

INDIVIDUALS VERSUS SYSTEMS

Emergence, Analysis Frames, and Social Change

1. Frames matter.
2. Individual consumer choice is not the only, or best, frame for AR.
3. “Emergent” properties – culture, social/moral norms, and institutions – matter far more.

DIRECT ACTION  EVERYWHERE

Motivations

- The Big Debate: abolitionism v. welfarism
- To change consumers, should we demand complete “abolition” (veganism) or something short of that (humane meat)?
- But what if the entire debate misses the point? What if we shouldn't be talking about individual consumer choices, and marginal economic shifts, at all?



Shadows from history

- Antislavery is best parallel to the modern AR movement.
- And yet they did not speak or act as if this were a movement of economic change.
- Scholars have concluded that it was not a movement of economic change, but of moral dissent.



I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I am in earnest -- I will not equivocate -- I will not excuse -- I will not retreat a single inch -- AND I WILL BE HEARD.

- William Lloyd Garrison, 1832

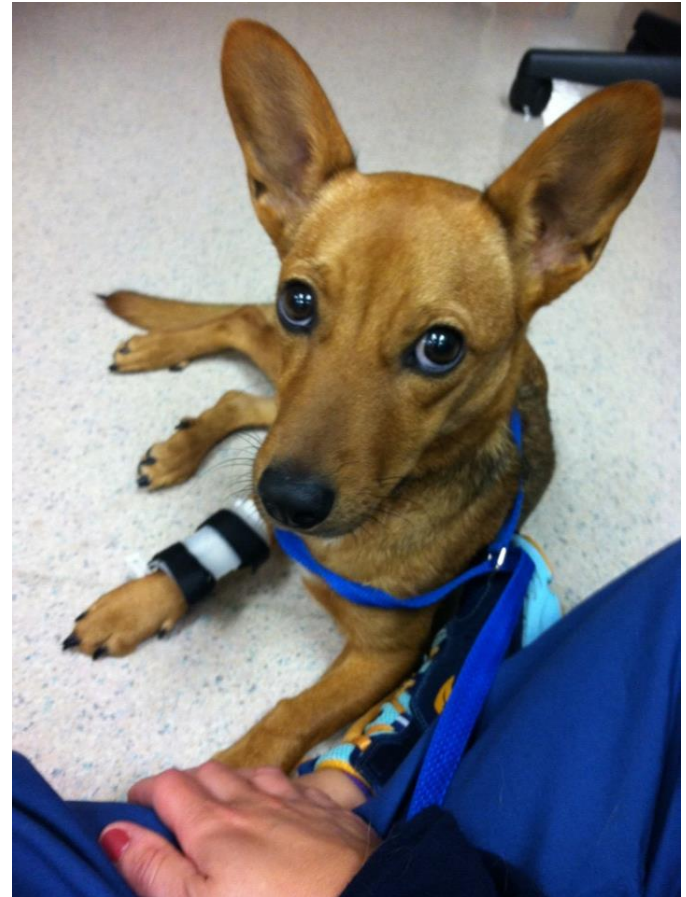
Frames matter

- A Famous Experiment: Kahneman and Tversky.
- 600 people: 400 will be saved. 200 will be killed.
- What do we do?



Framed decisions

- “Lives saved” – seems like a safe and attractive outcome.
- “Lives killed” – seems risky and haphazard.



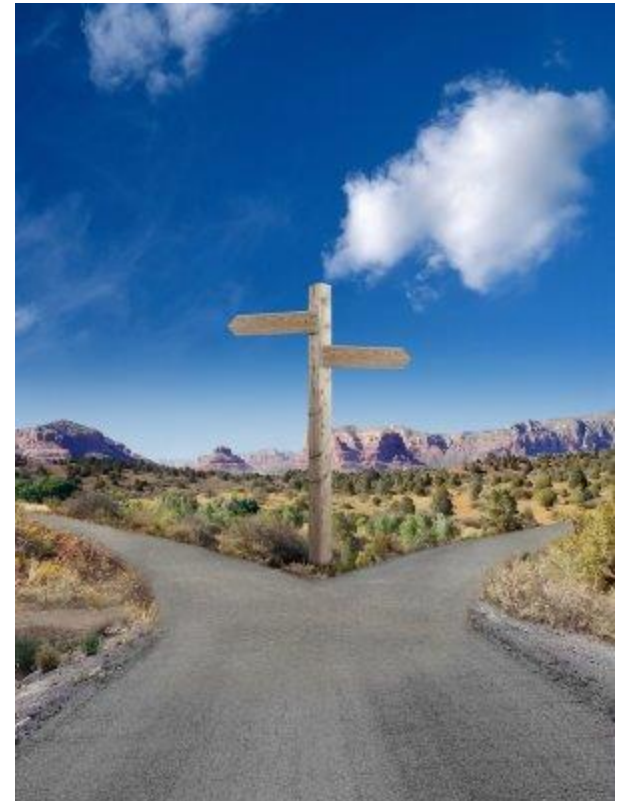
But are there other frames?

