

Humans Are Like Viruses and Amoebas, but Worse

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HUMANS ARE LIKE VIRUSES AND AMOEBAS, BUT WORSE

We like to feel special.

We like to feel unique.

Even chosen.

Humans cling to the idea of their own exceptionality. We polish our egos like relics. We tell ourselves that we are singular, irreplaceable, touched by some cosmic privilege.

Some even dare to call our species the pinnacle of creation, as if the universe were a ladder, and we alone had climbed to the top rung. But step back far enough, and the illusion thins. Against the backdrop of deep time, we are a brief shimmer. Against the scale of the cosmos, we are a microscopic tremor. Against the unfolding of life, we are simply another speckle, a slightly articulate miniscule organism trying to make sense of its own improbable flicker of existence.

We once claimed to be the only creatures who use tools. Then a crow bent a wire into a hook and, with a single motion, humbled our entire species. Octopuses followed, cementing the fact that dexterity and problem-solving are not ours alone.

We insisted language was our singular crown, a vast vocabulary, a cathedral of meaning no other being could construct. Then we listened closely to whales and discovered architectures of communication older, deeper, and more intricate than our own. Elephants added their voices, showing that complex communication is woven through many forms of life.

We once believed the Earth sat enthroned at the center of all things, a cosmic stage built for our dramas, our myths, our sense of importance. Then came Copernicus, quietly rearranging the heavens. Then Galileo, lifting a telescope to the sky and daring to say what the evidence showed, that we were never at the center, only at the center of our assumptions.

Still, we cling to a new form of pride. If not the center of the universe, then surely the jewel of it. Surely our solar system was exceptional, our sun a chosen lantern in the cosmic dark. But the universe has a way of dissolving our certainties. We learned that our sun is not a rare flame but an ordinary spark, a middle-aged, middle-sized, middle-bright star drifting in a galaxy of hundreds of billions like it.

And beyond that galaxy lie countless others, each with their own suns, their own worlds, their own possibilities, some perhaps stranger, richer, or more wondrous than anything we have in our galactic neighborhood.

The cosmos invites us to see that every time we crown ourselves exceptional, reality gently removes it from our heads.

Again and again, we draw a circle around ourselves and call it the boundary of possibility.

And again and again, the universe redraws it.

We are small; small in knowledge, small in imagination, small in the face of a universe that refuses to fit inside our definitions. Every time another species surprises us, another discovery amazes us, or another revelation is exposed, it cracks open the shell of our certainty and invites us into a wider, more generous understanding of life.

Maybe humility is not a wound to human pride, but the beginning of wisdom. Perhaps our greatness was never in our centrality, but in our capacity to be decentered and still continue the search.

We say we have evolved.

We repeat it like a mantra, as if the word itself were proof of progress.

But I came here to challenge that.

Not out of misanthropy, but out of realism, the kind that clears the fog rather than darkens the sky. Because when humans speak of “evolution,” we rarely mean the slow, biological unfolding that shaped every creature on Earth, we mean something else, an intellectual ascent, a physical refinement, a climb toward superiority.

We have changed our tools, but not so much our tendencies. We have expanded our knowledge, but not so much our wisdom. We have built civilizations, but often on the same foundations of fear, the same egotistical inclinations, and the same tribal instinct that guided our earliest ancestors.

We continue to build empires and lift them to glory, only for our ancient, **bottomless greed** to make them crumble beneath their own weight. Never learning. Making this same mistake time and time again across human history.

We still treat complexity as if it were a sign of maturity. We repeatedly mistake innovation for transcendence. We cling to the belief that because we can split atoms, sequence genomes, and send machines across the solar system, we must have surpassed the primal forces that shaped us.

But evolution is a branching, tangled, indifferent process. And we are not its summit, we are one of its experiments in progress, still driven by impulses older than the wheel, older than fire, older than the idea of “human” itself.

To say this, is not to diminish us, but to unchain us.

Because only when we stop pretending we have already evolved can we begin the work of actually doing so. Real evolution, the kind we long for, is not measured in millennia of biology but in moments of awareness, in the courage to see ourselves clearly, in the willingness to grow beyond the stories that keep us comfortable and oblivious.

