

Simon's personal outline

Post by “SimonC” of June 10, 2022 at 5:06 PM

As many others have stated, this is a current draft and subject to further change.

This is also a document written with a personal view, though I choose to make it public.

I do not at the moment go into the proofs or arguments behind these statements, but they exist, more or less.

Epistemology

- All knowledge is derived from the senses. Even mathematics is dependent on prior sensations since our language and reasoning skills are formed in contact with the outside world.
- The existence of an underlying “thing-in-itself” that is not possible to be sensed directly can be safely dismissed, as well as that of higher-level “forms”. What evidence can possibly be said to support their existence, given that *all knowledge is derived from the senses*?
- It is true that it is not possible to see a house from the front and the back simultaneously. So what, walk around it. If a square tower looks round from a distance, you can move closer to check. This is just a feature of sensation, not a counterargument to sensation being the source of knowledge.

Metaphysics

- There are two types of things: matter and void. We learn that there is matter because things exist. We learn that there is void because the matter can move around.
- If there was a third type of thing (such as “spirit”) it will either interact or not interact with matter. If it interacts with matter, it will *be* matter. If it does not interact with matter, it can safely be ignored.

Physics

- Matter is finitely divisible. What we today call “atoms” do turn out to be divisible, but there is a level of elementary particles that permit no further division.
- All effects and events we observe in the world are caused by interactions of these elementary particles.
- There is no “supernatural”. Nothing can be caused by something other than interactions between elementary particles, because this would require there to be a third class of thing, see *Metaphysics*.

- Any apparent design on Earth is the effect of Darwinian evolution. Any apparent design in the solar system or universe at large is explained by the anthropic bias: if conditions were not such that life could evolve, we would not be there to observe them.

- Thought and consciousness are thus also effects of the interactions between elementary particles. We happen to be conscious because it allows it to communicate better with each other, giving us a Darwinian advantage. Some animals are not conscious. Some humans are not. A rock is never conscious.

Ethics

- There are no supernatural gods. Because there is nothing supernatural. Somewhere in the universe there might live an enlightened race of beings, eternally blissful. These might rightfully be called gods by some, but I believe this terminology to be unnecessarily confusing. I prefer to state that there are no gods, full stop.

- When we die, there is no more life and no more sensation. There is no afterlife. There is no judgement. There is no reincarnation.

- There are no eternal or divine rules. No actions earn us points towards getting into heaven. Kant's "Categorical imperatives" are just divine rules in disguise.

- The only remaining ground for preferring action A over action B is that it will lead to something desirable.

- The only thing that is desirable in itself is our own pleasure. The only thing that is undesirable in itself is our own pain.

- The me of tomorrow is the same me as the me of today. A pleasure at a point in the future is worth the same as that pleasure today, multiplied by the probability that I am alive at that point.

- Thus we should choose actions that lead to the greatest balance of pleasure over pain over the course of our expected lifetimes. I'll call this position "hedonism".

Hedonism in practice

- There is a tremendous cultural pressure to believe in some set of eternal rules. There is a tremendous commercial pressure to desire things that we would otherwise not desire. Because of this we need to be very critical of our impulses and feelings. Many things that seem desirable at first glance do not in fact increase our total pleasure over our lifetime.

- Whenever you want something, ask yourself "what will happen if my wish is fulfilled? What will happen if it is not?"

- Counterpoint: there is no value in abstaining for the sake of abstaining.

- Seek like-minded friends. You are not obliged to like people that are not compatible with you.
- Be frank and open in communication. Be direct. Be shameless.
- You probably need less money than you think. You probably need less things than you think. Again, no value in abstaining for the sake of it – but there are other things you could be doing with your only life.

Hedonism Q&A

- “But what if I like murdering people (or some other heinous crime)?”

We luckily do not live in the Hobbesian state of nature, but are bound by a social contract. The wise person will keep to the social contract for the protection it gives them. While murderers might not be breaking any divine law (because there is none), they surely risk breaking the social contract, leading to a less pleasurable life for themselves overall.

- “But I am terminally ill with a month to live, and I really really want to murder someone.”

I think this is a strawman. BUT, if you truly have considered the pros and cons, I don't think I can judge you for this, morally. But I don't have to like you.

- “If you keep chasing pleasure, you are losing out on meaning.”

A word-game. Pleasure is not simply champagne and cigars, but all things that give a pleasurable feeling, including those things that are commonly thought to give “meaning” such as companionship and community.