

PHILOSOPHY

WHAT IS LIFE?

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There is an interesting discussion going on starting with Trifinov's (whom I met here last year) [seminal paper in J Biomol Struct Dyn 2011](#)

Analysis of the vocabulary of 123 tabulated definitions of life reveals nine groups of defining terms of which the groups (self-)reproduction and evolution (variation) appear as the minimal set for a concise and inclusive definition: Life is self-reproduction with variations... Over 100 of definitions of life exist today- learned opinions each one of which is, or has been in the past, defended not without a reason though generally met with skepticism. The skepticism is multiplied by the above number, leaving almost no chance for new formulations which, however, continue to appear. An excellent overview of the current status of the problem is given by a special issue of the journal "Origins of Life and Evolution of Biospheres". Sixteen papers of this issue, expert opinions, display a variety of philosophical and historical aspects of defining life, and inevitable limitations of about every approach and view point.

Looks like an ontological argument "Vocabulary of Definitions of Life Suggests a Definition", see also the comments by Neumann "The Definition of Life and the Life of a Definition" [this week](#)

This methodology is in line with current attempts to harvest "collective intelligence" for understanding the meaning of a concept. In this case, the collective intelligence is that of the experts who defined life.

although I do not believe so much in collective intelligence - maybe extremely powerful in some instances but frequently ("Lehrmeinung") an obstacle to scientific progress.

