

Essay

Is the Concept of God Fundamental or Figment of the Mind?

Alan J. Oliver*

Abstract

To be everywhere God would have to be nonlocal, which would allow the everywhere concept and it would also allow God to be eternal. On the other hand, all of that could be just a belief carried across time as a human tradition taught to children throughout the generations. So what we have here is a tradition about the concept of nonlocality packaged as a supreme being in very simple terms for consumption without question. All that is required is faith plus a universal acceptance of the need to teach them at a very young age.

Keywords: Consciousness, God, implicate order, David Bohm, evolution, mind, Samadhi, Sankhyakarika, Yoga sutras, Patanjali, Akasha, Rishis, Vedic.

Introduction

God and Consciousness are familiar terms in man's attempts to develop an understanding of reality. I have come to the view that much of the difficulty surrounding them comes from our selective choice of what to believe in any particular circumstance. We evolved from very simple cellular life forms which had to make existential choices in their environments. We can make a few assumptions about what those choices might be because there are today many similar simple forms of life we can observe as they make similar choices. These simple forms can be observed making choices and we may assume they even learn along the way. They don't have brains to think with and it is our human viewpoint which has led us to believe one can only understand consciousness by studying the human brain. I am suggesting that this hubris underpins our difficulty, and that what we call consciousness is part of a process which relates to even those early simple forms of life at the cellular level of being.

A Thumbnail Sketch of Reality

The Sankhyakarika¹ tells us that the wise people of the Vedic tradition had developed an understanding of reality, including a verifiable understanding of consciousness. This is explained in the Sankhya philosophy included in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali², and what makes it verifiable is the state of Samadhi. Their language, Sanskrit, is a highly technical one that enabled very specific descriptions of nonlocality we moderns have only recently paralleled. In that tradition we find the term, Satchitananda, the three aspects of the fundamental of reality. Satchitananda translates as Existence, Knowing and Bliss and these are the three aspects of the fundamental of

* Correspondence: Alan J. Oliver, Normanville, South Australia. E-mail: thinkerman1@dodo.com.au

a whole reality. In the West we have tried to understand consciousness as a fundamental of reality and so far we have not been particularly successful. What we have done along the way has been to take this trinity from Satchitananda and repackage it as God.

Sankhya describes reality as Prakriti, the material world, which is also a trinity of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, all of which evolve into matter in much the same way as that described by the standard model of physics. The stark difference comes with the word, Akasha, which in scientific terms is roughly the equivalent of an unmeasurable field below the Planck Length which obviously makes it nonlocal. I offer the following explanation of the whole process in every form of life in the context of Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*², beginning with the process as we understand it to apply to the human mind.

