I exist

Abstract

Why is there something rather than nothing? Probably the most profound question that can be asked. In this paper, a rather unexpected simple solution is provided. The solution comes from analysing the truth value of the proposition "I exist." It will be shown that this proposition is always true, so our existence is a logical necessity. Speculations about the implications over the universe as a whole are then provided.

Introduction

The most amazing fact about the world is that it exists at all. How can that be so? Was the world created? But this doesn't solve anything, because who created the creator? Does the world then exists by itself? Why is that? Is it a logical necessity that the world should have existed? Or the answer lies beyond any human capacity now and anytime in the future? Will the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" remain forever unanswered? In this paper, a shockingly unexpected simple answer will be provided, and this ultimate question will be proved to be neither that difficult, nor that illuminating. After all, we are expecting that by finding the answer to this question, we will basically find all the answers about the universe. After all, the answer to the ultimate question should have built-in the answers to all the mysteries of the universe. Unfortunately, it will turn out that nothing can be further from the truth.

The answer to the ultimate question is supposed to come by the methods of Physics. Physics is supposed to be the most fundamental science, and by researching the Universe on the largest and smallest scales, it will eventually find a set of physical laws self-consistent and that self-consistency will be the reason why there is a world. So far, Physics is nowhere-near finding that set of laws. More than this, it always thought that it is finally close to the end, but as the time passed, complexity in the laws uncovered by Physics increased. Can we ever hope that there will be an end? Even more troublesome for Physics is that it faces a problem that so far has no way of tackling it: consciousness. As many phenomena Physics uncovered in the objective ontology, consciousness presents us with an inner world much richer than the one uncovered by Physics. A radical paradigm shift is expected if we ever want to make true sense of the world. In a final explanation, consciousness must be there. There are 2 ways in which consciousness is supposed to fit in the final picture of the world: either as the central feature from which everything else derives, or just as a random phenomenon. Much of today materialist science hastily assumes that consciousness is generated by the brain activity, so it could not possibly play any major role in our fundamental view of the world. This is not a paper about consciousness as such, so we will not go deeper in the problem of exactly how important will consciousness be in our final view of the world. But the solution provided here to the "Why is there something rather than nothing?" question, will inevitably place the Self on the central spot.

Concepts

One problem of which Physics suffers is its contingent concepts with which it deals. Force, mass, energy, atoms, space, time, spin, gravitation, electricity, etc. All these concepts have no logical justification. The way in which they were constructed is by observing regularities in nature and naming their various parts. When you ask a

physicist what a "force" is for example, all he can do is to give you an empirical explanation where this concept applies and then provides you with a set of equations and their range of applicability. But no one can tell what a "force" actually is. So then, we should be suspicious that it represents anything meaningful. Or in the best case, we should be suspicious that it is an irreducible concept. A final theory of the world should be able to tell what all its concepts actually are, and not just point to empirical facts from where those concepts were derived rather arbitrary.

But even if we request from a final theory that its concepts are clearly specified, how would such concepts look like? With what kind of concepts can a final theory deal with? From what we see today from Physics, the concepts involved in explaining the world become more and more abstract and few people can understand them. So, is there any reason to expect that a final explanation will be given using clear concepts to everyone?

And then there is a problem in logic. Take the simplest case of a logical analysis:

All humans are mortal. Socrates is a human. So Socrates is mortal.

The concepts involved in the analysis (humans, mortal, Socrates), although easily understandable, are as contingent as the ones in Physics. But we are still able to make a logical inference using them. This is one of the problems of consciousness: What is understanding? How can we understand anything at all? How can we manipulate concepts in a logical manner, even though the concepts themselves have no logical justification?

So the program of finding a final theory with clear concepts that can be more than contingent seems impossible. How can we find a concept that doesn't require anything outside of itself that can explain why the world exists? These are the basis of this paper attempt at providing the answer to the ultimate question. So we need a set of concepts as clear as possible. And of course, the explanation should make sense.

