

*“We have to entertain the possibility that there is no reason for something existing; or that the split between subject and object is only our name for something equally accidental we call knowledge; or, an even more difficult thought, that while there may be some order to the self and the cosmos, to the microcosm and macrocosm, it is an order that is absolutely indifferent to our existence.”*

In this essay I am going to examine the three propositions put forth by the author of the quote about the fundamental metaphysical nature of the cosmos and our knowledge of and relation to it. My analysis will be from the ground up as much as possible, and use as small a number of premises as I can get away with. As far as I agree with him, I will present a coherent logical framework for why we indeed “have” to do the things he proposes, and, in the light of my analysis, present an alternate proposition where I do not agree.

### 1) The possibility that there is no reason for something existing.

The first point of examination is what exactly is meant when he speculates about “something” which “exists”. Given that the second proposition refers to a split between subject and object, we can safely assume that the “something” from the first proposition refers to the notion of an objective reality. Our first question now becomes: How likely is it for an outside, so-called objective reality to “exist”, meaning in this context “be there without the existence of a sentient observer”?

What data do we possess for certain that is relevant to the answer? Firstly, we know, that we, the thinking subject asking this very question, exist, precisely because we are thinking - *cogito, ergo sum*. Secondly, we know that we possess sensory data suggesting the existence of an outside world. How do we explain the existence of this sensory data? One possibility is that we actually possess senses which give us sensory knowledge of an objective reality. Another possibility, known as radical doubt, proposes that our “sensory knowledge” is faked, that there is no outside world, only the illusion of it in our minds, created by an entity which has some reason for doing so. Since this deception likely appears immoral to us, we would presume the entity to be malevolent, especially when considering that we have trouble coming up with a morally acceptable reason for such a deception. How likely is the second possibility? When comparing the number of premises needed to sustain it - the fakeness of our sensory data, the entity which fakes them, etc. - with the premise of the existence of a physical reality, then the second possibility simply does not stand up to Occam’s razor or any other methodological approach for assessing the plausibility of a scenario. There are more assumptions with smaller likelihood that need to be taken for it, including malevolent action by one of the presumed agents, than for the concurring hypothesis. Therefore, we discard it and postulate the existence of a physical objective reality existing independently of a subjective observer. Please note that this does not include any statement about the accuracy or completeness of our sensory perception.

Since we have now postulated that something exists, we can now ponder whether there is a necessity for existence to have a reason. The reason most commonly put forward is a deity, with whom you can then play this game *ad infinitum*: What is the reason for the deity to exist? And the reason for that reason? But is it necessary to have a reason for existence? That existence exists is a conclusion derived directly from our most elemental knowledge, even more directly than the existence of causality. Why, then, do we treat it as an effect instead of a cause? It makes much more sense for us to treat it as one of the fundamental axioms needed to make any sense of what we perceive whatsoever. Insofar I agree with the author that we need to consider the possibility of the lack of a reason for something to exist, even though I'd phrase it even more strongly: We need to consider the high probability for no agent-like or other reason for existence to exist.

2) The split between subject and object is only our name for something equally accidental which we call knowledge.

We have already taken "object" to refer to an arbitrary part of an outside, objective, physical reality. The subject, therefore, is the "inside" - a self-conscious being possessing sentience and a subjective notion of the physical reality of which it is a part. Why would this split be accidental?

Because the existence of a subject is no necessary requirement for objective reality to exist. When a tree falls in the woods, it produces sound waves, whether or not someone is there to hear a sound. There is no reason why a living object would have to become self-aware except for an accident in the course of evolution - a biological being whose brain's world-simulation became so advanced that it turned capable of recognizing the existence of itself as an entity and then of recognizing that it was capable of recognizing itself. So the split between subject and object was indeed accidental - what is it, then, that we refer to as knowledge?

Knowledge is the information the subject has about its surrounding reality comprised of objects. Since the subject itself is accidental, any consequences of the subject's existence are equally accidental as the subject, as long as we talk about the existence of subject and object. I would now like to return to my earlier reminder and state that our knowledge is indeed incomplete and, with a very high likelihood, flawed, meaning inaccurate in terms of referring to reality. The reasons for this will become important when discussing the third proposition.

