The Philosophy Café.

Introduction to Philosophy Café FOR 2022.

Is there a Philosophy of Everything?

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Hosted by

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INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

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"Everything begins with a thought, and thoughts are turned into plans, and plans into reality."

Marshall Sylver. American motivational speaker, author, and performance hypnotist who works primarily in Las Vegas, Nevada.

INTRODUCTION

I was brought to this topic with a purchase of David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (2021). For David Graeber, it was everything. He died just after the book was written. I was intrigued by this reference to "everything". Nevertheless, from the index list of topics and themes and thumbing through the large tome, it was obvious that "everything" was not the authors' intentions, nor is it mine. The attempt to describe the anthropological dawn of everything was really, as it was told in the first chapter, a harsh critique of both Rousseau-based (Left) Hobbes-based (Right) philosophies.

Fair enough but can anthropology which is examining the origins of humanity and the sociology of the City, in prehistory and ancient times, can get to the seventeenth century philosophy. I think not. One discipline alone is not enough for "everything", including the discipline of 'philosophy'. This introduction hopes to explain why.

There are no philosophy tomes or reasonably-informed paperbacks, I know, with the title "everything" included on the cover. However, there are quite a few other books, and here are some examples:

The Beginning of Everything (Robyn Schneider)

But God: Changes Everything (Herbert Cooper)

The End of Everything (Megan Abbott)

Everything All at Once (Bill Nye)

Everything and Nothing (David Moody)

Everything for a Dog (Ann M. Martin)

Everything Here is Beautiful (Mira T. Lee)

The Prayer That Changes Everything; The Hidden Power of Praising God (Stormie Omartian)

Everything I Never Told You (Celeste Ng)

Everything is Awful and Other Observations (Matt Bellassai)

Everything is Going to Kill Everybody: The Terrifying Real Ways The World Wants You Dead (Robert Brockway)

Everything is Illuminated (Safran Foer)

The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon (Brad Stone)

Everything We Keep (Kerry Lonsdale)

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Zombies (Matt Mogk)

Everything, Everything (Nicola Yoon)

Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything (Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner)

The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud, An American Legend (Bob Drury and Tom Clavin)

Hello, Goodbye, and Everything in Between (Jennifer E. Smith)

How to Cook Everything: 2,000 Simple Recipes for Great Food (Mark Bittman)

How to Ruin Everything: Essays (George Watsky)

Jesus + Nothing = Everything (Tullian Tchividjian)

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong (James W. Loewen)

Life, the Universe and Everything (Douglas Adams)

A Little Bit of Everything for Dummies (anonymous)

The Man Who Ate Everything (Jeffrey Steingarten)

The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary (Simon Winchester)

Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything (Joshua Foer)

My Jesus…is Everything! (Anne Graham Lotz)

The Power of Simple Prayer: How to Talk with God About Everything (Joyce Meyer)

The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe (Stephen W. Hawking)

When Dinosaurs Came With Everything (Elise Broach)

That is only one-page search results, and I skipped the titles which stated, “nearly everything” since that changes the semantics on everything, ‘completely.’

What does this voluminous, potentially-continuing, book list tells us? Tongue firmly set in cheek; it is not to purchase a book with “everything” in the title. Not quite. A number of books are, in fact, satirically in declaring “everything.” Philosophically, though, the point to make is that the titles indicate contextualism. The subject of the book is ‘everything’ in a specific context. Contextualism is a family of views in philosophy which emphasize the context in which an action, utterance, or expression occurs. Contextual philosophers identified are

Michael Blome-Tillmann, Michael Williams, Stewart Cohen, Keith DeRose, David Lewis, Gail Stine, and George Mattey. The field in application is epistemology.

PRINCIPLES

Context is one philosophical principle which tells us why the common and popular linguistic turn to "everything" is not what a person is thinking it is (if they do).

