
In Search of The Meaning of Meaning

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Abstract

There is no reason to think that mankind has already explored all the mysteries of nature. One such mystery is the dichotomy between mind and matter. It is argued that science should take terms like goals, intentions and meaning more seriously, because it could turn out that these concepts play a more crucial role within the grand scheme of things than science has thought of until now.

By asking where goals, intentions and meaning have their natural places in physics and cosmology, modern science confronts itself with an epoch-making question. Without quoting a plethora of historical books that heavily argue about this question, one can surely label it as a hard problem of science.

The hardness of the problem is, that to be sure that the answer suffices scientific standards, it has to be as objective as possible, means, independent from the subject which gives the answer and last, but not least, maximally formalizable. But goals, intentions and meaning are explicitly terms which describe a subjective world; they cannot easily be made totally independent from any subject and are surely not per se formalizable. Therefore, the terms goal, intention and meaning simply make no sense if every subject is eliminated from these terms. It would be like talking about thoughts and at the same time claiming that there is no need for a thinker of them.

As a result, it seems to be impossible to talk about goals, intentions and meaning without some kind of reference to humans' experience, especially when one aims to derive an objective answer to the mentioned hard question, and this aim obviously turns out to be a goal-oriented behaviour of human creatures.

Eliminating the subjective dimension from which goals, intentions and meaning take form cannot be the answer to the hard problem, unless one also does eliminate the objective existence of goals and intentions from this universe altogether. Nonetheless, attempts to do the latter have gained some popularity over the last two decades. For example the decade of the brain gave rise to assumptions that brain activity leaves no room for something like free will. Some researchers have advoca-

ted for the entire mental inner life of living creatures exclusively only following a strictly deterministic evolution that leaves no room for the subject to change the course of events in any way. If the latter would be true, this would be a challenge to Darwinian evolution, because consciousness would have no causal efficiency within the material world and would be condemned to only observe it – and ironically at the same time would be forced to think it willingly can act upon it. Consciousness would simply be superfluous in this picture and science with it, both would be no more than a cosmic aberration. Moreover, the whole concept of Darwinian evolution would be a misinterpretation, because natural selection wouldn't be based anymore on chance, but must be considered as a precise clockwork that necessarily had to happen only the way it did happen – in very detail.

How can science then objectively determine some goals and intentions at all in the universe, goals that make no reference to humans and therefore can be termed as totally independent from living creatures' goals and intentions to ensure maximal scientific objectivity? As we already have seen above, one way is to *eliminate* this puzzling problem by eliminating the subject from science and also by denying that subjects do exist other than as observers without any free will. If this scenario meets reality, the author of this essay cannot claim to have found this logical possibility all by himself via carefully obeying the rules of logics, but this thought was inevitably brought to him by the physics of a strictly deterministic universe just at the time and place he wrote these lines.

The elimination of the hard problem by eliminating the causal efficiency of human goals and intentions indeed suffices the demand of being independent from a living creatures' experiences of how goals and intentions should have to be defined 'meaningfully'. Firstly, there was the 'aim' of the author to solve the puzzle; secondly there was the 'insight' that it is logically possible to do so by eliminating the problematic parts of it (the causal efficiency for 'goals' and 'intentions'). The result is a possible truth about the world and living creatures, namely that there is a correlation between the thinker's 'aim' to find a logical solution and the fact that he has 'found' such a consistent solution. The disturbing part is not that he has found a consistent solution, but that the solution seems to reveal that the meaningful correlation

does not include what the author thinks to be his 'self'. This 'self' has been totally eliminated from the equation, but nonetheless the result has 'meaning' and makes 'sense' on a logical basis. To whom does it make sense? The answer is, to the 'observer'. An observer must then be defined as merely a kind of display where the results of some data processing do regularly appear on. The 'meaning' that is carried to this display about the circumstances that the resulting data should *at all* appear on such a display lies in the reinterpretation of the word 'meaning'. The latter doesn't anymore refer to a subject, but to an object which happened to be only accidentally conscious. Consciousness then would be not needed in the grander scheme of things and therefore should be defined as superfluous.

