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**The Function of Philosophy**

By Peter M.K. Chan

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The Function of Philosophy

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This s a self-contained section to the Epilogue of my book titled The Mystery of Mind

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In the simplest of terms, human knowledge comes in two forms: description of facts, and theories about them. Description tells us what happened, theories explain how or why they happened. More importantly, they also purport to tell us what will probably happen. In other words, the purpose of explaining is to make intelligible sense of occurrences that description alone is not able to provide. This is usually done by generalizing and projecting on the basis of what is known. It is to guess and conceptualize as to what may exist in the unknown. This explanatory procedure is true of religion as it is of science. Religion conceptualizes the existence of souls and other spiritual beings such as ghosts, deities, devils, angels, if not also fairies and so on to account for experiences that are either too boring or difficult to understand. Science conceptualizes the existence of ether, atoms, material forces, laws of nature, space-time, force-fields, dark-matter, anti-matter, black holes, strange attractors and so on for purpose of understanding the observed workings of the physical world.

In the very basic sense of the word, to philosophize is also to explain. By the light of its founding practitioners, the basic business of philosophy is to determine what exist and the relation between the natures of such existents. These two core enterprises are traditionally known as ontology and metaphysics. Thus, as other kinds of theories, a philosophical theory must also depend on conceptualizations in order to explain. Such conceptualizations are usually erected on the basis of two things: presuppositions and basic concepts or categories as they are professionally called. To believe that anything material must be cognitively inert is a fundamental presupposition of dualism. That everyone must take a soul to have a mind is another. These are in contradistinction to the materialist and scientific presupposition that the physical causal system is closed, and that material power and agency is all there are. Of basic concepts, these include such notions as existence (or being) and nothingness, facts and possibility, matter and mind, body and soul, act and object, substance and form,

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actuality and possibility, attribute and substance, accident and essence, function and structure, and so on and so forth. Between presuppositions and basic concepts, they provide various ways of mapping and relating many of the diverse features of what is known as human reality. However, across the span of centuries, different philosophers have found different ways of conceptualization to be intelligible, resulting in the proliferation of different philosophical styles and perspectives. In this sense, it can be said that every philosophical theory is in the ultimate analysis a consequence of the presuppositions and categories that its owner intends to grind.

For this reason, many philosophical controversies are about differences in conceptualization rather than disagreements about facts. They are, in the final analysis, controversies about the explanatory

efficacy of certain concepts and presuppositions upon which the same set of phenomena or facts and events are to be explained. Many times, the gut source of these disagreements are so ingrained that no arguments on the basis of facts are able to settle. This is also why no one philosophical perspective is acceptable to all. Having said that, it must also be pointed out that even in the realm of science, explanation is also a matter of degree, and major disagreements also exist. Besides, the diversity and complexity of phenomena in any knowledge area that has to be tackled is simply too complicated for any one theory to satisfy on a permanent basis. For this reason, theories are often not valued in terms of being true or false. They could only be described as adequate or inadequate, probable or improbable, in the light of what is already known.

There are two general requirements that any adequate theory must attempt to meet. They are comprehensiveness and coherence. Comprehensiveness requires that all known facts must be taken into account. Coherence requires that such accounts should be systematically consistent. But given the progressive character of human knowledge, these are tall orders that no theory is likely to fulfill on a permanent basis. What is considered adequate is always relative to the knowledge context and intellectual climate of the time. Any theory that falls short in any of these respects will sooner rather than later be relegated. The history of thought is littered with many once considered the most comprehensive and coherent of explanations. This is true of philosophy as it is of science. History has shown that in the shifting sand of knowledge and interpretation, even a relatively adequate theory of human reality is difficult to come by. This is why there have not been many who are able to dictate the course of theoretical thought for hundreds of years. And if history is any guide, even these must in the end also come to grief.

Looking back, it must be said that failure notwithstanding, the dominant philosophy of an era is representative of the metaphysical mentality of its time. It incorporates what the era deems to be matters of fact as well as what it does not really know. For this reason, evaluation of the past should always be accompanied by an appreciation for its knowledge and conceptual constraints. No generation should fall prey to the illusion that it has theorized or philosophized any better than its predecessors. Criticism from the benefit of hindsight alone is cheap. It is important to know where others were right and why they were right. It is just as important to understand where others had erred and why they had erred. What was it that made people reasoned the way they did? Given what they then knew and the conceptual bias they had, could they have thought otherwise? How could their theories be improved upon in the light of what we now know? To answer such questions is the basic function of philosophy. As understood by its ancient founders, philosophy means the love of wisdom. It

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is not only the desire to understand what is the case and how it is the case. It is also the desire to understand what is not the case, and why it could not possibly be the case. The former leads to knowledge, the latter to wisdom. A non-reflective life, as Socrates once said, is not worth living.

Author: Peter M.K. Chan

<http://www.geocities.com/themysteryofmind>

The strange neighborhood of truth is always less comfortable than the familiar circles of falsehood - PMKC.

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Author of book titled The Mystery of Mind – a systematic and critical introduction to the philosophy of mind.

### **The Superultramodern Principia : The Foundations of Superultramodern Science (SS)**

**By Dr Kedar Joshi**

The Superultramodern Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica (in short, The Superultramodern Principia) mainly combines The NSTP (Non – Spatial Thinking Process) Theory and Conmathematics (Conceptual Mathematics). It also entails some other ideas of Dr Kedar Joshi like 'If reason itself is flawed', Great flaws in modern/ultramodern physics, The nature of science, mathematics, and philosophy, Superultramodern universal communism, etc. Its chief purpose is to lay down the foundations of Superultramodern science (physics, mathematical science, and philosophy).

So far philosophers/scientists have argued too much regarding the nature of mind, self, space, time, and, in general, reality. Now they should understand that the truth on these matters might be known not through too much thinking and debate, but through more or less self-evident propositions, straightforward reasoning, and possibilities. Either, if they are smart enough, they would appreciate it or dismiss it and thus fail to see the light forever.

– Dr Kedar Joshi, BSc MA DSc DA, PBSSI  
Cambridge, UK.

The Founder and President of 'British Superultramodern Scientific Institution' (BSSI).

The Superultramodern Principia : The Foundations of Superultramodern Science (SS)

The 3 Ps Of Picking An Asset Management Team That Is Right For You

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