

Occam's Razor

Issue date: 01 Sept 2007

I will present one aspect of Occam's Razor that is often used without much thought by many people who wish to sound like a scholar amongst their peers. I would advise the reader to use a search engine on the Internet to see how certain advocates wish to use it in an appropriate manner, but unfortunately many others apply it inappropriately – because quite simply, these individuals do not understand their subject matter (but think they do – else they would obviously not do it)!

The reader may raise the following thought:-

If one aspect of Occam's Razor is used to simplify, why do I spend so many pages trying to explain it! Quite simply, I am forced to use many words to untangle the misapplication of (not a rule) but merely a convenient tool to be applied on an initial set of assumptions.

The basic principal states:-

An idea should not be supported by more assumptions than the minimum required.

This is also called the Principal of Parsimony.

I wish to show the reader how advocates in the world of science and mathematics “minimise the subject matter for the assistance in initial reasoning” (being Occam's Razor), then further, how a few atheists ‘jump-overboard’ by misapplying Occam's Razor unintelligently to try and exclude God out of the science material (desperately pulling any ‘rabbit out of the hat’ to support their indefensible argument) by throwing into the arena disassociated material.

I will now demonstrate how the two are totally unrelated within the common agreed definitions and assumptions presented. And thus through logic show to all humans, the fallacy of the those atheists who use what is merely a guide in their arguments incorrectly as ‘a definitive rule’ to give succour to their unreasoned stance.

1. Occam's Razor correctly applied in this common illustration.

What mathematical function would lie on two points positioned on a two dimensional plane?

Applying Occam's Razor would suggest that a straight line ($y=mx+c$) would be the most appropriate unless more information is gained through the use of a third point. This is because while an infinite number of different functions would fit the given information, we choose the minimum function, namely a straight line – purely for human convenience.

The applied principal being that:- The simplest solution is the most likely.

A very necessary caution:-

While the simplest is the most theoretically convenient – it is not necessary the correct solution – but just ‘a means to an end’ to assist in initial understanding – purely a step towards the final solution. But should not then be extended irrationally to preclude other alternatives.

It is not credible for advocates to assert that it “gives the correct” solution in all applications they choose to use it for, so I feel that it is a sad reflection upon those who claim this through misapplication.

We can now move onto this group of people, in the next section.

2. Occam's Razor correctly and then incorrectly applied within an example.

Some Atheists now try to apply this principal to ‘shave out’ an Almighty God from the scientific material that we study on this earth, and thus conclude ‘The Almighty God is not real because He is not required’.

However the argument is completely facile!

Why?

Let us look at several aspects why this is the case.

1. Because ‘the intense study’ of either Science or Theology, does not preclude the existence, or the non-existence of the other domain.

Both subject matters are of different ‘units’, and thus any one cannot be used to preclude the existence of the other, thus exclude the other. So we are able to see is that to study one domain or the other fully is possible, but so it is also possible to study the interaction between the two domains for further understanding of ‘The Whole’.

The atheist may irrationally say “No”!

But logically why?

I would suggest this is completely irrational if one is trying to understand ‘The Whole’ picture of our existence! Clearly one can study each domain to the exclusion of the other, but in doing so – it is irrational and churlish to dismiss the other without rational investigation (through the application of self imposed tunnel vision)!

Let me illustrate this stance with an example:-

Example 1.

The example would be with a motor car.

Assumption 1.

I ask the dissenting Atheist to put themselves in the position of Stone Age men (or a Tribesman taken from the middle of the Amazon Jungle).

Assumption 2.

The natural curiosity of human would lead us to investigate ‘The Car’.

How would we carry out this investigation?

I ask the reader to follow through my logic.

1. **Initially** I would have acute fear of the vehicle – before I could understand it. It has demonstrably so much more power than myself and perhaps could be used against me. I would treat it with reverence – like a god, to placate it!

2. However after some time with it, I would see that it had no intention of attacking me so my reverential fear would diminish.

3. I now want to get to understand it and so use it in the simplest possible manner.

I now ask the reader:-

How would ‘The Atheist’ apply Occam’s Razor on this requirement?

Or would they apply it at all?

The correct use of Occam’s Razor.

I personally section off different aspects and understand The Car in progression.

I would perhaps only be interested in driving it, thus I would concentrate on learning and understanding how the controls operated.

Or perhaps, I would be interested in understanding where the power came from, so I would investigate the reciprocating movement, compression and fuel mixing ratios of the engine.

Perhaps, the transmission would provide a greater attraction, so I would study gears ratios, synchro-mesh, shafts and oil seals used within the construction. Perhaps the steering mechanism would hold a fascination for me – and so on for infinitum.

Thus we understand from this example that Occam’s Razor has been applied so that we may concentrate our minds on certain aspects to get to the simplest solution in answer to our quest for knowledge on a particular aspect rather than being side-tracked upon other possible alternatives to the solution.

For example we are aware that the steering wheel has some importance in taking the car to a specific place, but if we are only interested in the engine operation that provides power for the locomotion to get you to that specific place – then the steering wheel to provide power is merely a distraction.

And that is the crux of the argument:-

The person using Occam’s Razor defines where they are going – it often being used in a purely subjective manner based upon personally predefined assumptions, that may in themselves be wrong!

Now perhaps the incorrect use of Occam’s Razor.

I hope to explain here how preconceived ideas show the correct and incorrect use – provided the person using Occam’s Razor actually understands boundary definition that they may be sub-consciously applying from the outset.