Justifications for a final theory

We thus need to find concepts that can be familiar to everyone, and at the same time independent of any cultural background or even natural background. For example, the concept of "earth" might be familiar to everyone, but it is not a universal concept. A being that might live his entire life in cosmos, might not have this concept. But he nevertheless should also be able to arrive at the same final theory. So it seems that no such concepts should be searched in the outside physical world. Then we are left with the concepts that can be derived directly from consciousness. But we are again faced with the same problem. Even though we might assume that all people see if not red, then at least white, this is again not a universal concept, because there might be beings without any sense of seeing. What are then those concepts that we can be confident enough that can be found in any being? The only concepts that I can think of are the concept of "self" and the concept of "existence". Any being on Earth is a self and it has some sense that it exists. It can also be generalized to any being in the universe. It is very hard to imagine that there can be beings that are not selves, that their consciousness is not unified. This is thus our first justification for trying to find a theory in terms of the concept of "self" and the concept of "existence".

There is another justification about the way in which a final theory should look like. This comes from the reflection upon the nature of existence. Existence can be classified into contingent and necessary. Objects such as galaxies, planets, mountains, rivers, atoms, molecules, are contingent objects. There doesn't appear to be any reason why these objects should exist, and not other objects. On the other hand, there are the necessary objects, such as numbers, mathematics, logic. Even if you were to imagine a universe devoid of all the objects, of any space-time, you would still have the abstract necessary objects. So a simple answer to the "Why is there something rather than nothing?" question is that there are the necessary objects that simply are. But this answer is not the one that we are looking for. We are rather more interested in why is there a concrete world. Nevertheless, a final theory should contain objects existent in any possible worlds. And the necessary objects are such concepts. You can, for example, make a virtual reality. The beings in that virtual reality will also discover the abstract objects. So we need them in our theory. There are already such theories. Mathematics is basically a natural science which explores the world of numbers. But so far, nothings came out of Mathematics that can explain the

concrete world. Some philosophers are talking about 3 modes of existence: mathematical, physical and mental, with mysteries between them: Mathematics describes the physical world, the physical world gives birth to conscious beings, and the conscious beings are able to understand Mathematics. How are all these possible remains unknown. How can there be any link between a concrete being such as a conscious being, and an abstract object such a number?

So a final theory of existence, should contain objects independent of any contingent circumstance. "Galaxies" are not a good object to base your theory on. "Atoms" are also not a good object to base your theory on. The only objects that you can be sure of, are the necessary objects.

From the two justifications about the way in which a final theory should look like, we arrive at two conclusions: it should contain objects that can be accessible to anyone, and it should contain objects that are necessary truths. We saw earlier the suggestion that the self and its existence should be objects accessible to anyone, even to an insect. But at this point we don't have any proof that they are also necessary objects. As far as we can tell, they are just as contingent as the galaxies or the atoms. The self even appeared very late in the history of the universe, so clearly it doesn't appear to be a necessary truth. But let's proceed and see if we can come to the conclusion that they are actually necessary truths.

I exist – a first logical analysis

For the beginning, I will directly present the logical proof, without much explanation. But because at every step there are misunderstandings that can arise, I will then treat them separately to the best of my ability. Because of the unexpected simplicity of the proof, there will always be suspicions among the readers that they are actually facing the answer to the ultimate question. So even though the proof might be logically sound, the reader might still have difficulties in accepting it. This is why I will later try to emphasize that this is really the answer to the ultimate question. That being said, let's present the Proof. (I will capitalize it to be easy to refer to it later in the text.) We will analyse two propositions in two different cases. Let's first take the case when I'm alive, and find the truth value of the two propositions:

I exist. – true
I don't exist. – false

Now let's analyse the same two propositions for the case when I will not be alive.

I exist. – the truth value cannot be evaluated.
I don't exist. – the truth value cannot be evaluated.

