

Knowledge, Understanding and the God Paradigm

Murray Hunter

The existence or non-existence of God has become an exercise in semantics. On one side we have the theologians espousing “God” as the designer/creator of the universe and on the other side people like Richard Dawkins who claim that “God” is a delusional belief of humankind¹. Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow claim a “God” was not necessary in the creation of the universe². Dawkins *et. al.* have been arguing over premodal concepts of God in the paradigm we know without venturing into working on the creation of new archetypes, which could have widened our narrow perspectives.

Thinking as a species is limited by the paradigms we currently understand. Over the ages each culture interpreted God in their way, and all religions emerged as different doors to the same room - metaphorically speaking of course. The concept of God is apparent in all major cultures and is how civilizations made sense of incomprehensible phenomenon³. Over the centuries humanity has worshipped the earth, heavens, and utilized projection, introjection, idealization, sublimation, and denial to deal with fear and hate, and as a way to explain what cannot be comprehended. The belief in God has also played a major role in shaping society’s collective identity⁴. Many people believe in God in the hope of some form of immortality⁵.

To a great extent religious rituals have become the meaning, rather than being symbolic of meaning. The power of the esoteric is that it stirs up the irrationality in ourselves. Organized religion has not appeared to deepen our belief in God and adherence to ethics. The concept of God has been hijacked and wrapped up within religion as a means of oppression by those who want to divide and rule society. It has increased our tribal biases, made us judgmental of others, and been the basis of the persecution of many.

Thinking about God and creation may be something like a fish looking outside of a curved fishbowl and trying to make sense of things. Being “*inside the reality*” we exist within makes it difficult to appreciate new meaning from the single perspective we have from our position of residence within the cosmos. The problem in understanding God is that we think within our social frames, which limit our understanding. Perhaps we have been asking the wrong question; *what is God?* Maybe a better question would be; *how is God?*

From the author’s point of view, one must try to avoid in taking on the esoteric as fact or believing in anything based on culture or tradition as knowledge unless it can be proved now or at a later time. For the author, this is the essence of the search for meaning. Therefore the subsequent comments in this essay should be seen a view in thought development as what a potential reality of how God could be among a vista of realities. Consequently, It is not a fixed

view, but thinking in progress, which will become outdated as new knowledge emerges. What I have to say is mere possibility rather than fact.

Perhaps the greatest mystery is understanding the medium or environment we exist within. We are really not much different than a fish in a fishbowl. How we see the environment around us influences what we believe. This is true both socially and scientifically. As we adopt new frames or paradigms our views of the environment change. For example, we once treated some types of psychosis with lobotomies, now we can treat those same disorders through drugs and therapy. Once we saw the universe revolving around the earth, then the earth and planets revolving around the sun in a synchronized Newtonian order, and now we see the solar system as a dynamic environment. The truth changes as we acquire more knowledge. This has occurred in all domains, fields and disciplines, except for the theology of God.

Present monotheistic religions take an ego-centric view of humanity. The human species is at the centre of the environment if we take the scriptures literally. This places the earth at the centre of the universe and humanity as its master, blocking our ability to view the environment for what is. Many have been persecuted for thinking differently to accepted socially constructed explanations of the unknown.

Many theories exist about the grand order of things, from cosmic consciousness to the evolving hypotheses of quantum mechanics. Cosmic consciousness, M-theory, and the multiverse still have esoteric appearances and connotations. However, we only need to look at the environment to see a structure created out of relatedness⁶ with an almost infinite number of phenomena occurring simultaneously in the personal, social, physical, and galactic domains; in what could be postulated a grand *self organizing system*.

This grand order from the smallest particle to the cosmos itself can be linked through one heuristic that can be found within the ancient *Pali* texts. This heuristic known as *pativcasamuppāda* or dependent origination can be summed up in four simple phrases that explain all phenomena and reality;

When there is this, that is

With the arising of this, that arises

When this is not, neither is that

With the cessation of this, that ceases⁷

The general principle of dependent origination concerns the fundamental structure of nature and how the elements within it interrelate. The doctrine of dependent origination looks upon the universe as a continuous succession of action, reaction, and effect within a state of dynamic flux and transformation. Max Brown postulated that the occurrence of entity "A" relies upon the occurrence of entity "B", i.e., "B" is the cause of "A". This implies antecedence where causes

must precede or at least simultaneously exist for something else to exist. These phenomena must be spatially connected by a chain of immediate things in conduit⁸. However this is abandoned by dependent origination where mutual arising with entities co-depending upon each other for existence. Dependent origination is not a sequential linear process; it is a cycle with no beginning and no end.

