Suffering matters.

(But it is not the only thing that matters.)

Why does it matter?

Because it is awful.

What makes it awful?

It is just intrinsically awful.

A non-answer.

A skyhook

A few fixed points

There is no double transduction.

It's spike trains all the way.

So consciousness is not a (special) *medium*.

It must then be a complex of talents or cognitive abilities realized in the medium of neural interactions.

These emerged gradually and spottily in evolution.

Suffering *could be* interference with those abilities.

Session 1:

PGS, Todd, Andy, Eva all develop evolutionary,

and HENCE functionalist considerations, seeking out by ‘reverse engineering’ the reasons why consciousness exists, what it is, and how it works.

We learn that they agree that (some) cephalopods, arthropods, and vertebrates have the main tools/organs/capabilities.

But they ‘flirt with consciousness’

(brava, Marian)

They don’t SAY that they are functionalists; they *hint* (except for Todd) that there is a Hard Problem,

And that they are addressing it.

Todd *advertises* that he is addressing the Hard Problem, the Explanatory Gap, Qualia, . . .

But look more closely: he was also articulating only functional considerations!

Drawing conclusions from facts of functional neuroanatomy that he was speculatively reverse-engineering.

Ned and Stevan to the rescue

I was worrying about how to draw out this curious fact,

when both Ned and Stevan came to my rescue by driving home the point themselves.

“All these competences, cognitive abilities, etc., could be done without consciousness, without qualia. . .” (Ned)

”What about *feeling?”* (Stevan)

Several objected: you say you are talking about consciousness, but instead you are just elaborating the different cognitive abilities of your cephalopods, your bees, your vertebrates, and what does *that* have to do with consciousness?

cf. Bentham: not ‘can they reason?’ but “do they suffer?”

They should reply:

not reasoning in particular, but responding in many appropriate ways to the nociception.

Later, Marian says that she wants to point to the complexity of the machinery that responds to the nociceptors, quite independently of any ‘qualia’ or Hard Problem.

She asks why we should care about whether there are pain “qualia” present.

David comes to the rescue:

"Why should we care about the complexity of the machinery?"

AT LAST David is on the verge of asking the Hard Question: "And then what happens?"

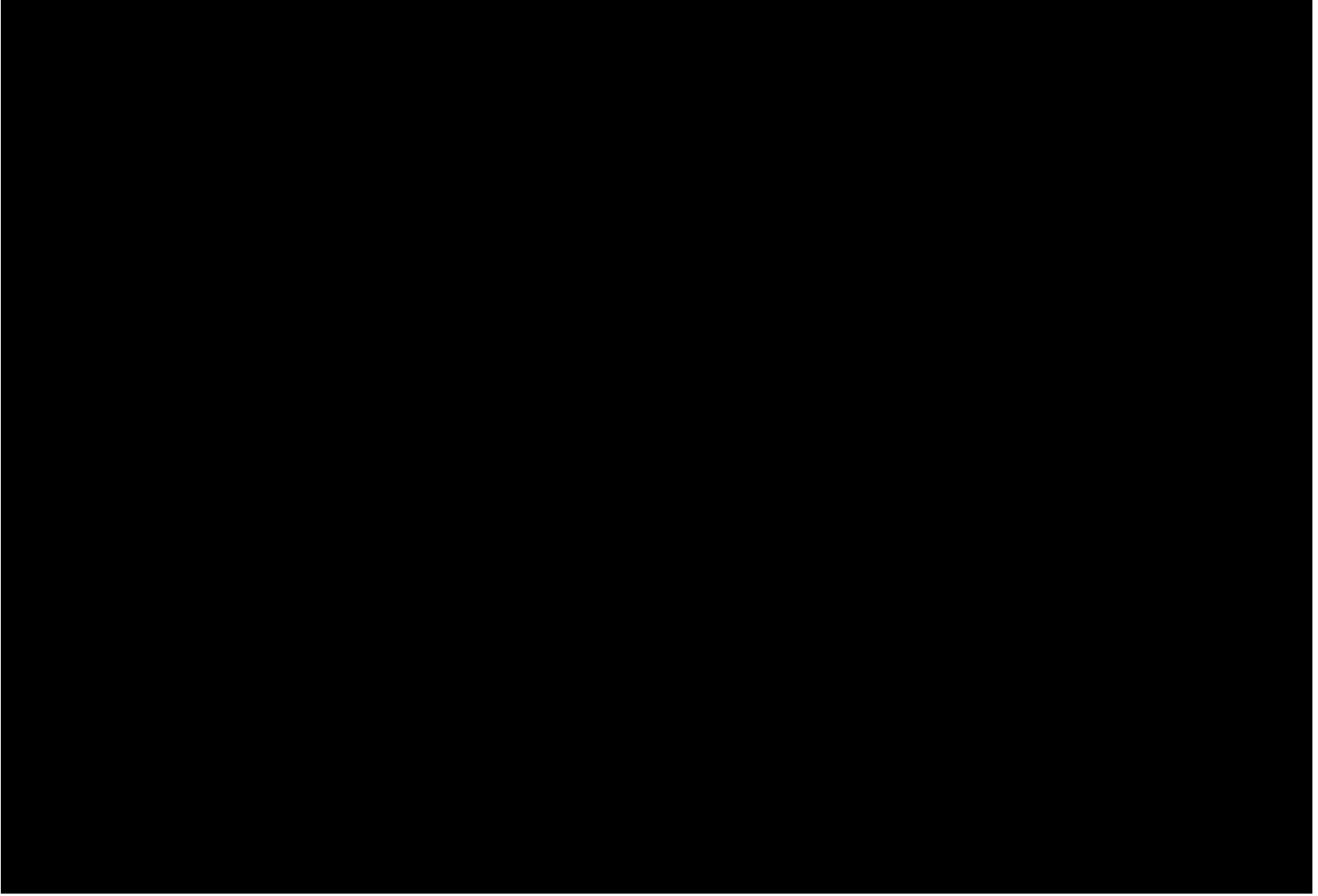
His is not a rhetorical question.

