteps are independent of the ones I am yet to take. But I do not know what I should walk towards. There is nothing to walk towards. There are no planets or stars or floating rocks or dead monkeys or other contents of space that I suspect should surround me. My scenery is a vast expanse of suffocating nothingness. I am instead left with the quietly deafening idea that perpetually, I am unknowing of my path ahead.

But my cursor winks at me knowingly. Waiting patiently on one line among the hundred that make up my simulation. As I stare into a matrix of zeroes – your environment, your past, your future—I cannot help but feel that what I am doing is paradoxical. I am using predictions to emulate stochastics. I center the 1 at the origin of the three-dimensional cartesian system just as I center you in my mind. You are within my control, yet fully autonomous—capable of decision-making all on your own. You are my beautiful discrete Markov chain, language agnostic, elegant in your simplicity. The amalgamation of hours of trial and error, of hypothesis, of data collection, of experimentation, and the embodiment of feeling lost.

When I first created you, 1, you were a mere singularity; your sum equal to, naturally, one. Elementary. But as I changed your rules, your affinity to movement in six cardinal directions, your uniformly distributed cumulative probability mass function, I also changed something as intangible as your essence. Like a mother prideful in her baby's first steps, I watched you with wide eyes as you danced across my laptop screen, a flurry of 1s scattered among a vast grid of nothingness, bright stars in a darkened night sky. The hum of my laptop singing me a melody as my CPUs work in parallel to bring you to life.

And you bring me life. As I correlate your steps and your progress, quantified by Euclidian distance, normalized logarithmically, I scale my axis and admire the line you draw for me, shaky with uncertainty and noise. I graph your existence from birth to death and the results are everything to me because they are your metaphor for me alone. The only variable you require is time. And with time you might create direction, or variation, or a constant function, or anything else that can be construed as meaning.

But your path, by definition, will always be meaningless. Maybe in your trails I might be able to discern a rose, Papua New Guinea, Kurt Vonnegut's signature. But to you those things are devoid of concept. They are outside the scope of your existence, and frankly, they aren't even there. I can try to guess what direction your next step will be. The probability of guessing correctly is 1/6. I can try to guess what direction each of your next ten steps will be. By the supplemental definitions of Kolmogorov's axioms (noting $P(A \cap B) = P(A) * P(B)$) , the probability of guessing correctly is 1/60466176. And as steps increase, the limit of the probability of guessing correctly approaches zero. Trivial.

If a drunken bee flies forever, will it ever make it back to where it started? Is there a boundary to how far it will go, ignoring the constraints of mortality? 1, I look at you and I know that I will go far, but that I will never return. With every step, no matter what direction—sometimes down, sometimes right, sometimes in travel that is recursive—I will inevitably, mathematically, go further. If I try to stop you, or me, will you decline? Will you change the path of your life and submit to a world of stagnation by way of reduced differences?

Hence, the answer: 1. Unwaveringly counterintuitive, Brownian, non-microscopic and finite. ■

J. Wyszynski

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