Charles Darwin in the last paragraph of *The Origin of Species* wrote;

“It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us⁹”.

This gives us a perspective of his sense of wonderment about the complexity¹⁰ and interrelationships within the biological system of life and evolution that the concept of dependent origination postulates. Thus only through interrelatedness can we see meaning;

Paper without a tree

A tree without soil

Soil without water

Water without clouds

Clouds without an atmosphere

An atmosphere without oceans.

This according to Winnicott is also relevant to human relationships, the family and the outside world¹¹;

A child and a parent

A parent and a partner

Partners and family

Family and friends

Friends and humanity

Humanity and nature.

Everything in the realms of nature and humanity are dependent upon each other for existence. Things only exist through relatedness¹². We can only exist through relatedness. Nothing can exist in isolation as it all depends upon numerous determinants which are all interrelated. If one doesn't exist then the rest can't exist. This continually changes, therefore entities change must change to adapt.

This can be clearly demonstrated with a plant where the plant relies upon the soil as a medium, minerals and nutrients to grow, moisture as carrier for the nutrients and a building block for cellular structures and the sun to enable photosynthesis for the building to occur. Without any of these, the plant cannot exist. The determinants that enable a plant to grow do not influence the plant in any sequential order of time. They must exist together, interdependent of each other. The plant contributes to maintaining the system through the shedding of leaves and other foliage, which decays, adding to the humus and trace minerals in the soil. In theory for anything to exist in isolation, it must be self-sustaining and stable. However within the laws of nature that is impossible, thus as a consequence everything is only transient with no intrinsic properties of its own. All entities are created and sustained through interrelationship. There is no beginning or end as the question of what came first cannot be answered: *“the seed or the plant, or the chicken or the egg?”*

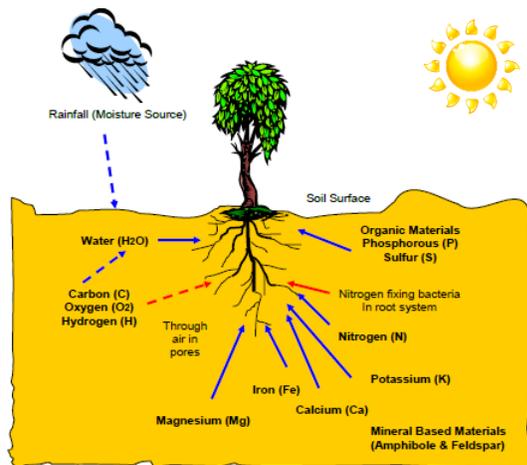


Figure 1. The dependence of a plant upon the whole environment to survive¹³.

There is no such thing as chance. Every event is a result of the consequences of previous events, cumulating as multiple influences upon what is. Therefore the notion of chance depends upon preconditions. As nothing exists in isolation, everything depends upon pre-determinants that are not sequential or required to arise in any particular order. This is in great contrast to the classical paradigm where the universe was deemed to be predictable like billiard balls rolling upon a table. Quantum behavior is also attuned to human behavior which is much less predictable and impossible to measure through mathematics; where only probability can be predicted through heuristics.

Dependent origination as a universal heuristic would look something like figure 2. The lines represent and interplay of two causal factors, one linear and the other synchronic that contribute to a non-linear pattern. Lines (2) and (4) are linear and connect past events overtime to the present and ground the future. Lines (1) and (3) are synchronic and connect objects and events to the present moment. These two basic principles intersect representing that all events are influenced by the two sets of conditions. Structurally this divides a system into parts, connecting the past, present and future together. The past and present circumstances determine the present which creates consequences for the future. However don't confuse time itself as a determinant, as time is itself a 'manmade' invention¹⁴. Time itself does not directly influence events, only what happens within the framework of time.

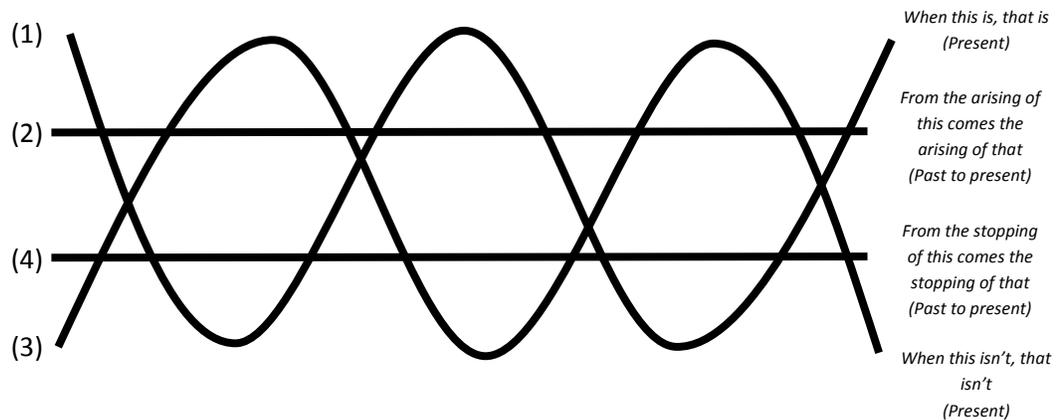


Figure 2. The dependent origination or "God" heuristic?

