

Ockham's Razors: A User's Manual

By Elliott Sober

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Ockham's razor, the principle of parsimony, states that simpler theories are better than theories that are more complex. It has a history dating back to Aristotle and it plays an important role in current physics, biology, and psychology. The razor also gets used outside of science - in everyday life and in philosophy. This book evaluates the principle and discusses its many applications. Fascinating examples from different domains provide a rich basis for contemplating the principle's promises and perils. It is obvious that simpler theories are beautiful and easy to understand; the hard problem is to figure out why the simplicity of a theory should be relevant to saying what the world is like. In this book, the ABCs of probability theory are succinctly developed and put to work to describe two 'parsimony paradigms' within which this problem can be solved.

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Editorial Review

Review
"Sober's treatment of the role of Ockham's razor in scientific methodology is, quite simply, the best that one can find in the philosophical literature today. With excursions into such diverse topics as model construction, Bayesian statistics, phylogenetic inference, philosophy of mind, and general philosophical methodology, readers of all stripes will find this book rewarding."
James M. Joyce, Cooper Harold Langford Collegiate Professor of Philosophy, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

"Ockham's Razors is a great book that philosophers, scientists, and anyone else interested in reasoning about the empirical world would do well to read carefully."
Daniel Steel, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews

"A flawless crash course in probability theory is expertly delivered at the outset, providing the casual reader with everything needed to grapple with the fairly technical discussions that follow."
Tom Graham, The Times Literary Supplement

"I view this monograph as an ideal introduction to Sober's philosophy. This is helped by [his] clear and entertaining style of writing: Ockham's Razors is a pleasure to read. As such, I recommend the book to any graduate student with interests in the philosophy of science, the philosophy of probability or the philosophy of biology. Furthermore, the book is suitable for a graduate seminar on Ockham's razor and individual chapters can be used for specialist graduate courses in the philosophy of probability, the philosophy of biology and the philosophy of mind."
Bengt Autzen, Philosophy of Science

About the Author
Elliott Sober is Hans Reichenbach Professor and William F. Vilas Research Professor in the Department of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin, Madison. In 2014 the Philosophy of Science Association awarded him the Carl Gustav Hempel Award for lifetime achievement in philosophy of science. His publications include: Evidence and Evolution: The Logic Behind the Science (2008), Did Darwin Write the Origin Backwards?: Philosophical Essays on Darwin's Theory (2011) and Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior (1998, co-authored with David Wilson).

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