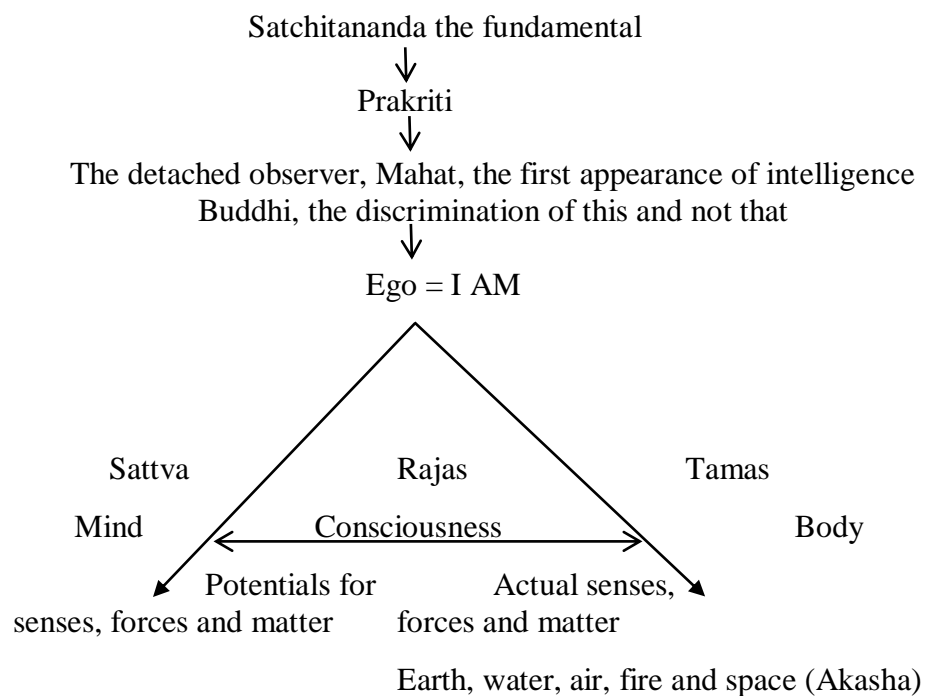


Fig. 1

Fig.1 is a simplified version of the Yoga diagram from my earlier JCER articles, and hopefully will clarify the similarities I infer to exist between the current science and that within the Vedas. The diagram contains aspects of the physical state, the non-local state of physics, and the Vedas. We need to keep in mind that the whole diagram from Prakriti down to Akasha is within the unmeasurable field below the Planck Length as mentioned earlier. The knowledge which the Rishis held and taught came from knowledge gained in the Samadhi state, and verified by comparing it against knowledge others had gained in that same state; it was after all an oral tradition. The diagram is a representation of the space called Akasha, which Patanjali tells us is composed of the tan matras, potentials for the five senses, and of the fundamentals for matter (body), consciousness (the detached observer) and memory. What it is intended to show is a self-definition, Ego, projected on both the Body and the Mind. The arrow running between the two lines of Mind and Body represents information flowing between them, information which in a

general sense we call consciousness. The sloping arrow on the right from Ego to body extends from sub particles through to real matter. In a simple sense we can say it represents elements and their subatomic forerunners all the way through to cells and structures. The term, body image, is one that comes to mind in noting the effect one's body state has on one's self-image and vice versa. Ego = I AM represents the mind's self-image we are talking about; 'I AM' is the sense of self into which the body is integrated.

Mahat, the detached observer, is Chit, part of the term, Satchitananda, used in my earlier essay, and to get a deeper understanding of the whole diagram one needs look at this from a non-local perspective. From science we are told that at that level (Mahat) a particle can be in a number of states simultaneously, and from the Hindu traditions Satchitananda is regarded as the fundamental which has three states; Existence, Knowing and Bliss. In that tradition these states are understood to be simultaneous, and while we may consider each state individually to understand its particular attributes, it is wrong to take that to mean they are really separate. What this means when we consider the diagram is that everything in that non-local space exists as an expression of Sat, Chit, and Ananda. At the level of Mahat, the Knowing, I AM, is the realisation of the existence of the fundamental Self, the recognition that knowing has been observed, and the Bliss that accompanies that recognition. All are there simultaneously as the whole fundamental which, for convenience is called Consciousness.

Bliss is the one state which has not had much explanation because it is not something one would normally encounter as an everyday experience. But it is important because bliss is an excellent example of the brain's neural network and its relationship with Samapatti. My physical experience of bliss leads me to say that bliss as an experience would involve the whole neural network being activated simultaneously, which needs some further explanation. What are sometimes referred to as neural correlates may be part of a description of the brain's activity leading to some form of reflex, be that some movement reflex or a thought in response to an input. This brings us back to Bohm's Implicate Order and Thought as a system.

From the references of Bohm it follows that:-

- An item of information flowing into and out from the Implicate Order would have come from an observation by an implicit observer, which the rishis say was Mahat, which represents intelligence.
- Bohm also says that all matter contains all information, which would infer that, not only does matter contain all information but that as a necessity all matter contains the non-local state.
- From that statement we can also infer that the neural networks, being matter, will also have access to all the information in that non-local state.
- And finally, the state of a specific point in the neural network is retained as non-local memory, while at the same time the information in non-local memory will act upon the corresponding neural network. This relates directly to the first point.

Firstly, what we know about the non-local state is that it is not spacetime; and that is a significant point - an item of information in this state can be in multiple states simultaneously because there is no physical space dimension and no time dimension.

Secondly, while Bohm said all matter contains all information it may be more accurate to say that all matter provides the necessary specific definition to separate item-specific information from all of the information at the level of Mahat.