As we can see, the proposition "I exist." can only have one truth value and that is "true". We thus conclude that the proposition "I exist." is always true, so it is a necessary truth. Being a necessary truth, it cannot fail to be true. Being always true, it means that I always exist. We thus arrive at an answer to the ultimate question: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Because "I exist." is always true, so my existence is a necessary truth.

This is the entire proof. Of course, usually more argumentation is requested for a proper understanding of an idea. But in principle, the idea can be understood only from the above proof. The analysis that I will undertake next, can be skipped completely if the idea has already been understood. There are several misunderstandings that can cloud the essence of the proof. Because of this, is good to help eliminate as much of the confusion as possible.

First person vs. third person

The first suspicion that might arise is that the proof presented can be applied to demonstrate the existence of anything. Let's see if this really is the case. We will do the same analysis, but this time not for "I", but for John. Let's take the case when John is alive.

John exists. – true
John doesn't exist. – false

So far, the results seem identical with the case of "I". Let's now take the case when John is dead.

John exists. – false
John doesn't exist. – true

As we can see, the case for John now differs from the case of "I". So the argument presented for "I" doesn't have a general validity. It only works for "I". Why is that? Having now spelled the difference through this second example, it's time to understand why the Proof works. The strength of the Proof is that it is being done from the first

person perspective, while the John case is done from the third person perspective. And this is probably the element of the Proof that is prone to confusion. It needs to be understood very clearly what the "I" is. When I say "I exist.", I don't say "I, John, exist.". I only say "I exist." without identifying myself with the person that people from the outside call "John". I'm only referring to the subject of experience, but not from a third person perspective, but from its own first person perspective. So when John dies, it only dies for the people observing it from the outside. Because of this, people from the outside can say "John doesn't exist." But I, after I die, it is impossible for me to say "I don't exist." This proposition cannot be evaluated anymore in the same way that the proposition "John doesn't exist." can still be evaluated from the outside. It is impossible to have an "I" that is observing its own inexistence. The "I" can only observe its existence. Because of this, the evaluation from the first person perspective can only be done when the "I" is alive. "I exist." is true when the "I" is alive, and "I don't exist." is false when the "I" is alive. But when the "I" is no longer existent, the propositions "I exist." and "I don't exist." cannot be evaluated. There is another aspect that we have to be careful here. Because of our language, we employ expressions such as: "When the "I" is no longer existent". But this is just a sloppy expression, because it treats the "I" in the same way it treats "John". We have to be careful here. What I really want to say is that from the first person perspective, the evaluation can only be done from a state in which I exist. So "I exist." will always be found to be true and "I don't exist." is always found to be false. There is no such thing as a non-existence state for the "I" from the first person perspective. So it is impossible to say that there is a way in which the "I" doesn't exist and still it evaluates the proposition "I don't exist." as being true. The only thing that can be said is that John doesn't exist, and from the outside, from a third person perspective, "John doesn't exist." is evaluated as true. But from John first person perspective, there is no way in which he can evaluate the proposition "I don't exist." as being true.

We conclude once again, that the proposition "I exist." is always true. So being always true, it is a logically necessary fact that I (always) exist. I hope that my arguments above have been understood. I could go one like that for many more pages, repeating the same reasons from a lot of other perspectives, but I hope that the arguments that I presented are enough for grasping the idea.

