On the Theories of Everything: Why they should be called theories of everything physical instead

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The claim, or at least the hope, of all theories of everything in physics such as Wolfram's physics program¹ or Eric Weinstein's Geometric Unity^{2,3}, is that there is a finite set of physical laws, from which the entire physical universe can be reproduced. A stronger claim is that from this set of laws, the universe, including all social interactions, will be reproduced.

In my opinion, in such a claim or an aspiration of these supposedly competing theories of everything, the authors sneak in a physicalist assumption. That one claims that everything is physical, including mind⁴.

It seems quite far-fetched that from Wolfram's hypergraphs and Weinstein's equations, spring both the physical universe (i.e., the stars, the black holes, the galaxies, etc.) and the mental universe/universes that include every person's phenomenology. If indeed all the complexities of minds can be reduced to simply certain arrangements of atoms and flows of information, the view of patternism⁵, it is conceivable that the right kind of computations can indeed simulate real people with their consciousness intact.

However, no one can be sure if this is true. One can simply entertain some of the major thought experiments in the literature of the philosophy of mind to see why the hard problem of consciousness poses a significant challenge to the stronger claim of the theories of everything: thought experiments such as Frank Jackson's Epiphenomenal Qualia's "Mary's Room,"⁶ David Chalmers' "The philosophical zombie,"⁷ John Searl's "The Chinese Room,"⁸ Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?"⁹

Philosopher Galen Strawson has eloquently and clearly restated the mind and body problem by asking what “physical” really means, in which he raises a point that we are not even sure what matter is or what its relationship with mind is. We don’t have definite evidence to refute the thesis of the panpsychist that that mental quality or qualia or consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the world¹⁰. According to panpsychism, everything physical thing, down to each quark and electron, has consciousness, however, dimly¹¹. Annaka Harris reviews the classic and modern literature on consciousness and shows that the position of the panpsychist is among the most coherent and the least confused about actual subjective experience¹².

The bottom line for me is that until there is a proven theory of consciousness, which somehow unifies the mental and the physical, a theory of everything should instead be addressed as *a theory of everything physical* to preserve the philosophical-scientific rigor and humility, which scientists have always prided themselves with¹³. Being clear in terminology is among the most important ways scientists and science journalist can ensure the public trust in science¹⁴.

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