

ABSOLUTE RELATIVISM

(oxymoron intended)

I love science, I love philosophy ... and I'm an atheist:

- For the first two, I dare include an aphorism:
"Philosophy without science is useless; science without philosophy is blind."
- For the third point, I dare include a statement (because faith is a crucial issue that impacts – and immediately pollutes – discussions):
"Having faith, and being non-believers, are a tautological fact: one believes because he/she believes; one doesn't believe because he/she doesn't believe."
If this is true, it follows that the concept of "Sacred" (with capital "S") is tautological as well. I defend instead the concept of "sacred" (with lowercase "s"), ...for which, however, you'll have to wait until the end of this text.

In any case, I consider it useless to discuss between atheists and believers (about faith, I mean). It's spoiled time.

Reasoning à la Popper, being useless to discuss it's been well verified, so far, on the field. It waits an equally experimental rebuttal, i.e. the factual proof of a discussion that ends positively, by changing the mind of some participant.

Let's come to science and philosophy. Besides the technical and technological sophistications of the former, the difference seems to be that science finds partial and temporary confirmations in its experiments (as long as it works, it's fine; when it doesn't work any longer, one has to re-think), while philosophy behaves differently, being divorced from experimentation, but anyway anchored somehow to logic (I can't say it any better, being an engineer and not a philosopher).

The trivial example is the ancient division of the world into four elements: earth, water, air and fire.

I guess that, at the time, you could place this division at the cornerstone between science and philosophy: on one side Archimedes, who plunges into the tub and makes science; on the other side Democritus, who imagines (these examples are "scientific" for us, but think of those times) that things could not be infinitely divisible.

A logical division of the elements into four fundamental types (at the time, somehow "verifiable"), in front of a logical reasoning about the non-infinite divisibility of things (no matter whether correct or not on a factual level, not verifiable at that time, ...but sensible).

If science is concerned with what can be sometime experimentally verified (it may take years, as for certain Einstein's theories, but that's not the point), philosophy is concerned – I think – with what we may refer to a kind of logical verification: there's no room, correctly, for what can be proved logically false (even if logic is subtle, so even here doubts abound...), but the remaining thoughts are somehow wild free.

To the misfortune of the reader, I also love complexity, of which I have a quite compact (philosophical) vision:

http://www.ybnd.eu/docs/Layman_complexity.pdf

I think that the universe generates ever new behavioral (chaos) and morphological / structural variety (proper complexity, life, thinking and consciousness included), and that the man – borrowing Adam from the Bible – has become such, from sheep he was, when his (curious!) feminine side prompted him to begin a long journey towards knowledge, instead of remaining as a puppet king in a place of joy, where he was forbidden, however, to eat apples.

If my (philosophical) vision of complexity is correct (it should be sensible, anyway), the man has a lot to run towards knowledge, since the horizon of new things (including those that humankind generates by itself) is continually expanding, just as the universe does.

Had I to dare, on the fly, a cosmological theory – insights are as such: relentless – a universe which "expands conceptually" (while it generates ever new variety) cannot avoid to expand

also physically, just to make room for the complexity that it creates (it's always philosophy...; when it becomes science, there will be someone with the cosmic yardstick who will go around with teleportation to make accurate measurements and careful tests. :-))

You should have understood that science, lately, makes me smile a bit:

- In the area of the infinitely small, they came up with N different string theories, unified later on (i.e. proven compatible, if I understand it correctly) by somebody who was awarded a Nobel Prize for that, although these strings have never been seen by anybody (just like the atoms of Democritus, but he called that ..."philosophy").
- In the area of the infinitely large, they "invented" dark matter and dark energy (taken together, they make up 96% of the universe, not a minor detail), so "dark" ...not to be detectable.

We are back to a situation similar to that of the ancient Greeks, with the four elements on the border between science and philosophy: today at the border there are strings ...and dark things.

In all this vagueness, there is a point of attack, ..."relatively absolute".

Each of us, in front of a whole which by definition is unknowable in its entirety, cares about the part (the small piece, actually) which he/she is able to grasp (either physically or mentally), identifies this part against the rest (if he/she intelligently realizes that there is something else, beyond what he/she cares about) and performs a detailed, progressive and endless action of subdivision and structuring.

A small child, at some point in its growth, realizes it is different from its mother. Then he/she begins to distinguish red from green, dogs from cats, his/her friends from his/her teachers, and so on. It's called "knowledge."

In this regard, the ability to add divisions (fine conceptualization) and/or widen the domain (novel concepts) is called "learning" (type 1, that of the school), while the ability to deeply reorganize the divisions, when patently insufficient or wrong, is still called "learning" (this time, type 2, the one real and important in life, at least for those who are lucky enough to live learning in an active way; for others, it remains the misfortune to suffer it in a passive way; for the former "life is the instrument with which to make experiments with truth"; for the latter, "life is what happens when you are making different plans").

