EDITORIAL

Have you ever wondered why there are 360 degrees in a circle? Or 7 days in one week? What about other counting conventions? What about the very foundation of our universally adopted counting system – the decimal system? Sure, all humans (with minor exceptions) have 10 fingers, but we also have 10 toes, so why not a base 20 system? In fact, cultures around the world have experimented with various systems: Mayans used base 20, Babylonians used base 60, people in New Guinea still have a base-27 counting system, where they use the names of 27 body parts as their numbers. Those who speak French realize that the language inherited a mixed use of base 10 and 20: 70=soixante-dix=60 + 10, 80=quatre-vingts=4·20 all the way up to 99=quatre-vingt-dix-neuf=(4·20) + 19. Bases 8 and 16, and of course base 2, are still used for computation (in fact, year 2016 looks quite nice in its base 2 representation: 11111100000).

So which system is the best? So-called Dozenal Societies will tell you it is the base-12 system and it can be hard to disagree with them. After all, 12 has many divisors (unlike 10, which creates messy fractions the moment division is at work), is not too small or too big (unlike 2 and 16 resulting in too few or too many digits) and already occurs naturally in many real-life situations: there are 12 months in a year, 24 hours in a day, 12 eggs in a dozen, etc. Plus, you can still use your fingers for counting: simply use the thumb as a pointer and count each of the three phalanges on the other four fingers totalling 12 on each hand. Better yet, you can use your other hand to denote the number of completed dozens and hence use your fingers to count up to 144. In fact, you can even afford to lose both thumbs and not suffer counting-wise.

Of course, changing the current system from the monopolizing base 10 seems nearly impossible. But one can still ask a question: if you could pick a system, what would you pick as a base?

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