I now ask the dissenting Atheist, this is surely like us humans of ‘modern times’ when we study The Laws of Nature now. We are investigating these different aspects of The Laws of Nature sectioned off in turn so that we can understand them and then apply them - initially in-depth without distraction but then move outwards to look upon everything holistically to see if “unification” can occur from similarities between them.

To which the dissenting Atheist should agree!

Now going back to our example of “The Car” being ‘The Resultant’ which we see in front of us.

The Atheist might now declare – I am going to apply **Occam's Razor!**

Where ????

On the designer and factory that made The Car!

Why ?????

Because they are unnecessary to my understanding to The Car and besides - I do not believe they exist because I have other alternative possibilities to the origin of the car which I think are simpler (because we do not need all the computer controlled design simulation, manufacturing stock-control, plethora of assembly tools, robots, rolling bed assembly lines, etc to make "The Car")!

OK, OK!

On the first declaration, the Atheist is perfectly correct! – The designer and factory are unnecessary to the understanding and application of The Car!

And on the second declaration:- the Atheist is entitled to their opinion.

But Occam's Razor has no more significance than that!

And in this illustration of The Car – it is not even the correct application of Occam's Razor!

Why?

Because we are not trying to use the designer or the factory to give us our understanding of The Car (more later on this twist) because we are trying to find out all this information on our own – based upon the material within our grasp. We are thus choosing to learn on our own – from our own trial and error processes.

The reader must appreciate; it is not the forming of the metal from **ore**, the material used to construct the car (being manufacturing of the plastics and paint used within the structure) – because you will not be able to do that **without investigation outside The Car domain.**

You are learning "The Laws" applicable to The Car from what is **visible on The Car within The Car domain.**

As I have alluded to earlier, what we are learning from studying The Car; are The Laws of Nature around us (basically – what is within our grasp – **visible – at the moment**).

And the Atheist is correct - we can do this at the moment without accepting the designer or the factory!

Thus Occam's razor is unnecessary and need not be used in the first instance!

So why is it being misapplied?

1. Occam's razor is being misapplied only by those who do not understand the application that they are trying to force it onto!
2. It boosts their personal ego before their peers.
3. It sounds like a rule (which it most certainly is not) that (within their own minds) can be used to squash 'a designer' / creator God idea.

It is for these reasons the Occam's razor is being misapplied!

As reader is now able to see, this razor to 'shave off' a designer and factory from The car is nonsense!

The Atheist must stop here – they can progress **no** further – because the remainder of the information is outside the domain that they are prepared to accept!

They have denied 'the designer' and denied the existence of a factory.

Because they cannot progress any further, their knowledge base is limited to what they have visible in front of them – just 'The Car' within its **own** domain!

However I accept that there was/is a designer for the car and a factory for further benefit.

Because I can accept this, then I can progress **further** than all Atheists!

How?

Because I:-

1. Have an open mind and prepared to look out of the box (beyond 'The Car' domain in front of me).
2. I can go to the designer and ask of help and information on how 'The Car' was built.
Ask about the hidden nuances behind the design that are not immediately obvious!
3. I can now mentally progress more quickly, and perhaps more safely without accidents in my life.
4. I can learn about other types of vehicles and transportation (outside that of 'The car' domain).

I think I do not need to explain any more and the obvious links to The Almighty God – it is hopefully, obvious! Thinking outside the box gives us all the benefits as clearly shown on this website.

Example 2.

This is a more lucid example but again shows why Occam's razor cannot be used.

I use selective quotes from example material collected off the Internet. I do not subscribe to either view, but show how protagonists feel justified to use Occam's razor to argue their case from opposite ends (and thus surely speaks volumes about the misapplication of 'Occam's Razor') – and because of such the reader must understand the fallible assumptions used by each side.

“Because Occam's razor is called the principal of simplicity some creationists have argued that Occam's razor can be used to support creationism over evolution. After all, having a God create everything is much simpler than evolution, which is a complex mechanism.” And the atheist perhaps would argue “The fact that something can be conceived does not imply that it exists, and so a hypothetical notion of God is as different from the real thing as a hundred hypothetical dollars are from the real thing. So positing God and a supernatural realm is to posit pluralities unnecessarily.” And so go on to propose “... us who think Occam's razor provides a better rule of thumb.”

So the reader is able to see many false assumptions and 'glossing over' of facts, to promote misinformation by both sides in just those few lines within this section. Both arguments are wrong and I show this through detailed reasoning elsewhere on this website.

Conclusions that can be drawn from this dissertation.

1. Occam's razor is only a convenient tool that can be used to assist in the initial reasoning process.
2. Only apply it for meaningful results – rather than 'proof of', or the exclusion of other domain material – for which it cannot!
3. If applied, then it does not mean the result from application of, is accurate or even factual!
4. It should only be applied when it best fits the information, and assumptions need to be removed merely to aid initial further understanding – else why apply mental suppression?

The reader is now able to understand that it has **no** application within this context – because it can neither add nor remove understanding through removing the assumption of a designer within this context. The reader **must look elsewhere** if they wish to either justify or nullify The Existence of a designer.

I know what the obvious answer is – my experience in life tells me something only exists when it is created by design!

But perhaps I am biased – I am a professional electronics designer of some 30 years experience with my products sold to many of the industrial users ('house-hold names') all around the world!

As with all tools, they must be applied correctly to be useful, else they may hurt you or be utterly useless, as useless as wasting time 'theorising' how many angels are could dance on a pinhead!