

Article

Unsolved Problems in Philosophy: The Hardest Four

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Abstract

In this article, the four unsolved problems of philosophy are explored from an Eastern philosophical perspective. The questions of Consciousness, nothingness, identity and demarcation of knowledge are discussed.

Keywords: Consciousness, philosophy, identity, nothing, Shunya, demarcation, science, genus.

1. Introduction

Philosophy helps us in understanding who are we, what is this environment and why we exist. It is a critical and comprehensive inquiry into the system of knowledge, learning, ideas, values, and the meaning of life. Philosophy¹ etymologically means love of wisdom. To understand fundamental truths wrapped in many layers of reality in the world.

The usage of the word refers to the year 1300, when philosophie² meant knowledge, learning, scholarship, scholarly works, body of knowledge, from Latin philosophia, from Greek philosophia "love of knowledge, pursuit of wisdom; systematic investigation. From ((philo+ sophia), philo- "loving", Sophia "knowledge or wisdom". From mid 14th century, it was the discipline of dealing with rational speculation or contemplation. The meaning "system a person forms for the conduct of life" is attested from 1771. The modern sense of "the body of highest truth, the science of the most fundamental matters" is from 1794. I was inspired by an article "4 of the hardest unsolved problems in philosophy" published by Big Think.

Philosophy is an activity of thought, a pursuit of wisdom. Every object and subject of thought is attached to the cognition centre by its name, symbol or mark known as genus or Linga. These marks (names or symbols) are correlated and associated with each other in a thought string to drive a sense from them. Further manipulations or processing of such thought strings leads to ideas and conclusions, In case we hit a pocket where such a process reaches a loop, logical errors or the analysis is so complex that can not be handled by a cognition centre then this is a problem.

A solution would arrive at understanding this problem appropriately by de-interleaving, indexing, collating, grouping and assigning different values and priorities to thought strings to seek more dominant trends. Such trends are then concentrated and processed by evaluating them and employing a process of filtration. This thought process is a reflection of the consciousness.

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¹ "Wonder is very much the affection of a philosopher; for there is no other beginning of philosophy than this."-Plato

² https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=philosophy&ref=searchbar_searchhint

2. The Consciousness

Philosophical problems are more complex than empirical problems as they are solved through an insight into the workings of the language. The article described above states, “The hard problem of consciousness asks why any physical state creates conscious mental states at all”. This statement contains an assumption that a conscious mental state is dependent on a physical state. It may be an observation but it can not be a conclusion.

Predicting the exact nature of consciousness is a challenging task. Even the ancient scriptures do not give a very clear understanding of exact nature except for the words such as Light, Purity, Love, Peace, Bliss, Shunya/ Mahashunya, and Kaivalya (the reality of the transcendental self). In Jnana Yoga and Advaita Vedanta, consciousness is also referred to as Neti-Neti. It is a Sanskrit expression which means "not this, not this", or "neither this nor that" (Neti is sandhi from Na Iti "not so"). Thus, Neti-Neti is the negation of something to get at the esoteric understanding of “nothingness” in terms of physical attributes but in today’s sense the best word that can describe it is the ‘Software’.

Consciousness is also revealed by the mathematics hidden in the design of the Cosmos. This way it is beyond the dimensions of space and time and therefore a non-material or abstract dimension of its own. Consciousness is also represented by free will. Consciousness may be defined as a fact of self-awareness and also as intelligence or sentience with the ability to control itself and its surroundings. Consciousness is the ultimate reality that creates. The interpreter and the interpreted are the two exponents of the same consciousness. The interpreter is with free will and interpreted with the inherent design mathematics.

Consciousness has thinking capability and this supreme consciousness which is termed Poorna (complete, infinite) has a uniqueness of existence beyond the known dimensions (Parbrahama), Nirguna (without attributes) Alakshya (unattainable, unknowable) through the normal existence and Parmatma (Supreme self). This consciousness is an extremely superior super set of human consciousness yet both may have some common attributes and capabilities and by extrapolating such attributes we can conjecture about the attributes of the Supreme being. One of the main attributes of consciousness is the thinking process which could be usually divided into two broad categories of Sat and Asat.