The beauty, and the complication, of this point of attack – I mean the ability to represent and structure reality within our minds – lies in the fact that every concept is not "wrapped-up" within a closed, waterproof border, but in a "membrane" that allows and manages the osmosis of meanings to and from other concepts, and that the connections between different concepts are not trivial arcs of a graph, but much more complex, tree-like or fractal lattice-type, formations (after all, it seems difficult that having a brain with neurons equipped with just an axon, but also with many dendrites, might serve to build trivial graphs only, instead of "rich", ...membranous-fractal ones).

If when we talk, very often we do not understand each other, I think this is the real reason. We are prey to an absolute relativism.

Aligning two mental graphs is perhaps possible(?), but aligning two mental membranous-fractal graphs is beyond any possibility. ...even if, sometimes, different minds "resonate" (one of the finest magic one can experience...).

Wrapping all up in one word only, we make "models" of reality, the more "plastic" the better we are at learning.

Tragically complex in their fine structure.

In this context, religion and faith – how can I forget them? – come into play at the boundary of what we think we know.

There are two ways of facing the unknown:

- "Amor vacui" (love of the vacuum): as I didn't know so many things before I first approached them, and as what I now think I know tomorrow may be belied, so this (huge!) area is unknown to me. But I don't worry about denial (because denial too is new knowledge), nor the unknown (because knowledge is anyway a journey, started eating an apple, and not a state); knowledge is expanding the border, while continuing to maintain what there's inside the border itself...
- "Horror vacui" (fear of the void): I need to give some form to the void, because otherwise "I feel bad"; I have to give an explanation for natural phenomena, and then for the unknown after death, and then for the mystery of the universe, and then... So, in ancient Greece, there were many gods; then came one God only; now we have three different – and conflicting – kinds of the unique true God.

The amor vacui / love of the vacuum is "open", full of freedom and adventure.

The horror vacui / fear of the void is "closed", full of mystery, terror and a feeling of (supposed) duty.

The presence or absence of religion and faith are so justified in this "childish" way (no offense, just to distinguish), according to how one "interacts" with the void.

In an "adult" way, instead, two different ethics appear distinguishable, one of religious origin (on which it's needless to spend other words, given the huge amount spent over the centuries) and another one coming from knowledge.

The latter comes from a preliminary distinction

(see. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MJ3IGJ4OFo> from minute 3:37 to 4:57)

between:

- Data (raw facts);
- Information (indications like "who", "where", "when", "how");
- Knowledge (know-how / how-to);
- Understanding (motivation / "why");
- Wisdom ("the ability to see the consequences of our actions by evaluating information, knowledge, and understanding").

The wisdom, as defined, is obviously quite different, and absolutely relative, from person to person. We should all have a sense of "society", but it is not sure that this sentiment is aligned among different people, who lived different experiences.

Under these conditions, wisdom CAN give rise to an ethics, as an emergent property: in some people it emerges, in others it doesn't; where it is born, it can be born different in different people, depending on what actions they make and the consequences that these generate (if different faiths can exist in a different unique true God, different ethics as just explained are a minor detail...).

I think that all the framework outlined above is just as valid, on the philosophical level, as that of a believer.

And I'm afraid that the pictures of the believer and the atheist are immeasurable / not comparable with one another, as indicated above in terms of tautologies (or my explanation may open a debate, in order to try to disprove the hypothesis of uselessness that I made above).

On a personal level I have no problem as regards religion, or religions, except what I said, i.e. I tend to consider useless to discuss about the topic.

I find it unfair, however, to inculcate religion in the minds of the children, taking advantage of the obvious horror vacui / fear of void of that age (I'm ready to change my mind, but I need valid arguments, certainly different from the fact that religion necessarily implies an evangelization duty; this must remain a choice, although I can understand the will of the soul, when you believe, to make others, or even everybody, learn about faith; I think that it should

be equally strong the will to respect the possibility of every individual to evolve in the way that his/her capacity and destiny will determine).

If you hoped that the text was over, unfortunately here comes the most serious issue (I'll close quickly, though).

It is not knowledge, the problem. The problem of today's world (and, presumably, more and more that of the future) is coexistence.

How to live in a world of absolute relativism, where complexity increases (by definition) and the modeling of all that matters remains both partial and individual (of persons, peoples or cultures)?

I don't have much to say, except providing this framework:

http://www.ybnd.eu/docs/Five_thinkings.pdf

The idea is that making our mental models the most explicit we can, even though they are membranous-fractal graphs, and having a minimum capability of learning (which implies putting themselves into discussion, as well as being willing to change own mind), perhaps a few steps forward can be done in coexistence, despite the absolute relativism which, for guilt and merit of the apple, we necessarily live in.

Ah, the "sacred."

Sacred (lower case) – but it is my model(!)– are life and (need for) coexistence.