

/dev/random

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The first time I heard the term “Fuzzy Logic” I thought it referred to the way cats plead with you to pet them and then park themselves just outside your reach. Rather than binary absolutes, fuzzy logic admits the existence of “degrees of truth” that acknowledge the ambiguous nature of nature. Life, in other words, is a multiple-multiple examination wherein the answer often turns out to be “all of the above.” One commonly cited example is when you toss a ball to someone. You don’t calculate exact values for all the variables constituting the trajectory; you just throw the dang thing in the general direction of your target and hope it doesn’t break Mrs. Anderson’s front window again. Fuzzy logic is a pandemic that has infected people and institutions worldwide and across historical epochs.

The poster children for fuzzy thinking are of course politics, politicians, and the election thereof. Every two years the American people throw rationality to the wind and vote for the candidate with the best clothes, facial features, and PR team. The reason we do this is that any given politician’s stance on issues is dependent on who’s asking, whether the month ends in “y,” and the phase of the moon. Not that their stance matters, anyway, because what they promise or assert during the run-up to the election often has no bearing on what they accomplish—or more often fail to accomplish—once in office. An American presidential election is a giant game of chess where the only piece left on the board by mid-November is a king.

Another area where fuzzy logic rears its head is consumerism. Admit it: when some gadget or other cool thing you have no actual need for rings your bells, the fuzz-synthesis system swings into high gear. In the time it takes to type your PayPal password you will have come up with at least two solid rationalizations for why you simply have no option but to hit the “Checkout” button. It matters little that you already own three shower TVs; this one is 4K. There is absolutely no point in living if you can’t watch *Dancing with the Stars* in 4K while you lather up your pits: am I right?

Fuzziness experiences many manifestations in and around the home—the answer to the perennial query “what’s for dinner,” for example. Open just about any fridge in America (I suspect a great many other nations, as well) and with not a lot of effort you can probably uncover a half-dozen textbook examples of fuzzy. Nor are household chores immune from fuzziness. Anyone who uses a clothes dryer will know what I mean. I’m convinced that dryers are quantum gateways, in fact.

When I put a pair of socks in a dryer, they assume a superpositional state wherein they exist simultaneously as both a pair and a single sock. Opening the dryer door collapses the wave-form. In my case it usually collapses in “single sock” mode. The probability should be 50% per pair for any given load, but it isn’t. I can only presume that something in my laundry room environment biases this result.

It seems to me that one of the prime uses for fuzzy logic in the upcoming years will be in the Internet of Things. I would go so far as to suggest, in fact, that we rename it the “Internet of Fuzz” in honor of that relationship. After all, it takes a dedicated fuzzy thinker to connect one’s lights, thermostat, security system, fish tank, doorknob warmer, microwave, welcome mat, garage door opener, medicine cabinet, pet door, and seal-a-meal to the notoriously insecure global mishmash we call the Internet. A hacker taking control of all these things might not be able to cause irreparable harm, but one could well come home to a frozen house with dead fish, a garage full of raccoons, an exceptionally high utility bill, and a pissed-off SWAT team camped on the front lawn.

Fuzzy thinking is also evident in many legislative actions, from Supreme Court rulings right down to your local city council’s ponderous pronouncements. Legislative gems running the gamut from authorization for police to bite dogs to calm them down to forbidding the sale of both toothpaste and a brush for application of such to the same person on Sunday demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that the rule makers of our great nation subsist on a rich diet of tasty, tasty fuzz.

The private sector evinces no shortages in the fuzz department, either. Companies search high and low, night and day, for fuzzy staff. This results in some quite puzzling products, and even

more puzzling warning labels. To be fair, some of these labels owe their existence more to the anticipated fuzziness of the consumer than that of the label creators themselves. My favorites include instructions not to operate a motor vehicle included on bottles of pills intended for babies and dogs, admonitions against inserting people into washing machines, and a warning not to swallow wire coat hangers. Because that’s a widespread health hazard.

Returning to our own occupational neighborhood, the security practices of some computer-related concerns are so heavily fuzzed it’s hard to see through to the content. Password generation algorithms for security products that do not allow special characters: fuzzy. SSL sessions that accept self-signed certificates: fuzzy. Vendors who quietly upload “security updates” to your device that significantly increase the vulnerability of said device to remote exploits: ridiculously fuzzy.

Now, you might argue that none of what I’ve laid out above is really “fuzzy logic.” I would respond by making for the door while distracting you with an ad for tablets boasting 4K resolution that promise to download entire HD movies that haven’t even been released yet in the time it takes to enter your character-only password. The door in question can be closed, open, or somewhere in between, but as long as I can squeeze through, I don’t care. I still carry my old Fuzzbuster.