Sat means what is feasible, lasting, sustainable, possible of existence, logical, true etc and it is the root of reality. Asat is imaginary, infeasible, and incapable of logical and mathematical evaluation. Asat disappears after reiterative cycles of refinement of thought. If it is persisting and put into action then it is incoherent, unfeasible, nonrhythmic and not in conformity with reality. Asat can not exist in reality and therefore, it mostly retains its existence in the thought realm. The thought realm of the universal mind is beyond the effect of relative time. It is beyond the material cosmos. Absolute time is still applicable here to ascertain the sequence of thoughts and decisions. The time in causality can differentiate one process leading to another, This time is completely unrelated to cosmic time. The Nāsadiya Sūkta, also known as the Hymn of Creation, is the 129th hymn of the 10th mandala of the Rigveda.

**नासदासीन नो सदासीत तदानीं नासीद रजो नो वयोमापरो यत ।
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्मभः किमासीद गहनं गरीरम ॥**

At that time, there was no Asat or Sat, there was no realm of time, no space. What was it covered with, and where? what gave shelter? Were the unfathomed waters there?

Only the Sat has the capability of existing in a physical sense and all Bhuta (existence), Dravyas (fluids, analogue energy), Tattvas (things or non-intelligent beings), and Padartha (manifested stanzas). The quality of a soul (cognition centre) is to differentiate and choose Sat for its information processing. The consciousness is the essence behind the thought and it is explained by Samkhya.

चित्रं यथाश्रयमृतस्थाण्वादिभ्यो विना यथा छाया । तद्वद्विना विशिष्टैर्न तिष्ठति निराश्रयं लिङ्गम् ॥ ४१ ॥

As painting cannot exist without support, as shadow cannot be formed without space similarly without support especially the Lingam (subtle body or soul) cannot exist.

The subtle body or the cognition centre contains three thought organs of the Identity forming complex, intellect and mind. These are supported by consciousness as they can not sustain otherwise. In this, the Identity complex is the chief thought organ of an interpreter which is illuminated by consciousness.

The human cognition centre contains higher algorithms for receiving knowledge through cosmic language. The consciousness may not be understood or experienced immediately but being in the state of alternative consciousness it is more likely to be attained by an individual. It is beyond the limits of science, space or time or reach of the artificial intelligence or supercomputers. The experience may not allow one to give a clear description due to limitations imposed by human language.

3. Why is there something rather than nothing?

The second fundamental problem of philosophy is why there is anything at all rather than nothing. Nothing is the absence of manifestation and this term has been used here to indicate simply the absence of anything that we are familiar with and thereby indicating the presence of a completely different and unsensed, unmanifested, in-interpretable realm. Shunya and Mahashunya (absolute 0) also indicate the absence of even the most subtle energy. This understanding of nothing is recognised in Hinduism as “Brahman” (universal mind) and in Buddhism as “emptiness”. Everything has a beginning and Brahman lies at the root of the beginning. This realm of spirituality is the potentiality and root cause of the entire effort of springing up the Cosmos.

ॐ असम्भवस्तु सतोऽनुपपत्तौ ॐ ॥ २.३.९ ॥ The Sat does not originate from impossible. The existence springs from the consciousness and that too which has a possibility of existence. The physicist Lee Smolin has calculated that the odds of life-compatible numbers coming up by

chance is 1 in 10^{229} . This figure indicates the effort, perseverance, sustained intent and dexterity of the consciousness in creating Sat from its own hallucinating thought process.