There is an observation made by Agent Smith in The Matrix movie I found intriguing, maybe even compelling, but unsatisfactory.

On a conversation with Morpheus, Agent Smith said, “I'd like to share a revelation that I've had during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species. I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment, but you humans do not. You move to an area, and you multiply, and multiply, until every natural resource is consumed. The only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus.”

Agent Smith's comparison is intriguing because it exposes something uncomfortable. Humans often behave like a species out of equilibrium with its environment. We expand, we consume, we transform, and we rarely stop to ask whether the system can sustain it. In that narrow behavioral sense, yes, we resemble viruses.

We consume until our natural resources are depleted.

But viruses do that without intention. There is no emotion driving them to take and take until they no longer have anything left to take. There is no force pushing this behavior. A

virus does not want anything. It does not hunger, desire, strategize, or conquer. It drifts. It waits. It bumps into a compatible membrane, and chemistry, not choice, does the rest.

Surface proteins meet receptors. A lock meets its key. The cell opens. Replication begins. No malice. No greed. No story. Just the cold elegance of molecular inevitability.

Humans multiply beyond what the ecosystem can bear. We leave trails of depletion in our wake. But the analogy is ultimately unsatisfactory, not because it is wrong, but because it is incomplete.

We want. We desire. We crave. We hunger. Because of our innate greediness, we accumulate far beyond our needs. We reshape landscapes not because we must, but because we are insatiable.

Viruses cannot choose.

Humans can.

Viruses are unable to change their nature.

Humans are able, at least in principle, though our track record makes that claim uncertain.

Viruses are innocent.

Humans are not.

Viruses do not experience greed.

Humans do.

From this, one might be tempted to argue that humans are somehow worse than viruses. A virus behaves according to its structure. It spreads because that is what its nature is. There is no intention, no malice, no appetite. Its harm is simply a byproduct of its existence.

Humans, by contrast, possess the capacity for reflection, restraint, and transformation. Yet we often act as if we lack these capacities. We cause harm not because we must, but because our desires, appetite, and lustful systems push us toward it. That gap, between what we are capable of and what we choose, creates the moral weight viruses never carry.

The question then is, why does a species with agency, imagination, and self-awareness so often behaves with the inevitability of a pathogen?

We are a creature split between instinct and awareness, between compulsion and responsibility, between the ancient drives that shaped us and the emerging consciousness that could transform us.

Human beings exhibit purposeful expansion, directed resource extraction, strategic colonization, greed, ambition, and desire. We do not merely float into new environments. We pursue them. We migrate not by accident but by appetite. We extract not by necessity but by desire. We consume not because we must, but because we want more. More energy, more power, more control, more wealth. We engineer access to them. We fight wars over them.

So the comparison to viruses, as compelling as it may be, is superficial. Underneath, the difference is profound, a virus is a pattern of chemistry, a human is a pattern of primal driven forces, a virus consumes until the host collapses because it has no concept of collapse, a human consumes until the host collapses despite having the concept.

Thus, the viral analogy shatters. It is too passive, too mechanistic, too innocent. If we are to compare humanity to another organism, we must choose one that moves with intention toward energy sources, engulfs, absorbs, expands its domain until it depletes its resources, and leaves a polluted environment behind. Not out of malice but out of a simple, relentless drive.

The comparison then shifts.

From a virus.

To an amoeba.

An amoeba moves. It extends itself toward sources of food. It engulfs what it encounters. It consumes until all potential energy is exhausted. Leaves toxic waste in the environment. Then extends again, seeking new sources, new sustenance. It is not malicious, but it is directional, purposeful. It is not greedy, but it is driven. It may not be conscious, but it behaves with a primitive will to grow bigger, stronger, and then spread.

In this, humans resemble amoebas far more than viruses.

However, we know when we are taking too much. We know when we are destabilizing the systems that sustain us. We know when our actions ripple outward in ways that harm others. And yet we continue.

We consume not out of biological necessity, but out of psychological compulsion. An amoeba expands because it has no alternative. Humanity expands because it refuses to consider alternatives. Our destructiveness is not mechanical, it is intentional, or at least enabled by intention.