Thirdly, while the neural networks can have access to all information, it is more accurate to say a specific combination of points in a specific neural network will provide access to the information related to a specific individual's specific experience.

And fourthly, Bohm is reiterating the inflowing and outflowing movement of information to and from a specific non-local memory and a specific neural network. But the picture we need to examine here is how this model can explain how a neural reflex could arise in the first place, and for that explanation we need to look at memory.

In my earlier articles I mentioned two types of memory, one in which the object or experience of observation is primary as a memory, and one in which only the observation of the experience exists as the primary memory. The memory of my experiences is of the second type and this gives an example of direct perception being a confirmation of Mahat as the detached observer. Buddhi is the discrimination available which accompanies every observation, while Ego is the result of an observation accompanying the mind focussed within the body as a potential.

In Bohm's book, "Thought as a System", he used the term reflex response, which I had likened to Yoga's Samskaras. In Arya's explanation of memory we find that in any experience, be that thought, word or deed, the senses are activated in response to that experience which results in an impression on the mind; that impression is called a Samskara, which then creates a memory. This is significant in relation to understanding consciousness because when we relate the samskara to a neural reflex response to an experience it begins to make the whole thing a bit more familiar. Almost any experience has a cognitive, physical, or emotional response that we can be aware of, and we may remember it at a later time. We may even say that it comes to mind. It is not too much of a leap to see that what we call the mind, and its consciousness, is whatever is activated in that particular moment as a neural reflex or a set of reflexes. In other words our mind is our samskaras, and we can probably illustrate this with two diagrams.

The first type of memory is created when Mahat *consciously observes* each part of an experience.

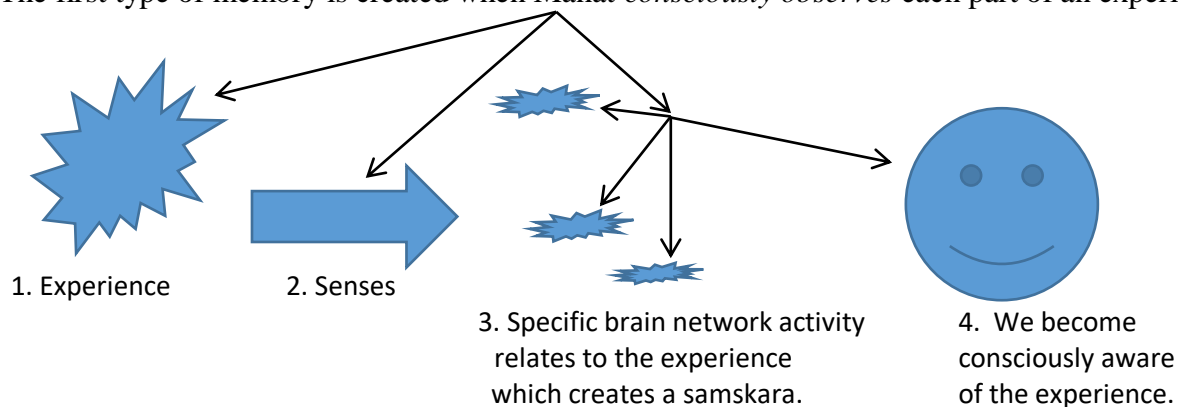


Fig. 2a

An experience is registered by the senses as a response, which switches on specific neural reflexes in the brain. This effectively modifies the brain and therefore the mind. Note that Mahat observes all aspects of the experience and the related responses as specific conscious observations. These modifications of the mind exist simultaneously at the level of Mahat.

In recalling the memory of an experience, the process in **Fig. 2a** is reversed.

1. Mahat observes the thought which triggers the relative samskaras
2. These samskaras activate the related sensory information.