Every plan of action has an aim and everything in the plan revolves around the aim. Aimless life fritters away, aimless design doesn't get appreciated. Nothing fruitful comes without the aim. The aim is thought upon by the mind which houses free will. This free will takes shape inside the matrix of the brain where unlimited thoughts flash through neurons and thought processing leads to a meaningful outcome. The universe is also like a giant neural network³ in which various stars and galaxies interact with each other. Scientists have found just overwhelming evidence of this fact. That's how this statement is a fact and not a conjecture. One can also draw an analogy to a super-intelligent computer program or Artificial Intelligence that is self-aware and capable of controlling itself and the environment.

इत्येषः प्रकृतिकृतो महदादिविशेषतु तपर्यन्तः । प्रतिपुरुषविमोक्षार्थं स्वार्थं इव परार्थं आरम्भः ॥ ५६ ॥

This evolution from Mahat to the specific elements is created by Prakṛati. The beginning is the emancipation of each Spirit and though it appears as if it is for her own interest, it is for another's sake. There is nothingness in terms of space too, we can not sense that unformatted space as it exists beyond the boundaries of our cosmos. The space in which the cosmos exists is formatted space (by energy).

4. The Ship of Theseus

The article enumerates this problem as one which dates back at least to the time of Plutarch (1st century) and addresses questions of identity.

The Athenians decided to maintain an ancient galley used by King Theseus after he escaped the labyrinth with the youth of Athens. As the parts on the ship break down, they are replaced, one at a time. At what point does the vessel stop being the ship of Theseus and start being another ship? A later twist asks what happens if the old parts are saved and later used to make yet another ship. Which one is the real ship of Theseus?

The identity of a ship is linked to its characteristics such as shape, colour, capability and functions. If any of the majority attributes are altered in space and time, the assigned identity may remain the same or it may be suffixed by words such as modified or renovated. Any part of the ship has its own identity which is associated with the identity of the ship. When it gets removed from the ship to a place and time where the association breaks down, it assumes its own existence and can be used for any purpose.

This is an apt analogy for the problem of the identity of Jeeva (individual self) and Brahman (universal mind). At what time Jeeva assimilates itself in Brahman and loses its own identity? Similarly when a river enters the at what time it loses its identity and becomes the sea. One may

³ The Universe is like giant human brain: Scientists find <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/universe-brain-shape-cosmic-web-galaxies-neurons-b1724170.html>

argue that there may be a geometrical coastline that can be extended or when the water of the river acquires the same salinity as that of the sea, all these considerations produce a different demarcation. The change is subtle and not clearly demarcated. There may be situations during such transformations that it is either both or neither this nor that but a unique in-between transformational existence.

5. The demarcation problem

The article lists the fourth problem as to how to distinguish science from non-science. The question often finds its way into court cases. Defining what counts as science, philosophy, or any other meaningful field of study and what counts as nonsense.

The word science⁴ originated from the Latin word *Scientia* which means knowledge, knowing, expertness, from *sciens* (genitive *scientis*) "intelligent, skilled," present participle of *scire* "to know." The word has roots in the word 'scene' and is a notion similar *Darshna* (a view, a perspective). The one who has a perspective is a 'Scient' and God who has a perspective of everything is omniscient.

In the real sense of the word root, the *scient* is *Drsta*. This knowledge comes when one's mind is in union with the universal mind and it is called direct or immediate knowledge. It leased two kinds of perception direct and indirect. The Jainas classify knowledge into immediate (*Aparoksa*) and mediate (*Paroksa- proximate*). Immediate knowledge is further divided into *Avadhi*, *Manahparyaa* and *Kevala* and mediate knowledge into *Mati* and *Shruta*. Perceptual knowledge is regarded as mediate since it presupposes the activity of thought. *Mati* includes both perceptual and inferential knowledge. *Shruta* means knowledge revealed by an authority. Thus *Mati* and *Shruta* which are the two kinds of mediate knowledge have as their instruments perception, inference and authority.

The word science is used in a sense opposite of its meaning. It only contains *Mati* or mediate or indirect knowledge derived by experiments, instruments and mathematical derivations. As per the article, Thomas Kuhn argued that science is defined by "paradigms" within which scientists work and implicitly agree on. Anything that fits inside the paradigm is "science," and that which is outside it is not. These paradigms too sometimes lack clear definitions.

