

SCIENCE, LIFE AND MIND

Bertrand Wong, Eurotech, S'pore Branch

Email: bwong8@singnet.com.sg

Abstract

This paper raises some important points about science, life and mind.

What is truth? We are always concerned about truth. To many it is just knowledge or facts. For example, the rotation of earth round the sun is a fact. How do we know? The textbooks say so. Have we witnessed earth's rotation round the sun with our own eyes? No. Some might have seen photographs of earth juxtaposed against the sun. Couldn't these photographs be faked? And so on and on. We only take this fact to be true for granted. In fact, many things should not be regarded as truths for the simple reason that we have not physically witnessed them. Of course what we have physically witnessed we would be certain of their truths. Truth is a matter of judgement, intuition, interpretation and is not absolute. Different people might see or witness the same thing but their interpretations of it might vary. In the same sense, science tends to be the result of varying interpretations resulting in differing theories on a similar subject. For the so-called acceptable truth from all this, some consensus on the differing theories is necessary. This indicates that truth is subjective and not really solid. It is basically an interpretation of what has been observed; interpretations do vary from person to person.

What is morally right or morally wrong? Isn't morals based on personal values such as kindness, fairness and honesty, which vary from person to person? This is another subjective, controversial area. We kill animals for food and even for fun as in big game hunting, kill insects like mosquitos and cockroaches as they are pests to us. All this is acceptable to us. But when someone kills another person whom he regards as a pest (or eats him up as food after killing him) he is labeled an immoral murderer, a criminal. Isn't this double standards and prejudice towards other forms of life?

Is intelligent life only limited to earth? Is there intelligent life in other planets or universes? So far no intelligent life has been found outside earth. There is no sign of intelligent life out there in outer space; we cannot see any (though there have been reports of UFO sightings and alien contacts, unsubstantiated they may be). There may be intelligent life out there but we may not be able to see them. Intelligent life out there may be so different in form from us that we can't recognise them. Many believe in a consciousness independent of the body or matter, as is in the controversial case of spirits or ghosts which are generally invisible. Some forms of matter such as air and vapours are invisible; quantum particles which apparently have a life of their own are invisible to the human eye; bacteria and viruses, which are life-forms, are also invisible. Must intelligent life in outer space have visibility?

Copyright © Bertrand Wong, 2015

Consciousness may even be possessed by plants (experiments had shown that plants do respond to stimuli); the problem is that plants are not able to communicate with humans so that if they have consciousness it will not be evident.

Is nature and life the creation of a supremely powerful God? This is a controversial topic. There are believers in God, that is, theists, and non-believers, the atheists. There are also those sitting on the fence regarding this matter who may be called free-thinkers. Many, probably most theists, believe in a God who is benevolent. No one has any claim to having physically witnessed God though many have great faith and trust in Him and His benevolence. On the other hand, there may be flesh and bone fellow-men who have evident goodness and kindness but may have difficulty winning the trust and confidence of their fellow-men. This is an anomaly. Any idea how to explain this anomaly?

What is logic or reason? Isn't it the explanation for or cause and effect of something that happens? This is also a controversial subject and is another problematic area which appears to be the most contentious of all human problems with often serious outcomes such as conflicts and wars, manifesting the imperfection of logic, reason, character or the intellect. In reasoning, we arrive at conclusions with premisses or facts, finding the links among them. It is thought that the more intelligent a person is the more capable he is of reasoning. In mathematics, for example, which is regarded as an exact science where logic or reasoning is concerned, there is a need to convince others that a mathematical statement is true or valid by utilising other proven statements (lemmas) or evident assumptions (axioms) in the reasoning process which may run to hundreds of pages. The reasoning and explanation has to be watertight in order for the statement to be accepted as a theorem, a proven fact. The whole reasoning process or proof (as it is called in mathematical terms) must make the truth or validity of the mathematical statement evident or obvious to everyone, that is, the explanation has to be clear and convincing, leaving no room for doubt or uncertainty. Such a laborious way to achieve certainty for a mathematical statement which may just require one sentence to describe reflects the limitation of the human intellect, that is, the human brain is inefficient. A super-intelligent alien race may grasp the truth or validity of a mathematical statement (or any other statements) right away without the need of reasoning or proof perhaps due to a superlative intuition, not forgetting that logic or reasoning itself depends on intuition, the feeling of correctness, of certainty. The following example should make this point clear. Very intelligent students pick up things very quickly without the need of the teacher explaining much. For the dull students the teacher has to go more slowly, explain many times, use many examples or analogies, and yet these students may not understand the teacher.

The above are important points for deeper contemplation and greater enlightenment.

REFERENCES

- [1] The Fabric Of Reality, Penguin Books, David Deutsch, 1997
- [2] The Elegant Universe, Vintage Books, Brian Green, 2000
- [3] Logic: Its Proper Use [How To Think Logically] Volume 1 & Volume 2, www.Amazon.com, Kerwin Mathew, 2012