Eternal vs. temporal

There is another confusion that needs to be clarified, and that is the distinction between eternal and temporal. Because it appears that although "I don't exist." indeed cannot be evaluated from a state of non-existence of the "I", John still dies. So it appears that although John cannot evaluate its own inexistence when he doesn't exist anymore, this doesn't matter, because from the third person perspective, he is dead anyway. What needs to be understood here, is that the argument is actually not about John, but about I. This is a subtle, but profound distinction. I don't identify myself with John. I am only identified as John from the outside, and as a matter of fact, I also adopted the expression: "My name is John." But this is not the same as my Self. The "I" is different from John. The "I" is the observer, is the subject of experience, is an entity that has a first person perspective. So the fact that John dies, doesn't say anything about what happens to the Self. What is identified from the outside as "John" can indeed enter a state of non-existence. But "I" cannot do that. "I" cannot be defined as having a state of non-existence. So how are we then to understand the fact that "I exist." is always true, so I always exist? The truth value of the proposition "I exist." needs to be understood from an eternal perspective. To easily visualise this, imagine the case of sleeping. From the outside, there is a state when you are identified as being awake and another state when you are identified as being asleep. But from your own first person perspective, there is no state in which you are asleep. You are always awake. The "I" is always awake. From the third person perspective, there is a temporal manifestation of John when he is both awake and asleep. But from the first person perspective, there is no temporal manifestation when I'm asleep. (beware again of the sloppy expression. "I" can never be asleep.) The conclusions are straightforward. There is no temporal manifestation for the Self of John after John dies. A billion years can pass. But there will be a point when the Self will exist again. We will talk more about this later when we dive into speculations about the universe. But for now, it is important to make the distinction between eternal and temporal. "I exist." being a necessary truth, is

also eternal. It is not temporal. Temporality is only an illusion. And indeed it is a problem that needs to be solved in the future. The fact that I exist through time is only an appearance. I can only exist in an eternal fashion. We are only experiencing the present, the eternal present. "I" only exists in the present. Indeed, various experiences happen to the Self, but the Self is eternal, living in the eternal present. It is irrelevant that from a temporal perspective there might be a period of time of 1 billion years when no life exists in the universe. For the "I", that 1 billion years doesn't represent an experience, so it doesn't exist. But since "I exist." is eternal, from the first person perspective the "I" must always experience itself. So, from a third person temporal perspective, there will be again a time when life will be present. Before talking about the implications over the universe, let me strengthen the Proof with another perspective.

Self-referentiality

Another objection to the Proof is that it tries to assert a universal truth starting from the particular case of my existence. But this is not so. The argument presented in the Proof is actually an abstract argument, that doesn't involve at all my factual existence. It was indeed presented in terms of the factual case of my existence, because in my opinion it is easy to be understood if presented in that manner. But the actual strength of the argument comes from the self-referential proposition "I exist.". Let's now analyse this proposition in a strictly abstract and formal manner. This proposition contains the subject "I", which is a first-person entity, and the predicate "exist", which is what the "I" is doing. This proposition is self-referentiating itself. The proposition points from the subject to the subject and affirms that it exists. But since this reference can be done only as long that there is an "I" to start with, this mean that it is true by its very construction. The "I" will always notice its existence because of the fact that it will always point to itself. So the proposition "I exist." will always be true by its very construction. Be careful here! We are only analysing the structure of the proposition, we are not talking yet about anything factual. We are only analysing the truth value of an abstract self-referential proposition. And because of its very structure, we arrive at the conclusion that it is always true. So "I exist." is always true. Only now we can make the step from abstract to factual. Since the proposition "I exist." is always true, then it simply means that I exist; always. To strengthen our understanding of this analysis, we can contrast it again with the third person perspective. The proposition "John exists." is a proposition that points outside of itself, towards John. So its truth value depends on the existence of John. But since John's existence is contingent: at one time he exists, at another he doesn't, the truth value of the proposition "John exists." is also contingent, so it is not a necessary truth.

Another point that can strengthen our analysis is the meaning of the concept of "existence". This is the only concept that assures the proper self-referentiality of "I exist." and its necessary truth value of "true". It is not only "I" that creates the proper self-referentiality, but "I" together with "exist". To emphasize what I mean by this, take for example the proposition "I walk." Even though "I" is also in this case a self-referential concept, the property that it self-refers is the walking. But the concept of "walking" doesn't have the proper meaning that the concept of "existence" has, and so the proposition "I walk." is a contingent one. "I exist." is the only proposition in its class. The type of analysis that has been done in this paper, is only applicable to the proposition "I exist." This is not to say that there can be no other propositions that are necessary truths (beside Mathematics). There most probably are. But they don't support this analysis.