As an empirical science, it has limits to which it can observe experiment and demonstrate. Sometimes, it can explain how but not why. Science cannot unravel all the mysteries. It is therefore not the ultimate tool to solve all the problems of the world. Science also employs axioms and presuppositions in mathematics (introduced by *mathesis*). Its theories become a projection of skewed mathematics that employs presuppositions. Ronald W. Dworkin⁵ mentions in his article "The Limits of Science" the following views:

⁴ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/science>

⁵ <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-limits-of-science>

There are flaws in the scientific method. These flaws rarely show up in hard science. the scientific method involves forming a hypothesis, testing it through experimentation, and then analyzing the results to verify or disprove the hypothesis. All this seems clear and benign, but problems lurk just below the surface. The method requires some assumptions that inherently limit how true the results can be.

“First, the scientific method is one of intentional ignorance. To understand complex phenomena, the method demands that investigators focus on certain chosen details, isolate them, and leave out all the rest. Thus, willfully or unconsciously, investigators artificially limit themselves and reach conclusions by looking at only a small portion of the facts.

Second, in isolating such details, and supposing such isolation to be accurate, investigators suppose what is false. Because investigators do not work with all the facts, their conclusions about complex phenomena are also false. At best, a conclusion may apply under the narrowest conditions.

And third, the scientific method encourages investigators to transcend individual details that can be seen or felt and to substitute generalisations that are convenient for thought but nothing more than phantoms. Investigators credit these phantoms with real existence.

The limits of this method are quickly understood in practice. The closer we get to the subject and the more the scientific method breaks down.

Newton had warned others not to take the method too far. "To explain all nature is too difficult a task for any one man or any one age. 'Tis much better to do a little with certainty," he wrote. But his advice was forgotten, as the allure of science and its authority proved irresistible in many disciplines not well-suited for it.

Obsession with science doing more harm than good. Our society's obsession with a certain idea of science has resulted in the popular prejudice that the scientific method is the mark of a thinking person and that those who question its conclusions are "anti-science" or "deniers" of science.”

When Albert Einstein published the theory of special relativity in 1905 and subsequently of general relativity in 1916. He assumed that space is isotropic (it has the same properties in all directions), and that space and time are both homogeneous (all points in space and time are equivalent). These theoretical extensions of symmetry to space and time were necessary to assert the constancy of light propagation in opposite directions, and to “derive” his Lorentz transformation equations. Einstein also assumed that ether was superfluous to his Special Theory and that all motions are relative. Such assumptions made the problem fit into the available method or solution. Therefore, the results were true only if the condition of isotropism and homogeneity existed.

In his article “God Our Contemporary” J.B. Phillips⁶ mentions, “We have already reached the point where the discoveries of science can "greatly bless or wholly destroy." But how the knowledge is used cannot be decided by scientific means. The majority of scientific men are without doubt kindly and humane people, but it is not their science which gives them their kindness or their humanity, nor can any branch of science assess what is "good" or "right" or "human." Science itself is incapable of making moral judgements and it is not too wild a step of the imagination to think of a situation where scientific knowledge is valued more highly than human lives.”

6. Conclusion

Philosophy paves the way for theories and theories combined with mathematics and/or experimental proof pave the way for science. The human mind carries out interactions with nature to understand and evolve. These interactions take place not only through the human sense organs or scientifically extended sensors but also through human perception. Human perception contains higher algorithms for receiving knowledge through cosmic language. The consciousness may not be understood or experienced immediately but being in the state of alternative consciousness it is more likely to be attained by an individual. It is beyond the limits of science, space or time or reach of the artificial intelligence or supercomputers. The experience may not allow one to give a clear description due to limitations imposed by human language. The problem of identity is that of association, as long as the associations last they create multiple impressions. The demarcation problem of science is relatively simple as it only includes mediate knowledge.

⁶ <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-5-the-limitations-of-science/>