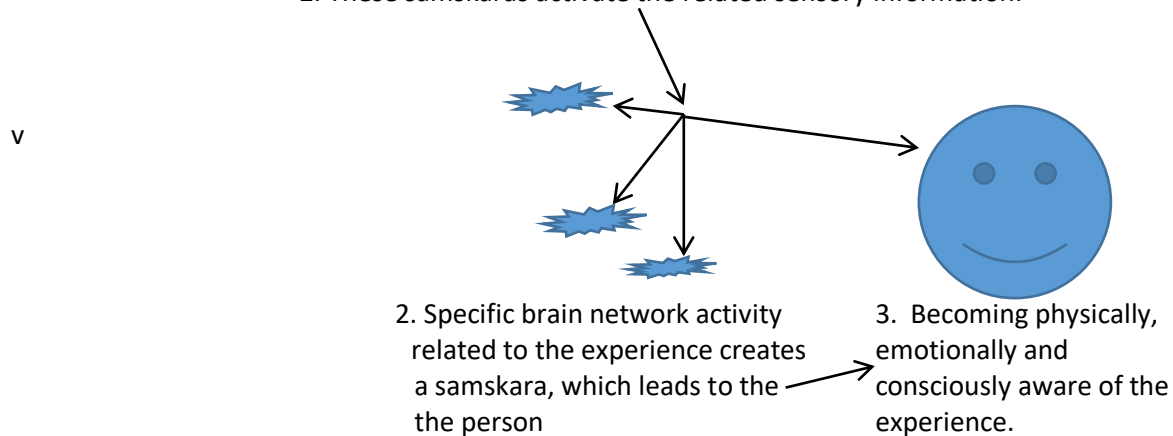


Fig. 2b

In the case of the second type of memory the initial experience is registered as it was in **Fig. 2a**, but since the person is in the state of Mahat, all that is retained as a memory is Mahat's observation that this happened; it does not create a samskara. This means that the mind has not been modified by the experience.