So, here are a list of philosophical principles for discussion in relation to 'everything':

Axioms and Axiomatic system

There are mathematic axioms which are not used in the same way as epistemology. It is still worth noting since the Zermelo–Fraenkel axioms has to do with set theory and theory of sets free of paradox. Epistemology approaches paradox in non-mathematic language, and often allows the paradox to stand. But for the record, Zermelo–Fraenkel axioms (one of these axioms will be mentioned further on):

- Axiom of extensionality
- Axiom of empty set
- Axiom of pairing
- Axiom of union
- Axiom of infinity
- Axiom schema of replacement
- Axiom of power set
- Axiom of regularity
- Axiom schema of specification

In epistemology, axioms are self-evidence (self-evident propositions), not mathematic formulation, and here we can state axioms of self-evidence. This can be done in two ways, informal speech, or analytic propositions. Examples of informal speech are often moral propositions, and here is an example of the example:

Alexander Hamilton cited the following moral propositions as self-evident in the Federalist No. 23:

- The means ought to be proportioned to the end.
- Every power ought to be commensurate with its object.
- There ought to be no limitation of a power destined to effect a purpose which is itself incapable of limitation.

The Is–Ought problem described by David Hume is what makes these informal speech statements problematic in the same way that book titles of 'everything' are not 'everything'. Hume's Is–Ought is an example of an analytic proposition. Time does not allow for research to produce an extensive, if not a complete ("Everything"), list of analytic propositions. A few examples might be sufficient.

Kant

Conceptual containment:

- analytic proposition: a proposition whose predicate concept is contained in its subject concept
- synthetic proposition: a proposition whose predicate concept is not contained in its subject concept but related
- a priori proposition: a proposition whose justification does not rely upon experience. Moreover, the proposition can be validated by experience, but is not grounded in experience. Therefore, it is logically necessary.
- a posteriori proposition: a proposition whose justification does rely upon experience. The proposition is validated by, and grounded in, experience. Therefore, it is logically contingent.

Logical Positivist Reworking of Kant (from Frege):

- analytic proposition: a proposition whose truth depends solely on the meaning of its terms
- analytic proposition: a proposition that is true (or false) by definition
- analytic proposition: a proposition that is made true (or false) solely by the conventions of language
- synthetic proposition: a proposition that is not analytic

- Two-dimensionalism (Robert Stalnaker): determine the sense and reference of a word and the truth-value of a sentence, e.g., "Water is H2O"
- Internal and External Questions (Rudolf Carnap): questions posed outside any framework – posed before the adoption of any framework as opposed to questions which logical (or analytic, or logically true) and factual (empirical) are interpreted using terms from a framework.

Willard Van Orman Quine Rejection of the Analytic–Synthetic Distinction ("Two Dogmas of Empiricism")

There are no 'analytic' truths, but all truths involve an empirical aspect.

The distinction being:

- analytic propositions – propositions grounded in meanings, independent of matters of fact.
- synthetic propositions – propositions grounded in fact.

There is no non-circular (and so no tenable) way to ground the notion of analytic propositions, so the distinction does not hold.

What Quine said was "That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith." Thus, it is a problem in the scientific belief for a 'theory of everything.' It is a problem of and for empiricism. And it is really an argument for scientific instrumentalism. It might be – and here are the technical debates which continued – that the distinction holds for metaphysicians. Grounding semantics ('meanings') is no longer a problem – in that it is rejected – for philosophers for whom epistemic foundationalism does not hold (at least on it own), and alternatives are used.

<u>Logical Consequences (Other)</u>

All of what has preceded involves rules of logical entailment or inference. There are other principles which 'ought to be' noted. A few general examples from the field of logic can be seen.

Deductive system

A deductive system refers to a formal system, but, first, *deduction*: inference in which the conclusion is of greater generality than the premises, as opposed to *induction*: inferences from particular cases to the general case. A deductive system, also called a deductive apparatus or a logic, consists of the axioms (or axiom schemata) and rules of inference that can be used to derive theorems of the system.

Rules of Inference

In the philosophy of logic, a rule of inference, inference rule or transformation rule is a logical form consisting of a function which takes premises, analyzes their syntax (‘anything having to do with formal languages or formal systems without regard to any interpretation or meaning given to them’), and returns a conclusion (or conclusions). For example, the rule of inference called *modus ponens* takes two premises, one in the form "If p then q" and another in the form "p", and returns the conclusion "q". The rule is valid with respect to the semantics of classical logic (as well as the semantics of many other non-classical logics), in the sense that if the premises are true (under an interpretation), then so is the conclusion.

Empirical Evidence

Here we are talking about what supports or counters an evident proposition, that is constituted by or accessible to sense experience or experimental procedure, such as science, but also fields of philosophy other than logic. The epistemological discussion is what justifies belief(s).

THREE BASIC PRINCIPLES PROBLEMATIC TO ‘EVERYTHING’

There are three philosophical principles which simplify the problem of ‘everything’ that we are seeing in all that has preceded.