The Universe

Let's reflect now upon what kind of universe this truth entails. Since the Self is the central piece of this world view, the strong anthropic principle becomes true. But it is interesting to see how exactly the strong anthropic principle manifests itself under this new truth. Because the fact that "I exist." is always true, this means that there will always be at least one being in the universe at some point in time. The exact moment in time when the being is alive is irrelevant. As we saw for the case of sleeping, it is irrelevant that from a third person perspective, there is a time interval of 8 hours when your body is not animated by any self. From the first person perspective, those 8 hours don't exist, and the experience of being awake is continuous. The same phenomenon has to take place across the vast time spans of the universe. Actually, it has to take place forever. From the first person

perspective, I always have to exist. The straight-forward implication is that the universe is unable to die. The universe must always produce life or other forms of manifestations of the Self. The universe is sustained in existence by the fact that the Self must always experience itself. This is not to say that there will be no temporal periods with no conscious activity. There will be. They might even be as long as trillions of years. But even so, after those trillions years, there will inevitably be new beings that can allow the Self to experience itself. You cannot cheat this truth. You can kill all the life on all the planets in the universe. You can throw all the planets in the stars. You can throw all the stars into black-holes. All these are irrelevant. The universe will always find a way to give birth to life again, because the truth "I exist." is eternal.

This truth is a powerful torch in our search for the ultimate laws of the universe. What we need to do is to answer the question: "How is the universe constructed such that it will last forever and it will always give birth to conscious beings?" We can picture the universe as a potential well with the Self at the bottom. No matter in what state along the potential well the universe is situated, it will always get to the bottom of the well and allow the Self to exist. So any physical theory that predicts the death of the universe is false. You cannot obstruct the Self from existing. So concepts such as entropy are impossible in any possible worlds. No matter what, "I exist." is a necessary truth.

Open problems

We will now talk about the two most immediate problems. Even though we proved the truth of the Self eternal existence, there are two immediate problems that arise when we compare this truth with the actual way in which the world is. Compared to the eternal way in which this truth exists, we nonetheless live in a temporal world. A way must be found to understand where time comes from. An intuition is already telling us that time derives automatically from the nature of the Self. Even though "I exist." is eternal, we still feel intuitively that we need change in order for our existence to be meaningful. So somehow, time is directly emergent from the very fact that the Self exists necessarily. However, this intuition must be grounded in serious logical justification of the same kind that we did in this paper to prove the truth of the proposition "I exist.".

The second problem is the existence of multiple instantiations of the Self. As compared to the first problem where we intuitively feel that time must indeed derives from "I exist.", the existence of multiple Selves seems quite puzzling. Why should there be more than one Self? I have no further ideas to say about this second problem. But I nevertheless think that it too should be solved using logical reasoning in which the multiplicity should be shown to be also a necessary truth.

In the ending of this paper, I would like to reflect a little on the nature of questions and answers. One of the many problems of consciousness is the way in which by asking the proper questions, we get to arrive at right answers. This is a remarkable fact. When I ask: "What is the result of 1+1?", I don't just get a randomly "1+1=5" in my mind, but I get the correct answer. How is this possible? And this phenomenon happens even more impressively when we do science and ask questions never asked before and for which there is no known answer. We nonetheless are able to find the answers. And the way in which the answer arrives in our consciousness is not by a numerous set of random answers, but only the correct answer appears in our mind. When Einstein asked himself how it is to ride on a light beam, he surely didn't get in his consciousness the answer "because aliens on Mars are green" and then another set of thousands similarly absurd answers. But the answer more or less came directly and in very close connection to the question.

So it seems that there is some kind of 1-to-1 relation between questions and answers. Given this fact, it shouldn't surprise us that by asking the ultimate question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" we didn't solve all the mysteries of the universe. The answer that we obtained is only answering this question. The journey is not over. And in this manner it will never be. It appears that no matter how profound a question might be, it will only have one answer, an answer that will only answer that specific question and no more. So we will have to keep asking questions in order to find how the world is. There will never be a magical question by whose answer we will be able to know everything.