Every event takes place in a context determined by the combined influence of past events and present circumstances. Every event has repercussions in the present with reverberations extending into the future. The strength of the influence will depend upon the intensity of the event. Sometimes events reverberate and amplify an effect and sometimes events may suppress an event¹⁵. However this is not the result of a chain of causes leading to effects strung over time. Any event may be affected by a past event and present circumstances which may lead to unexpected feedback loops during the causal process¹⁶. Due to this possibility of any event happening at any time, the causation or arising process is extremely fluid and complex¹⁷. The *Pali* explains the phenomena using the metaphor of water rather than the *wheel of samsara*, thus metaphors such as *ebb and flow* are much more suitable than "sequency".

If everything existed in linear relationships, everything would be totally predictable and deterministic and the future would be unable to change from the present and past. If

everything was totally in synchronic relationships there would be no relationships from one period to another and all events would be totally random and completely unpredictable. Everything would just break down and change without reason and connection. The two modes work in concurrence where past events and present circumstances create a potential, but not completely determined path.

Critical to the continuity of the processes of dependent origination is feedback. Feedback is one of the *energies (along with momentum)* that enable the system to operate continuously as a *self organizing system*. To understand how particular feedback occurs is to understand the manifestations of dependent origination. It is this feedback which defines interdependency. However this understanding may be beyond our cognitive abilities and is thus one of the challenges for mankind to overcome in the future¹⁸.

Closed feedback loops are responsible for linearity of the system and open feedback loops are responsible for non-linearity of the system. Closed feedback loops influence quantitative rates within a system, such as a thermostat regulating temperature in a room. Open feedback systems are more dynamic and allow for changes in the state of a system, like the change in direction of wind within a weather system that brings a change in the state of weather.

Simple closed loop feedback systems can be responsible for counterintuitive behavior¹⁹. For example, we usually over correct heater thermostat systems which lead to oscillations in room temperature until we find a stable range. This is very similar in a free market pricing mechanism in economics where an increase in price leads to the entry of new producers until supply outstrips demand and the price decreases to a level where producers leave the industry, leading to supply shortages and increases in prices once again, in a continuous cycle.

Open systems tend to operate with multi-loop non-linear feedback systems where many variables provide for unpredictable results. It is the interaction of counter-reactive feedback loops that provide the unpredictability and *chaos* within the system. These feedback systems can also exist across the sub-systems of the environment where certain phenomena can exert enormous influence upon much more powerful phenomena in other sub-systems. This can clearly be seen in the current European financial crisis where public perception and sentiment has dramatic affects upon the stability/instability of the Euro and even fabric of the European financial system, *i.e., where collective thinking can become self fulfilling prophecies*. Not through the esoteric will of any collective unconscious but by the forces of behavioural economics. Mathematical formulas are centered on linearity and cannot predict the outcome of a system that is both *emergent* and *self organizing*. As the number of feedback loops increase the complexity of the system increases exponentially²⁰.

If one traces back the stream of events, no root causes can be found for anything. Events are an emergence, a natural evolution where there is a mutually arising²¹. Open systems are just too complex to determine any single cause, and selecting single causes to explain phenomena would just delude reality. Consequently there is no beginning and end, just a continuous flow of events.

The doctrine of dependent origination applies to all things and subsequently all things are influenced by cause and effect. *Kammaniyama* the law of karma determines potential future behavior paths in a similar manner to how Foucault saw social interaction as "...a set of actions upon other actions"²². All events and phenomena produce karma. Karma is the 'potential' generated by 'cause and effect' or the interrelationships between dynamic entities²³. Karma can have a positive or negative consequence upon the future. Karma being a 'potential'²⁴ is what keeps the universe transient across time dimensions. To some degree karma actually provides the substance to time, as without karma there would be no change in the universe and thus no time²⁵. Karma is regularly mistaken for something psychic that acts upon the soul, more attuned to the romantic narrative of a humanized religious version of Buddhism²⁶, or the mythology of reincarnation based on past deeds done upon the Earth. Other misinterpretations describe karma as a form of fate.