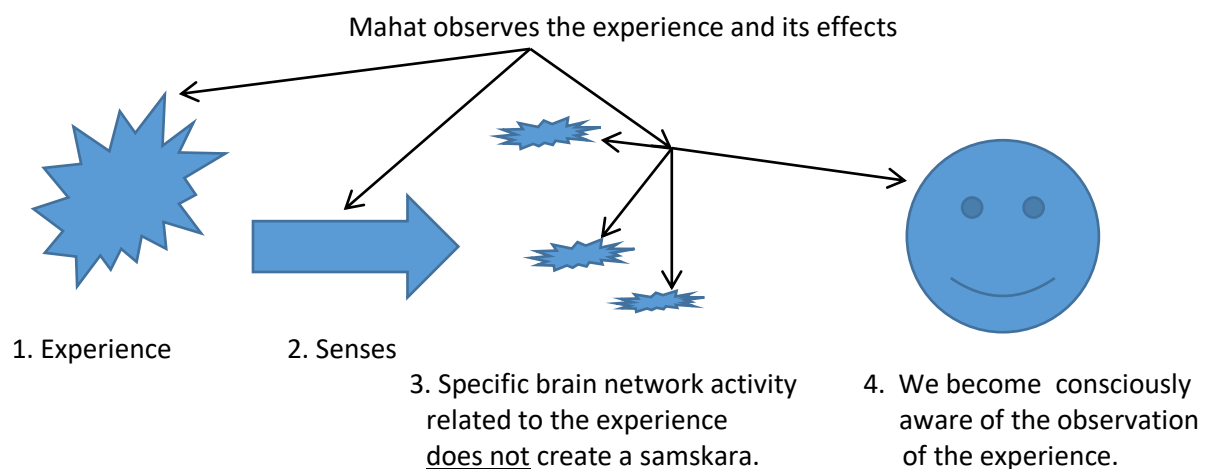


Fig. 3a

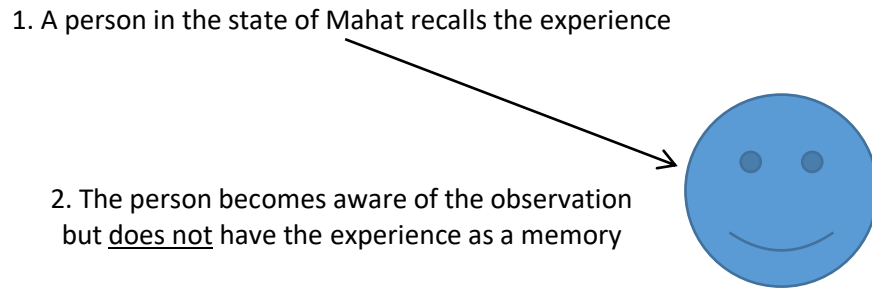


Fig. 3b

This may better explain what happens in Samapatti. Without samskaras, the seer's mind is empty, which means it does not contain 'I AM', so what the seer contemplates (the subject) becomes the 'I AM' in that observation at the level of Mahat. It is as if the seer is 'remembering' the subject as of the moment; this activates what is essentially the same samskaras of the subject but in the seer's brain. For the subject, the seer's observation reflects the seer's lack of samskaras in the subject's brain and the subject becomes aware of that lack of pain. The seer is aware of the state of both brains (both minds) and is able to differentiate which is which. In understanding consciousness then we need to remember that it is simultaneously being the observer, knowing the observation and activating the brain's samskaras. All of these aspects give us what we call consciousness.

The next two diagrams can also show the effect of meditation when it finally brings the mind under control, which really means the samskaras have been disabled in Samadhi.

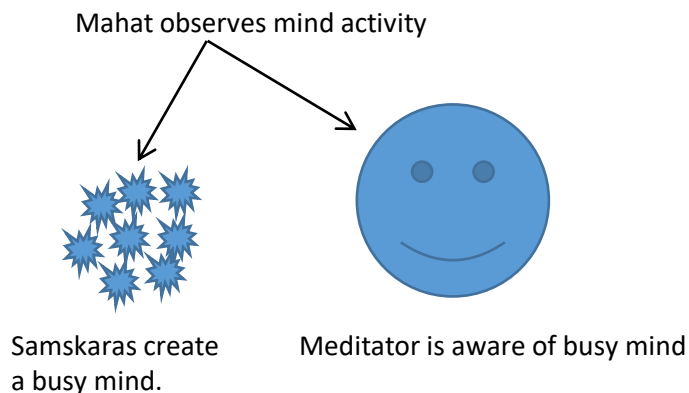


Fig. 4a

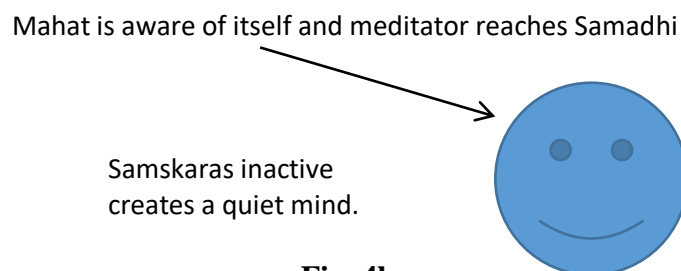


Fig. 4b

The effect of having no active samskaras is that of having an empty mind. When that has been achieved, Mahat the detached observer, is only aware of itself as 'I'; this relates to its own existence, which it knows and recognises thus creating bliss. But it is not quite that simple.

Patanjali tells us that our samskaras are very much related to Ego, our definition of self, and fall into five categories:

1. Fear of death, either physical death or the death of who I believe myself to be.
2. Attraction
3. Repulsion
4. Ignorance of the true self, called I-amness
5. Ignorance in general

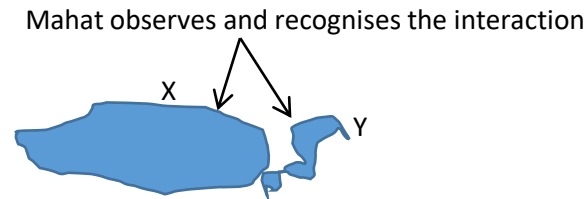
Every experience, thought, or action, arises within these categories as a samskara, which means that the neural network becomes more complex in any given moment, and this has been happening since the emergence of the first brain cell during gestation. Essentially, the whole network is a record of everything we have learned over a lifetime, and that is why the moment by moment configuration of our samskaras is what we know, what we believe, and what or who we present ourselves to be. More frequently used connections have more input and output branches and stronger signals in relation to these five categories. That moment by moment configuration is presented as the *conscious information* we know as *mind*. As one ages the less significant connections reduce in terms of signal strength and contextual relation to others, and the mind becomes more serene. In time this is called wisdom so far as decision making is concerned.

