

Elayne's personal outline

Post by “Elayne” of December 6, 2018 at 9:48 AM

Thanks for reading all that, and for the comments!

For each point, I had a lot more to say but putting it in skeleton form was very helpful. For the vestigial/spandrel point, this has been on my list of important concepts for a long time when teaching medical students.

When I was in training, we were taught that the appendix was vestigial. Now we know it serves as a reservoir for beneficial gut flora, to replenish the gut after something like a viral illness. The umbilicus was described as a spandrel, just a leftover feature from the cord. But it, also, is a reservoir for skin flora. The foreskin, in the US-- it's astonishing how many physicians are unaware of its functions and of our bizarre historical origins of circumcision here (the hygiene movement, whose adherents thought circumcision prevented masturbation and insanity). There's a pretty long list of this kind of thing.

So I tell students to be wary when they hear a feature or behavior commonly found in humans has no current advantage. Reasoning can lead them far astray.