This heuristic can be applied to the cognitive, social, physical, and cosmos. It is the basis of all force or energy, the very medium we exist within.

The interdependence of existence is the fabric of all realities. It links the present with what has gone on before, explaining mutual dependence. This is much more complex than simple cause and effect relationships. For example, we saw that a plant needs soil, and within the soil, moisture to carry trace elements and nutrients to the root system that operates from enzymes and proteins formed through photosynthesis in a harmony of nature. There is no cause and effect, just mutual dependence. This heuristic explains Darwin's reefs, Lovelock's Gaia, the formation and existence of the solar system, quantum mechanics, society, and our self identity, intention, and behaviour. The fabric of quantum reality can be seen as the "God particle" or Higgs Boson, culture in the social domain that both knits and divides society, and imagination that enables humans to think, feel, create, and maintain a self identity. These are the seas upon which everything exists according to the nature of dependent origination, operating as a self organizing system.

The wisdom of the cosmos is contained within the above heuristic. Such a paradigm escapes esotericism, transcends theology and poses that the entire cosmos is the actual fabric of our reality. It is complex, but it is grounded, therefore a wisdom that one can obtain, the ultimate understanding about the great mystery – the creator. Creation does not occur through intended intelligent design, but rather by inter-dependence and co-arising – an emergence.

Humanity did not arise by design, but by chance. Thus we have been unable to see God; because we have been within God. To understand *how* is to understand God. This heuristic as a metaphor implies that God is everything and everything is God.

This paradigm or potential reality of God would have a number of potential consequences:

Firstly, as time is an artificial creation of humankind, there cannot be a beginning or end, only arising or cessation. Therefore there may have not been a big bang and the multiverse theory may have validity making the concept of existence something far beyond what our imagination could ever comprehend. This also has implications for the earth and humankind, our existence is not permanent. As we exist within a self organizing system, change and evolution is inevitable. There is no such thing as immortality. Where we go after death is part of the great sustainability, we are recycled and exist as something else. Both metaphorically and physically we are children of the earth and the stars.

Secondly, ethics are about survival. Life follows the physical laws like everything else. Nothing is divine, just the result of heuristic probabilities – a good reason to be humble. Ethics have always been related to social order and have been culturally bounded. Society and religion have been the external medium of transference and perpetuation. Under the doctrine of dependent origination ethics or universal values exist within our true self, hidden by layer upon layer of constructed false identities, greatly influenced by the emotions we carry both instinctively and through our imagination²⁷. Therefore non-ethical behaviour can be seen as ignorance. All evil in the world is thus a human and social construction. One of the great tragedies of today is that organized religion sees evil as a product of “satan” and absolves man for the evil he does through particular set rituals. Religion for numerous reasons has failed to provide humanity practical codes of ethics and morals to live by. Our ethics are driven by the notion of our existence. In addition to survival, ethics are needed to control the notion of ourselves, so one can live in social codependence. This realization would be the catalyst of a society built upon compassion, fairness, and equity.

Under dependent origination, the concept of cause and effect (or karma as it may be more commonly known) constitutes existence. It creates our notion of existence; our self views. Without karma we don't exist as a person – we are intellectually and emotionally a product of society and our experiences within it. What we think and feel shapes the present and influences future actions. All structure (*self identity, social, physical, etc*) is the consequences of prior actions sustained through past and present practices and experienced as obdurate²⁸. As such karma is itself a potential process of transformation, an opportunity to change²⁹. The opportunity to change is the key principle behind sustainability – not necessarily developing static practices that we believe are sustainable. A completely new paradigm about how we

think of sustainability is required drawing upon the lessons of co-arising and cessation in Darwin's reef, Lovelock's Gaia, and Hawking's multiverse.

Our imagination is grounded upon what we already know and this can only expand through further discovery and experience, but is limited by the metaphors we use. God certainly exists, within our imagination, where all reality exists. As our knowledge increases, so will our understanding of the concepts of God. Faith is fine, but not the faith of the premodern order that locks one into a narrow and unchanging view. Faith is often needed to pursue ideas and test validity – one of the prerequisites of man's ability to be creative and adapt; the real essence of sustainability.

Understanding is a dynamic construct according to dependent origination. Perhaps this essay should conclude with some words attributed to Albert Einstein. *"The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity."* Dependent origination may answer his description.

¹ Dawkins, R., (2006), *The God Delusion*, London, Black Swan.

² Hawking, S., & Mlodinow, L., (2010), *The Grand design: New answers to the ultimate questions in life*, London, Bantam Press.

³ Private communication with Arman Nobari, Sacramento, California.