From this point of view, we can see two things more clearly. Firstly, consciousness *aims* to be *not* merely a cosmic accident but has an inner desire to be the intentional result of a meaningful process. Secondly, this meaningful process is traditionally attributed to have its roots within a greater consciousness (god) that should have the power to bring such a process at all into existence. If there are goals and intentions in the universe that are independent of living creatures, then only another, more potent conscious agent can be the author of these goals. Like mother and father wanted her child to exist, the child's consciousness per se wants to be a meaningful process within a bigger meaningful process, provided by the parents' existence and inner mental world. The author thinks that this does attribute more or less to all living creatures, besides the fact that some kinds of atheism deny it. These kinds of atheism try to deny free will and with it subjective goals and intentions. If the proponents of such an atheism are right, the consequence should be to no more award Nobel prizes, because then there simply would be no subject that deserves to be honoured for any discovery, not even for 'displaying' it to a wider audience. Because even the latter would then no more be within the causal powers of this subject, this subject simply would have no causal powers. Until now, the author hasn't heard of any scientists which are atheists, deny free will and are willing to forego the Nobel prize according to their scientific beliefs (but maybe he/she cannot other than he/she does?). The author takes this as an indicator that behind some sophisticated argumentations against free will, the latter has very effective causal powers.

We should remember that it was the living subject who eliminated itself from the equation by claiming that the whole universe cannot be something more than a huge mathematical equation, evolving only in a strictly deterministic fashion. If one drops this assumption, then the hard problem of how mindless mathematical laws can give rise to aims and intentions presents itself from a new perspective.

The new perspective is that it could well be possible that nature is simply not fully formalizable and our extrapolations from our insights into the formalizability of parts

of it towards the whole are unjustified. By equating objectivity with mathematical formalizability, it is no wonder that science at one point tends to eliminate the very actor of science, namely the scientist including his goals and intentions. But nowhere in nature there is a guarantee that nature has to be completely formalizable. Nonetheless, science, in many ways, acts as if the opposite is guaranteed by some universal law.

The question arises in which sense nature should not be fully formalizable. Firstly, there is the possibility that we haven't taken into account all possible parameters and therefore wrongly assume to know all governing laws, even those of in-principle unobservable events. Maybe there exists a set of additional influences that only come into play for such unobservable events. By 'unobservable' we mean that the material world which isn't alive lacks some kind of immaterial influence across its own domain, but immaterial influences could well be induced from outside the material domain onto arbitrary parts of it. Not due to a physical law, nor due to an algorithm, but due to a category of influences that best can be termed as 'intentionality'. Instead of physical forces of the same kind which interact by exchanging some basic stimuli, the stimuli of 'intentionality' could only act in one way, namely towards the material world, and could well act upon different physical forces at the same time. This force of 'intentionality' must be thought of as not being able to receive a physical back-reaction from the material world. Similar to a human's leg that makes a step forwards, the myriads of physical forces which are engaged in the details of performing this act do not individually react back to the force of 'intentionality' and alter this intentionality (for example to step back again or to suddenly jump). The author thinks that it cannot be excluded that physical systems and subsystems are able to react to non-physical influences, depending of course on how these systems and subsystems came into being, via the traditionally proclaimed physical mechanisms or via 'supernatural' processes. Unfortunately such considerations are almost impossible to experimentally test. If there are violations of energy conservation, how could one prove this in the context of parts of a human brain without disturbing the contents of consciousness in this moment? Moreover, maybe energy conservation is guaranteed even under the assumption of non-physical forces, the latter rendering the energy balance in all cases well-adjusted. Therefore, it would be necessary that different microscopic constellations should correlate with the same effective behaviour of the 'display' we mentioned earlier. Causation in this picture wouldn't be anymore a one-to-one relation, but a one-to-many relation, whereby the 'many'-parts are all isomorphic to each other. This would not automatically mean that these parts are exclusively only describable as mathematically isomorphic structures, but only that they are exchangeable without altering the result on the display. The picture described here implies that the physical universe as a whole is an open system and that

conscious beings are too. Both are open to a dimensional realm beyond what is perceived by us as space and time.