Amoebas cannot choose restraint.

Humans can and often do not.

So the comparison is not meant to degrade humanity, it is meant to illuminate the tension at the heart of our species, we possess the instincts of an amoeba and the awareness of a sentient being. We are pulled forward by ancient biological imperatives but can hold back, if we choose, by the weight of consciousness.

The real questions become, will we continue behaving like an amoeba while possessing the mind of something more? Or will we finally evolve, not biologically, but ethically, psychologically, civilizationally, into a creature that can override its own primitive drives?

Because unlike viruses and amoebas, we may not be condemned to our nature.

We may be capable of rewriting it.

Dictyostelium discoideum is a remarkable example because this creature shifts between two entirely different modes of existence depending on its environment. When food is abundant, each cell lives independently. But when scarcity arrives, thousands of cells fuse into a single multicellular “slug.”

The cells that lead are not chosen for strength, speed, or dominance. They are the ones that are malnourished or have recently divided, “the weaklings.” Their physiology is what allows them to endure starvation long enough to be pulled into that role. Survival under deprivation, seems to determine who leads once all cells have gathered to form the “slug.”

Dictyostelium reveals a deeper logic: in a depleted world, the traits that matter most are endurance, frugality, resilience, and the ability to function under constraint. Not abundance. Not luxury. Not power. Not dominance.

It suggests that many of our assumptions about strength, success, and survival are illusions built on temporary abundance. And if we want a glimpse of humanity’s future, especially as our own resources thin, we might learn more from this humble amoeba than from our myths of conquest and growth.

Physarum polycephalum is another intriguing example because when it spreads across a forest floor, it extends itself like a living question, sensing gradients of nourishment and moisture. Its body becomes a map of possibility. Where food is abundant, its veins thicken; where the land offers little, they thin and fade. Over time, what remains is a network shaped by experience, an elegant lattice that carries resources with remarkable efficiency resembling interstate road systems.

Humans, in our own way, behave as if we share this ancient instinct. When we build highways, we trace the routes our collective movement has already begun to sketch. Settlements swell, trade pulses between them, and soon the land reveals the lines we will eventually pave. Engineers formalize what travelers have been signaling for generations. Asphalt becomes the hardened memory of countless journeys.

Both species, humans and this particular amoeba, one sprawling across leaf litter and the other across continents, participate in a similar choreography. We respond to need, density, and flow. We reinforce the paths that serve us well. We let others fade. Our networks, freeways or highways, become the visible record of how life seeks connection.

In this sense, *Physarum* is not a distant curiosity but a mirror held low to the ground.

Human cultures across time have woven a consistent story. We are special. We are unique. We are the pinnacle of creation. This narrative has been reinforced by religion, philosophy, and science alike, until science, ironically, began dismantling it.

We once claimed tool use as our defining trait; crows and octopuses disproved that. We claimed linguistic complexity; whales and elephants challenged that. We believed ourselves the center of the cosmos; Copernicus and Galileo displaced us. We imagined our solar system extraordinary; astronomy now shows it is painfully average.

Each revelation chips away at the pedestal we built for ourselves.

I am not a microbiologist, and certainly not an “amoebologist,” and this may be evident by my comparison of humanity to an amoeba. Nevertheless, when we zoom out far enough, humanity behaves less like a virus drifting without intention and more like a vast, immense amoeba. We detect sources of energy; forests, rivers, oil fields, fertile soil. We move toward them with purpose. We engulf them through industry, agriculture, and extraction. We metabolize them into growth, expansion, civilization. And we leave behind waste, pollution, chemicals, toxins, that reshape the environment.

Viruses overconsume because they cannot do otherwise.

Amoebas overconsume out of a deep, ancient drive to expand, secure, and disseminate.
Because that is their nature.

We humans overconsume because of our fundamentally grotesque, egocentric, nature.
Our gluttony. Our hunger for more. Our craving for excess.

Because of our insatiable and devastating greed.

It appears, after all, we have not evolved far from viruses and amoebas.

If anything, knowing exactly what, why, and how we harm makes us worse than both.

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