I am going to answer it.

Complexity is worth caring about, but

not just any complexity.

The wonderful complexity Eva describes.



Eva's Major Transition

Sims virtual creatures

The genome and the developmental program is 'backstage,' not in the model, and hence not itself under selection pressure.

It could not evolve a longer genome, for instance, or a new chromosome. . . .

It lacks *Unlimited Heredity*

Unlimited Associative Learning.

This IS a wonderful talent—shared by only a few extant species, and only in approximation.

The ingredients

1. Compound stimuli (and actions)
2. Novel compounds/problems (a kind of generativity)
3. Which can support second-order conditioning (reflection).

This creates a HUGE set of potential learning opportunities,

and problems for the organism.

A large investment in versatility.

The open-endedness of reflection and evaluation (cf PGS's spiders vs wasps)

in those organisms that are . . . .

conscious.

This is the 'easy problem' answer to why consciousness is so wonderful,

why suffering matters.

'negative valence' *must* be functional.

"Ouch!" can't be "ouch" all by itself.

We agreed that nociceptors without an appropriate response would be useless, and would not be selected for.

The simplest appropriate response is withdrawal, and that is not suffering (box jellies).

“And then what happens?” Nothing.

(Could there be unconscious suffering?)

As Andy pointed out, bees, have a much more complex response to noxious stimuli.

Why? Because they have control systems that deal with a more variable and complex selective environment, in which they have to have the capacity (among others) to overcome the ‘urge’ to withdraw.

These more complex responses to nociception matter in a way mere withdrawal doesn’t.

The complexity of an autonomous, self-protecting, self-advancing (but mortal, vulnerable) bit of machinery gives us an explanation of why it is equipped to suffer, and why its suffering matters TO IT.

To meet the demand for an explanation of *what suffering is*, you have to ask, and answer,

the Hard Question: “And then what happens?”

Suffering matters because it is the price paid by uniquely talented autonomous protectors of their own interests, who pay for this power with their susceptibility to negative states that interrupt, thwart, disrupt. . . the otherwise smooth operation of their life projects.

A pain that doesn’t interrupt or interfere is not a pain.

And certainly not suffering.

Suffering matters

But what else matters?

(Cf Cora Diamond's point about what would be wrong with eating amputated limbs)

If suffering is the only touchstone of mattering, then there is nothing wrong with

Anencephalic cows

Beef in a box. . . (Peter Singer approves)

Is there something objectionable about this?

A harder case:

Brain-dead living human bodies as

marionettes. . .

They wouldn’t be suffering!

But it would violate our sense of decency.

What about plants?

The plants don’t care.

And Michelangelo’s *Pieta* doesn’t care if you bash it with a hammer.

And the flag doesn’t care if you spit on it.

But some people care,

And we care that they care.

Consciousness is not all-or-nothing

"A true gradualism is hard to think about, but it makes sense" Peter Godfrey Smith