Another argument against the complete formalizability of all that exists is that even some simple mathematical systems like first-order arithmetics cannot reliably decide between a necessity and a possibility. For Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorems to be true, it is necessary that one assumes this system to be consistent, but incomplete. An inconsistent system could prove everything, even the statements of which Gödel could prove that they are not provable within the mentioned system. So one has to conclude that relatively simple mathematical systems, although they are consistent, must remain incomplete. The mathematical system itself cannot offer this very conclusion, the latter simply isn't clearly formalizable within it. Nowhere we can find a formalization within the system that such a system does explicitly assign itself the necessity to be consistent, but incomplete. It is only implicit in the system due to what it is able and unable to deliver. For this to determine, it needs some kind of intentionality which aims to test the possibilities of the system.

In the same sense the author assumes that our hitherto gained insights into the laws of nature are essentially incomplete. They have been tested excessively but couldn't deliver a coherent understanding of how goals and intentions can exist in a mindless physical universe. For the author, relying further on the power of mathematics to understand the factual existence of goals and intentions is only reliable insofar that mathematics implicitly says that it never will succeed to formalize all that exists. To the contrary, it would be more meaningful to the author to abandon the classical idea that all there is must necessarily speak the language of mathematics. Gödel's results are a broad hint that meaning cannot only be found in mathematics' beauty, but also within mathematics' limits and beyond. Even here, the language of mathematics speaks to us, and the message is that there is more to existence than mathematical structures ever can deliver, not even an infinite tower of axiomatic turtles can do this.

There is another argument against the total formalizability of nature. Although quantum mechanics has formalized the microscopic world so that scientists can in many cases predict the long-term behaviour of some macroscopical subsystems, at shorter scales and with less particles involved, individual particle behaviour cannot anymore be predicted for sure in all cases. This lack of prediction alone does not necessarily imply that individual particle behaviour in these cases is totally random and not governed by any 'instruction'. But until now, huge efforts to decipher the possible principles of such instructions have all more or less failed. The results of these efforts cannot be objectified enough to trigger general accordance about them.

A last broad hint that the physical universe is interwoven into a dimension beyond space and time is regularly

delivered to us by so called near-death experiences. Although at this field of research, until now here again no elements exist that inevitably could trigger a general accordance about the meaning of such experiences, nonetheless a careful study of them indicates that human brains are at least capable of showing some remarkable behaviour at a point in time where traditional science would assume them to totally malfunction, if at all functioning. One has to study not only the more prominent cases, but there are tons of reliable testimonies out there in the internet (especially on youtube) that seriously take into question the causal closeness of our hitherto known universe. Especially those by whom a near-death experience correlates with a healing and this healing correlated with some information about the forthcoming healing given to the subject during the experience. There also exist many reports from people which saw themselves and things in their physical surroundings during the event, although the event excluded the possibility for them to see these things at all with their physical eyes. Nonetheless, those reports have been verified by several witnesses, and the author thinks that it is unlikely that all these witnesses have lied or have been somewhat confused when interviewed.

The results of this essay are that goals and intentions, as they are traditionally understood by us humans, cannot be reduced to merely mathematical patterns or mere fictions without reinterpreting them from what was originally meant by these terms. If the proponents of a strictly deterministically working universe should be right (they aren't), then from time to time this kind of evolving universe can display some truths about itself on some screens called consciousness. These truths would then reveal to those displays what is the true meaning of human goal-orientation and intentions. The displays then can claim that what has traditionally been connected with free will – namely human goal-orientation and the causal efficiency of it – turns out to be a misinterpretation of what is really going on. This would be similar to say that there is meaning and an observer who recognizes it, but for meaning to exist objectively, there is no need for any recognition of it. We can easily see that this is an a posteriori fallacy, because a world without consciousness is imaginable and it is hard to imagine that there exists *objective* meaning about what this physical universe truly means in itself without some consciousness. A world without consciousness is only imaginable because every imagination *needs a consciousness* to exist. A thinker in the historical era of the Babylonians would have imagined the meaning of his universe without consciousness totally different than we do. Obviously 'meaning' depends on and changes with *knowledge* about the world (and/or what we *assume* to know!). Therefore, meaning, knowledge and consciousness are intimately interwoven. If there is goal-oriented behaviour in the universe independent from all the pettiness of living creatures, this behaviour should have its roots in a more knowing and more potent conscious agent than we are and least of all in a dead universe.