

Phil 1101 Review

Ockham's Razor

- Don't say: "the simplest explanation is the best, i.e. probably true".
- That's not what Ockham's Razor says.
- Einstein's version is nice:
"Everything should be made as simple as possible, *but not simpler*".

Example: Complexity of the Eukaryotic Cell

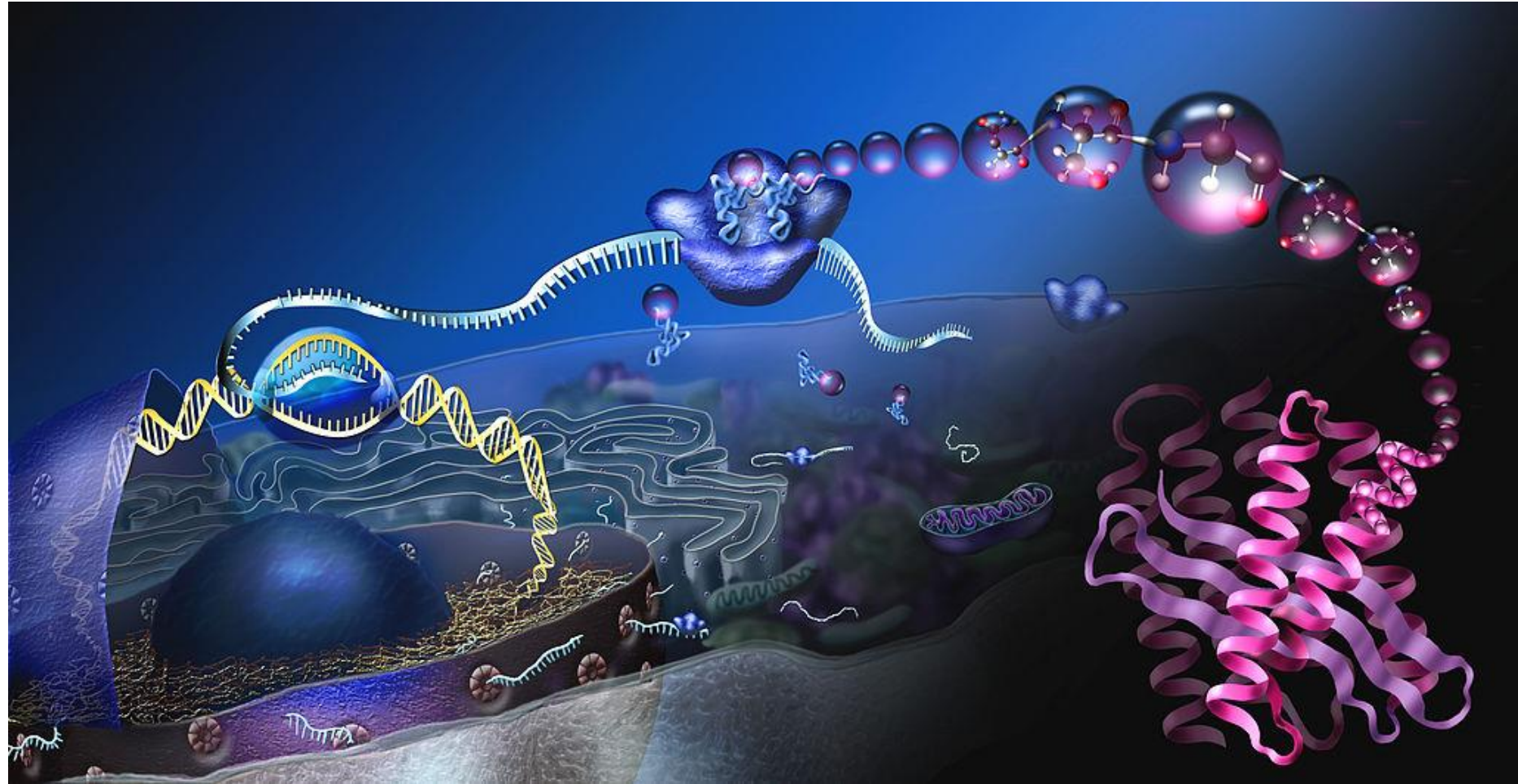
“We have just seen that in the body of an *Amœba* we have the type of a cell. Now both the fresh waters and the sea contain many living beings beside *Amœba* which never pass beyond the condition of a simple cell. Many of these, instead of emitting the broad lobe like pseudopodia of *Amœba*, have the faculty of sending out long thin threads of protoplasm, which they can again retract, and by the aid of which they capture their prey or move from place to place. **Simple structureless protoplasm as they are**, many of them fashion for themselves an outer membranous or calcareous case, often of symmetrical form and elaborate ornamentation, or construct a silicious skeleton radiating spicula, or crystal clear concentric spheres of exquisite symmetry and beauty.”

(Sir Norman Lockyer, *Nature*, 1879.)

The American Cyclopedia, 1873.