- The prior change in frames was a slight manipulation.
- What happens when we ask a **completely different sort of question?**
- Two questions:
 - “Should we use the treatment?”
 - “How do we stop the disease?”



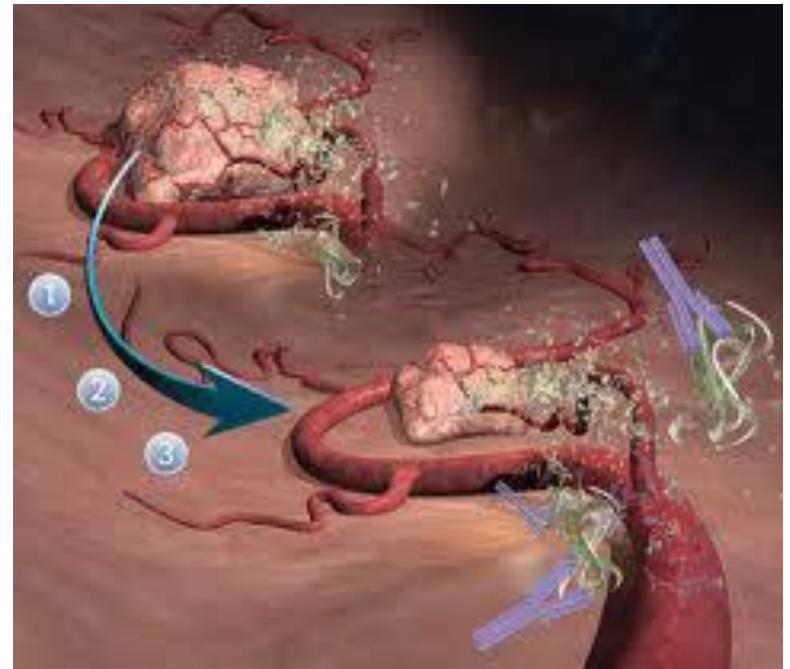
Forks in the frame

- Your framing of the problem – the question you ask – affects the variables that you care about.
- “Should we use the treatment?”
 - Focus on **individual-level** variables: what makes **this patient** get better?
- “How do we stop the disease?”
 - Focus on **system-level** variables: what makes the **entire community** avoid transmission of the disease?



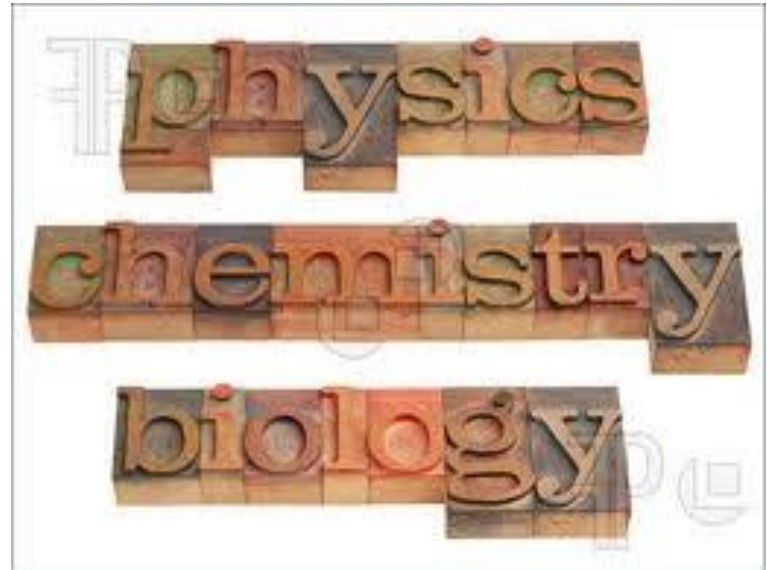
Different paths; different solutions

- Germ Theory of Disease
 - Miasma v. Germs
- Cancer
 - Bad cells or bad mechanisms?
- Social/Cognitive Revolution
 - Rational automatons or social feelers?



How do we know the right frame?

- Short answer: we don't!
- Better answer: when we are dealing with **complex systems** with **extensive interactions** between components that lead to **macro-scale patterns**, then we have to consider so-called **emergent properties**.



