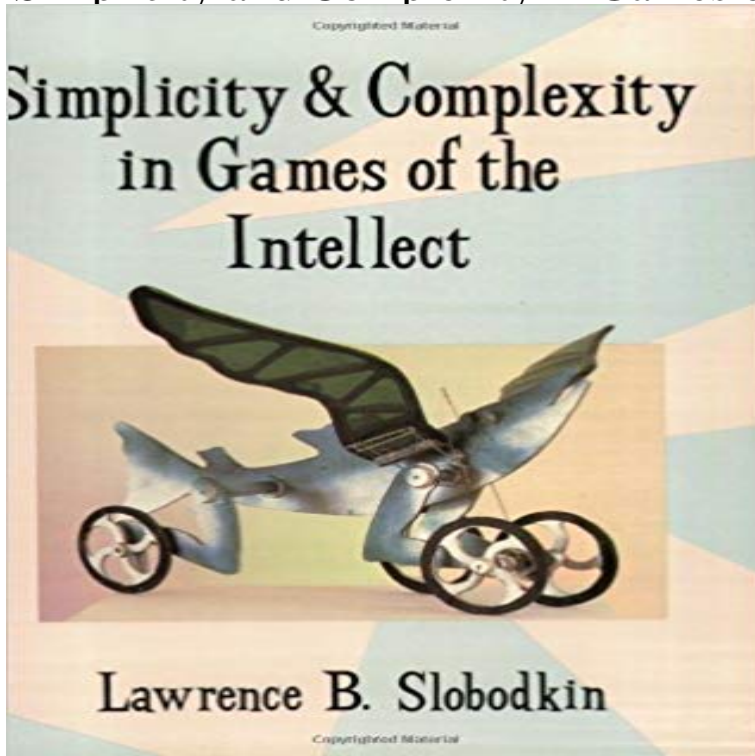


## Simplicity and Complexity in Games of the Intellect



If it were necessary, for some curious legal reason, to draw a clear line between human and nonhuman--for example, if a group of australopithecines were to appear and one had to decide if they were to be protected by Fair Employment Laws or by the ASPCA--I would welcome them as humans if I knew that they were seriously concerned about how to bury their dead. In this witty and wise way, Lawrence Slobodkin takes us on a spirited quest for the multiple meanings of simplicity in all facets of life. Slobodkin begins at the beginning, with a consideration of how simplicity came into play in the development of religious doctrines. He nimbly moves on to the arts--where he ranges freely from dining to painting--and then focuses more sharply on the role of simplicity in science. Here we witness the historical beginnings of modern science as a search for the fewest number of terms, the smallest number of assumptions, or the lowest exponents, while still meeting criteria for descriptive accuracy. The result may be an elegant hypothetical system that generates the apparent world from less apparent assumptions, as with the Newtonian revolution; or it may mean deducing non-obvious processes from everyday facts, as with the Darwinian revolution. Slobodkin proposes that the best intellectual work is done as if it were a game on a simplified playing field. He supplies serious arguments for considering the role of simplification and playfulness in all of our activities. The immediate effect of his unfailingly captivating essay is to throw open a new window on the world and to refresh our perspectives on matters of the heart and mind.

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