“... They are not only the simplest organisms with which we are acquainted, but also the simplest living beings we can conceive of as capable of existing; and **though their entire body is but a single, formless, small lump of protoplasm, and (each molecule of it being like the other) without any combination of parts,** yet they perform all the functions which in their entirety constitute in the most highly organized animals and plants what is comprehended in the idea of life, namely, **sensation and motion, nutrition and propagation.**” [what?????????]

A cell is not a “formless lump”!



- We now know that this view of cells is wildly false. Even the simplest living cells are fiendishly complex, having hundreds of genes. They are like miniature factories, consisting of hundreds of tiny “molecular machines”.
- Furthermore, in hindsight at least, **it is very clear that this simple explanation isn't even remotely adequate.**
- Imagine asking an engineer to build a machine that will move under its own power, using materials in its environment for fuel. It will sense things in its environment and respond appropriately. It will repair itself, and even reproduce itself by fission and growth.
- Is this an easy task? Will a blob of jelly suffice?

Ockham's Razor

- Ockham's Razor says that the simplest *adequate* explanation is the best.

I.e. "Do not multiply entities ***beyond necessity.***"

- In the case of the cell, for example, an enormously complex structure is absolutely necessary, given the data (sensation and motion, nutrition and propagation). Hence any good explanation for the cell will be extremely complex.

- In philosophical disagreements where Ockham's Razor is appealed to, therefore, the argument focuses on whether the simpler explanation is adequate.
- For example, physicalist theories of the mind, free will, personal identity are simpler (less burdened) than dualist, libertarian etc. ones. But are the physicalist theories *adequate*?

Topics covered

- Knowledge
- Perception
- Empiricism + Rationalism
- Dualism (substance and property)
- Identity theory, functionalism, (eliminativism)
- Consciousness, reductionism
- Free will + determinism
- Personal identity

Appeals to God

- Source of innate knowledge (Descartes)
- Guarantor of the reliability of the senses (Descartes)
- Super-believer whose beliefs are the objective facts (Aquinas, Kepler, Leibniz).

The concept of *substance*

- Used to distinguish different kinds of dualism (substance dualism, property dualism)
- Searle seems to think that consciousness and intentionality require a substance.
- Views about personal identity: same substance, or similar properties?

Non-physicalism

(Incompleteness of physics)

The basic argument for non-physicalism is that it *provides space* for common-sense notions:

- Consciousness (e.g. qualia)
- Intentionality
- Libertarian (“real”) free will
- Personal identity

Materialism vs. “built-in beliefs”

- Drew McDermott (Prof. of Computer Science, Yale) expresses a common view among materialists, that **many of the things we automatically believe about ourselves are false.**
 - (N.B. by ‘science’ here he means naturalism, the view that all of reality can be studied using the tools of science. This is roughly the same as materialism.)
- “Science commits one to a view in which ethics is just an arbitrary aspect of culture But intelligent agents cannot take the view of pure science, because certain built-in beliefs contradict it. These inescapable framework illusions (IFI’s) include a belief in free will, the persistence of the self through time, and, among humans, the universalizability of moral statements”
- Drew McDermott, quoted in Karsten Harries, “The Theory of Double Truth Revisited”.

The Myth of Procrustes



- Procrustes had a bed that fit him perfectly. When taller travellers slept on it, however, their legs would hang off the end. This mismatch bothered Procrustes, so he would trim their legs to the correct length.

- Procrustes is sometimes considered the “patron saint” of bureaucrats everywhere, who attempt to force everyone to fit into standard categories, etc. with no room for individual needs.
- But philosophers are also accused of being Procrustean. When things don't fit into their philosophical schemes, they cut them down to size, instead of changing their scheme.

Is consciousness an illusion?

Is Consciousness an Illusion?

Ned Block

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Co-editor, *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*

with Robert Lawrence Kuhn

www.closertotruth.com

CLOSER TO
TRUTH TO
COSMOS. CONSCIOUSNESS. GOD.

Compatibilism

- Recall how the compatibilists concerning free will don't have much substantial disagreement with hard determinists. Compatibilists define 'free will' so that it fits into a deterministic framework.
- Are they procrustean?

Alvin and Rudy

- For an extreme case of this, consider two Christians, Alvin and Rudy. Both believe in God.
- However, “God” for Alvin means a transcendent eternal being that created the universe and all life.
- Rudy is a strict materialist. “God” for Rudy means a socially-constructed idea that is an objectification of humanity’s highest ideals and aspirations.

Reductive materialism

- Eliminativists concerning the mind are rather like hard determinists. (Free will is eliminated.)
- So are reductive materialists also in danger of being procrustean? What if minds won't fit into the physical world?

Personal Identity

- Hume, Parfit etc. are eliminativists concerning personal identity.

Evolution of truth?

- Did truth and rationality evolve? Are they *biological* phenomena in some sense?

“How did logic come into existence in man’s head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is “equal” as regards both nourishment and hostile animals--those, in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously--were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal. ...”

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s.111, Walter Kaufmann transl..

Final Exam

- A. 14 multiple choice questions. (Answer all 14)
- B. Short answers – 1 page each. (Answer 2 out of 5)
- C. Long answer – about 3 pages. (Answer 1 out of 3)

Monday, Dec. 11

4 – 6 pm

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