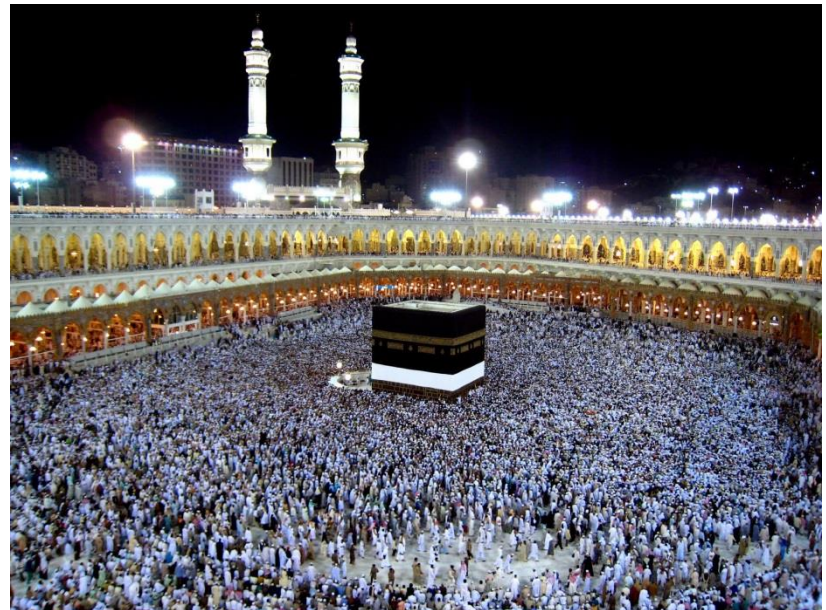
Emergence

- Each individual ant has no knowledge, or even motivation, to act on behalf of the colony.
- Studying ants as individuals leads to a flawed understanding of their behavior.
- Colony wide properties, that no individual ant acts on, matter more, even for understanding and predicting individual ant behavior, than individual-level incentives.



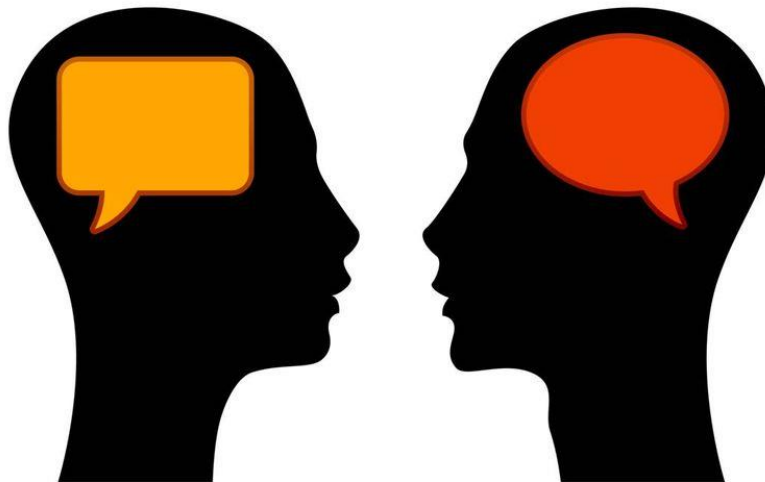
Emergence and humans

- Human social systems meet the basic criteria for emergence: complex systems, with dynamic interactive components, that lead to regular patterns..
- The one thing that influences human behavior, that no one is willing to admit, is: the people around us.
- But what causes communities to shift?
 - Ideas (stories) about human interaction.
 - People to push them.
 - Examples: Religious movements, Occupy, Arab Spring, even anti-smoking!



Two Emergent Properties

- **Institutions** – ideas (formalized or otherwise) governing human relations. (North, Fogel)
- **Interactions** – shifting willingness of individuals to interact with others to establish new institutions. (Christakis, Fowler)



Summing Up

- The AR movement is **dominated by one frame: individual consumer/economic choices.**
- **Frames matter.**
 - They influence our judgment. (Saving v. losing lives)
 - They influence our perception. (Miasma v. germs)
- **“Emergent” frames are often more important** than individual components. (Ants)
- **Human social systems have emergent properties.** (Religion)
- To change these systems, you have to **change the systems – i.e. institutions and interactions** – and not just the individuals. (Smoking)

Concluding Questions

- Are there variables at a higher frame of analysis that are more relevant to our problem than individual consumer choice?
 - Answer: Yes. And we need to change these variables – social norms and institutions – if we are to change even individual consumers.
- To the extent we are focusing on individuals, should the movement be focused on creating private vegans or public activists?
 - Answer: from an emergence perspective, indisputably the latter! The variable we should care about, then, is are there more activists – and not, “Are there more vegans?”