

Nano-philosophy

The 21st Century promises to be the age of the very small. Silicon chips, ever shrinking, crammed with ever more information! Data storage on things smaller still than the tiniest known chip, soon down to the atomic and subatomic level!

This is an exciting time for consumers – but also for researchers who can count on endless grants in nano-engineering, nano-computing, and so forth.

In an effort to bring philosophy on board, members of University of Waterloo's Department of Philosophy began the search for very, very small philosophical questions. (An added bonus of this quest, if successful, would be that the oft-heard complaint that philosophy never definitively resolves anything would be soundly rebutted.) Since then, a whole team of dedicated researchers have contributed their suggestions. Here is the list so far:

Metaphysics

- What is the sound of two hands clapping?
- Is there something rather than nothing?
- Is the universe made up wholly of Leibniz's gonads?
- Is this the best of all actual worlds?
- Which came first, the chicken or the omelette?

Theology

- How many Angelinos can dance on the head of a Finn?
- Does 'God' exist?
- Is there life after birth?
- Can the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God be reconciled with the existence of Elvis? (This is the Problem of Elvis.)

Philosophy of Mind and Language

- Can a Chinese man in a room understand Chinese symbols?
- If a human could speak, could we understand it?
- Is there a relationship between language and talk?
- Could a machine stink?
- What is it like to be a baseball?
- If a mad scientist replaced my original brain with a silicon brain, would my shoes still fit?

Ethics

- Is it permissible to harm none to save five?
- Is abortion always obligatory?
- Can we derive an 'is' from an 'is'?
- Do two wrongs ever make more than one wrong?
- Does 'human existence' have any meaning?

- If you're standing on a track, and a trolley is coming right at you, should you get out of the way?
- Would you rather be Socrates satisfied or a pig dissatisfied?

Philosophy of Science

- Can science be naturalized?
- Is classical mechanics consistent with Newton's laws?

History of Philosophy

In what ways did the later Wittgenstein influence Hume?

Aesthetics

- Is there any difference at all between expensive art and cheap art?

Epistemology

- Can we tell an arse from a hole in the ground
- How would things look if the Earth rotated on its axis?