⁴ Cohen postulated that objects are central to a society's collective identity, a role that God and religion has played throughout every society. Any object such as religion according to Blumer consists of meaning for a person and society for whom it is an object. Cohen, J., (1993), The conflicting views of symbolic interactionists and Talcott Parsons concerns the nature of relations between persons and non-human objects: A sequel to "About steaks liking to be eaten", *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 14, pp. 127-153, Blumer, H., (1969), *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, P. 11.

⁵ Becker, E. (1973). *The Denial of Death*, New York, Free Press.

⁶ We derive meaning through comparison, thus meaning is a relative phenomenon.

⁷ *Pali Tipitika S.II.28,65*

⁸ Brown, M., (1949), *Natural Philosophy of Cause and Chance*, New York, Dover Publishers.

⁹ Darwin, C. (1859). *The Origin of Species by means of natural selection on the preservation of favoured species in the struggle for life*, London, John Murray.

¹⁰ Even the concept of complexity is relative to the number and nature of actions we are comparing our perceptions with.

¹¹ Winnicott, D., W., (1967), *The Child, the family and the Outside World*, Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley.

¹² Even the conditions around our body are experienced through relatedness. For example, if you have been working outside on a hot day and go inside to an air conditioned room, upon returning outside the heat will feel unbearable. Initially the feeling was neutral, but only when one experiences comfortable conditions will the hot conditions outside become a conscious burden. In Buddhism this is important to the concept of suffering or *dukkha*. Relatedness and comparison as the basis of emotions like greed and envy.

¹³ Taken from Hunter, M. (2009), *Essential Oils: Art, Science, Agriculture, Industry & Entrepreneurship: A focus on the Asia-pacific region*, New York, Nova Scientific Publishers, P. 355.

¹⁴ Feynman, R., (1995), *Six Easy Pieces*, London, Penguin Books, P. 110.

¹⁵ A good example of amplification and suppression might be a company's sales. For example certain factors like population growth, rising per capita incomes, advertising, word of mouth, and more accessible channels to reach the

public may amplify a firm's sales growth. However, a situation of decreasing population, loss of spending power though unemployment, increasing competition, and/or the arrival of new technologies may suppress the growth of sales.

¹⁶ DeGraff, G., Thanissaro Bhikkhu, (1996), *'The Wings of Awakening'*, P.300.

¹⁷ DeGraff, G., Thanissaro Bhikkhu, (1996), *'The Wings of Awakening'*, P.301.

¹⁸ Gharajedaghi, J., (2006), *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A platform for designing business architecture*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, P. 119.

¹⁹ Forrester, J. W., (1971), Counter intuitive behavior of social systems, *Technology Review*, Vol. 73, No. 3, pp. 52-68.

²⁰ Wolfram, S., (2002), *New Kind of Science*, Wolfram Media, Inc., online at: <http://www.wolframscience.com/>

²¹ The belief that in the beginning there was *nothing*, does not have any foundation in dependent origination. This thinking can be seen as an attachment to concepts as the truth is unknown, and implies the existence of a creator. This view of the world means that humankind cannot seek solutions by wishing or praying to *'the gods'*. There is no such thing as luck, there are no aimless accidents as there is a seemingly endless process of evolution going on.

²² Foucault, M., (1973), *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences*, New York, Vintage/Random House, P. 220.

²³ The Buddha taught the concept of karma in the pretext of human suffering, where emotions like greed, envy, anger, and other psychotic emotions perpetuate one within one of the realms of samsara. See Hunter, M. (2012), *Opportunity, Strategy & Entrepreneurship: A meta-Theory, Volume 1*, New York, Nova Scientific Publishers, pp. 255-266.

²⁴ Something like the current potential between the positive and negative nodes of direct current electricity. It takes a wire of something that can conduct electricity to realize the potential connecting the two terminals.

²⁵ Time is a relative measure of one point against another.

²⁶ Payne, R., (2006), Individual and Awakening: Romantic narrative and the Psychological Interpretation of Buddhism and Psychotherapy, In: Unno, M. (Ed.), *Buddhism and Psychotherapy Across Cultures: Essays on Theories and Practices*, Boston, Wisdom Books, P. 36.

²⁷ Hunter, M., (2011), Perpetual self conflict: Self awareness as a key to our ethical drive, personal mastery, and perception of entrepreneurial opportunities, *Contemporary Readings in law and Social Justice*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 96-137.

²⁸ , Blumer, H., (1969), " *Symbolic Interactionism* ", Strauss, A., L., (1993), *Continual Presentations of Action*, New York, Aldine de Gruyter.

²⁹ However structure is usually very slow to evolve which hints at humankind's inability to learn from history.