My understanding of this is that the neural network is similar to an electronic network of gates in a circuit which is able to operate in much the same manner of a parallel processor, and I guess this is why computers and artificial intelligence systems claim to operate as analogies of a brain. The neural 'gate' may have many inputs and outputs but in the context of the diagram the important factor is the non-local space being part the brain matter comprising the gap across which a signal must jump, either as a pulse of electrical potential or as a chemical signal. In considering the case of the bliss state one would have to assume the chemical signal would be something like dopamine or oxytocin, something associated with 'feeling good or happy'; in the normal state the signal would vary in terms of the required signal strength or chemical type required to replicate the original experience in the body. As the space in question is also known as Akasha it has the potential for everything, even the required chemical. The point here is the fact that at every junction within the network this Akasha space is present and can, as in the case of bliss, be everywhere at the same time.

In the case of more normal neural reflexes, such as pain, memory or thought, specific gates will operate to provide a specific set of reflexes as a response to an experience. This reflex to a specific experience will have a threefold effect in that it will be observed and known by Mahat, it will activate specific gates as described in the diagrams above, and it will exist in the real world of the physical body, The reflex response to that experience will contain *conscious knowledge* of the current experience as well as a *conscious* memory of past instances of this particular experience and other similar experiences, together with past responses and their outcomes. All of this information is processed unconsciously within the networks, as current and contextually related networks are integrated into a final response which the person may become aware of in

making a decision to respond, or will respond unconsciously and become aware of it afterwards. I would say this integration of many network samskaras is what takes the time to make this unconscious decision, which one only becomes aware of having made it after the potential for conflicting options (samskaras) have been resolved. To that extent it is fair to say that we rarely ever make truly objective decisions. What we call consciousness is not limited to the mind. Like the simple life form mentioned at the beginning, every cell in our body is aware and cognitive to some extent at the level of Mahat.

1. Single celled life form, X, encounters something, Y, in the environment



2. If either one is prey the other eats it or departs as the choice becomes known to each form. The manner in which it is known we would generally call a reflex or a response following a specific stimulus recognised by Mahat.

Fig. 5

Fig. 5 brings us back to reality. Neither being has a brain or a God, but few would dispute an interaction took place and some form of conscious decision was made. The fact a decision was made suggests an earlier lesson had been learned and remembered without recourse to a brain or a physical memory. The decision could be made in the same context we earlier called samskaras, despite the absence of a mind or a brain. All I am trying to point out is that this process existed long before humans, and to suggest that this process is part of the fundamental referred to earlier as Satchitananda. It is not the sole preserve of humans. Looking at the world of today one wonders how much of an advantage our present form represents.

Our immune system is a good example of the encounter shown in this last diagram. The immune system is capable of learning to differentiate friend and foe within the various systems of the whole body and can mount an attack against something that it has recognised as a threat. Vaccination is one way of assisting this learning process. On the down side, the immune system recognises and responds to something which has been transplanted, such as a donated heart or kidney, and the response must be suppressed if the transplant is to function within that body. At some point these immune responses may even have a modifying effect on the cell's genome, but that is for others to explore.

Conclusion

Some years ago I was having a conversation with some friends about God, and I jotted down a simple poem.

As a child I was taught that God is everywhere,
Here is part of everywhere, so God must be here.

I was taught that Heaven is where God is
So here must be Heaven.

Looking back on what I was taught, I would now conclude that to be everywhere God would have to be nonlocal, which would allow the everywhere concept and it would also allow God to be eternal. On the other hand, all of that could be just a belief carried across time as a human tradition taught to children throughout the generations. So really, what we have here is a tradition about the concept of nonlocality packaged as a supreme being in very simple terms for consumption without question. All that is required is faith plus a universal acceptance of the need to teach them at a very young age.

References

1. The SankhyaKarika by G Srinivasan.
2. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali by U. B. Arya. Himalayan Institute, USA. 1986.
3. Wholeness and the Implicate Order by D. Bohm. Routledge UK.
4. Thought as a System by D. Bohm. Routledge. UK.