Principle of Non-Contradiction

In any conflict, fight, or war, there is an unwillingness to find a compromise. Aristotle's logic is mostly to blame, when Aristotle declare the principle as "It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect."

That might hold true, as in it is not possible that in exactly the same moment and place, it rains and doesn't rain. But is it always true?

Philosophers have been arguing since about the principle and the alleged impossibility of its proof or denial. One position has become more to the fore of late, although it has ancient roots – Dialetheism. Logician Graham Priest takes the view that *under some conditions*, some statements can be both true and false simultaneously, or may be true and false at different times. Dialetheism arises from formal logical paradoxes, such as the Liar's paradox and Russell's paradox.

Principle of Excluded Middle

The principle of excluded middle sounds similar to the principle of noncontradiction. They are similar but not the same. In the case of noncontradiction, it is 'either or.' The opposing dialetheism is a case of 'both.' In the principle of the excluded middle, it is still the case of 'either or' but the opposing principle is not 'both', but a third option. Discussion around this 'excluded middle' is mostly the discussion of formal logic. In formal setting, the necessity of excluding third options can be understood, which is why formality appears to be strict, rigid, and dogmatic. However, informal settings almost always break the rules. When someone says, 'either or', it is a fair bet that someone will respond with 'neither' and possibly inferring 'both and' or 'something else' or means 'neither' sufficiently.

Principle of Sufficient Reason

In modern/postmodern philosophy there gets to a point of resigning oneself to a fallible endpoint, that could either be extended infinitely or circle back upon itself. In these cases, the philosopher concludes on the principle of sufficient reason:

- For every entity x, if x exists, then there is a sufficient explanation for why x exists.

- For every event e, if e occurs, then there is a sufficient explanation for why e occurs.
- For every proposition p, if p is true, then there is a sufficient explanation for why p is true.

Gottfried Leibniz is taken as the *modern* originator, but the idea goes back to Anaximander, Parmenides, Archimedes, Plato and Aristotle, Cicero, Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas, and Spinoza.

Leibniz identified two kinds of truth, necessary and contingent truths, and stated that all truths are based upon two principles: (1) non-contradiction, and (2) sufficient reason. To quote 'The Monadology' (1714, translated by Robert Latta):

> "Our reasonings are grounded upon two great principles, that of contradiction, in virtue of which we judge false that which involves a contradiction, and true that which is opposed or contradictory to the false; And that of sufficient reason, in virtue of which we hold that there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, *unless there be a sufficient reason*, why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us (paragraphs 31 and 32; add emphasis)."

It then followed in another work, 'On Freedom' (1689, edited by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber), this statement which draws out the meaning of contingent truths which have to be taken as sufficient:

> "In contingent truths, even though the predicate is in the subject, this can never be demonstrated, nor can a proposition ever be reduced to an equality or to an identity, but the resolution proceeds to infinity, God alone seeing, not the end of the resolution, of course, which does not exist, but the connection of the terms or the containment of the predicate in the subject, since he sees whatever is in the series."

The inference here is a closed system on a universal level, a God's eye view which is the view from nowhere (John Searle), but if the context is contingent, there is an inference to an open system, one where change is possible, and it is very difficult to state the necessity. Thus, Leibniz used the principle of sufficient reason to refute the idea of absolute space.

In Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710, translated by E.M. Higgard) brings it together:

> "In consequence of this, the case also of Buridan's ass between two meadows, impelled equally towards both of them, is a fiction that cannot occur in the universe....For the universe cannot be halved by a plane drawn through the middle of the ass, which is cut vertically through its length, so that all is equal and alike on both sides.....Neither the parts of the universe nor the viscera of the animal are alike nor are they evenly placed on both sides of this vertical plane. There will therefore always be many things in the ass and outside the ass, although they be not apparent to us, which will determine him to go on one side rather than the other. And although man is free, and the ass is not, nevertheless for the same reason it must be true that in man likewise the case of a perfect equipoise between two courses is impossible"

CONCLUSION

Whether astronomically the universe is infinite or not, the epistemology holds from Gottfried Leibniz, and all else that has preceded, that we cannot talk about 'everything' in an infinite fashion. Context makes everything less than everything for the simple reason of sufficient reason. This, in turn, requires an acceptance of noncontradiction for a universal closed system (philosopher of religion Don Cupitt calls this 'Outsideless-ness'), and that for all open systems, continency and compromise.