

Thinking Simply

I'm not a very intelligent person, but I am lucky enough to know several of these creatures. I got to wondering this weekend about what, apart from the ability to assimilate and use vast amounts of information faster and more efficiently than us mere mortals, really sets them apart.

And the thing that strikes me most is their ability to think very very simply. Now I'm not talking about thinking simplistically, i.e. with the sort of logics found mainly in the Daily Mail or the town pub after 10 pints. I'm talking about the ability to take a topic, a known topic, to reach into its core and retrieve an idea that seems so simple, so obvious, that you wish you'd thought of it yourself. And that little inner voice tells you that you could have done, if only you'd noticed, but you know in your heart that only someone very smart has the gift of thinking that simply.

And then I started wondering how this simplicity might be connected to my long-ago quest to understand creativity; if what the smart people were doing was having the courage, confidence and tools to rearrange existing concepts that build up around a topic over time. Which took me back to an old book (the structure of scientific revolutions), a coarse precis of which is that science moves at two speeds: slow methodical progress interspersed with great leaps of the imagination.

Meanwhile, I've been reading some of my old notes and, once again, can't understand them. Context is all sometimes...