Is the split between subject and object only our name for our subjective knowledge? Without this split there could, by definition, be no subjective knowledge - including our knowledge of our, the subject's, existence, which is, again *per definitionem*, part of the total sum of our knowledge. The split between object and subject is a necessary condition for the subject to know anything - for anyone to have any knowledge whatsoever. Our idea of subjective knowledge is intimately tied to the idea that we are subjects and that there are objects of

which to have knowledge of. But to call the necessary preconditions for something the same as that which exists seems like a rhetorical imprecision to me.

It would make more sense if knowledge referred to the knowledge of our subjectivity, but knowledge also refers to data, taken as facts, that we have about the physical reality that would be there without us, and logical statements which are objectively sensical. I therefore agree with that which is said, but not with the way in which it is stated.

3) While there may be some order to the self and the cosmos, the microcosm and the macrocosm, that order is absolutely indifferent to our existence.

What, precisely, is referred to here as “order”? If order means the existence of causality, having as a consequence a logical universe, then yes, it is a part of the necessary assumptions, called premises, which we make in order to make sense of anything. It is, in itself, a cause which is not bothered by any of its effects, including the existence of some self-aware entities. That is the kind of order that governs the cosmos and the macrocosm, and the microcosm - where physical reality is concerned.

I have already made note of the fact that our inner representation of the outside world - no, accurately: of an infinitesimally small subset of the physical world - that constitutes a part of our knowledge is neither complete nor necessarily accurate. It is necessary to examine this proposition further. The representation of the outside world which we have in our heads - our world simulation, a consequence of the evolutionary origin of our species, as it must obviously have presented an advantage - is build on the basis of our sensory perception. Since it is in itself a self-contained, complete-in-itself world (albeit one that does not consist of physical objects and is indeed in absolutely no way what we know as objective “reality” even though its main purpose is to reflect reality), this gives us two possible ways to describe “the world” that are internally complete and logically consistent.

The first one is, obviously, the physical plane of existence with material objects, whose entities have physical and chemical properties and know no other laws than the law of causality and other laws of physics - even the ones we haven’t discovered yet.

The second internally logical manner of describing a world is the world as it seems to the mind of human beings. Because our world-representation has evolved along with our species, the properties it assigns to objects are those of whether it poses a potential useful resource to us or a danger, similarly to how we divide the whole of other subjects we encounter into the most basic categories of friend or enemy. Of course our world-representation can be a whole lot more sophisticated than that - but those are the fundamental issues it concerns itself with. It views the world in relation to the subject to whom it belongs, and it fills the gap within its data with assumptions generated on the basis of real or assumed patterns, and sometimes, when the data presents it with contradictions, it alters them according to those assumptions (as can be observed with e.g. optical illusions). This is the world of the “self” which is predominantly concerned with the microcosm - and the

laws of causality that govern it have the actions taken as consequence of the individual will of its subjects as their origin and end.

This internal world-representation of ours has a number of other particularities. For one, there are concepts which seemingly are a logical necessity for the external world to be internally logically consistent but which we cannot model due to a lack of sensory data. Our mind can only model - imagine - things that have some sort of grounding in the data generated from its perception which it already has available. There is no possible way for us to perceive either eternity or nothingness, nor can we process the absurd number of dimensions which e.g. String theory requires. Our lack of ability to mentally handle either of the first two has given fertile soil for the wildest superstitions to grow on.

Another peculiarity is our desire to see agents at work in every place where we can possibly do so. This also is a plausible consequence of our species' evolutionary origin. When I watch my garden during the transition from daytime to twilight to night, it seems to come alive - there are suddenly foxes sneaking around every corner, owls on every branch, mice behind the movements of each blade of grass - but when I use a flashlight or an infrared camera to verify my observations, it was mere grass-blades, leaves or stones almost each and every time. This is not a result of my personal overactive imagination, but of human being's tendency to see an agent at work where there is none. It is very logical why such a tendency would have presented an advantage over the course of evolution. It is beneficial to me if I mistakenly think that a tree in my garden is a burglar nine hundred ninety-nine times rather than overlook the burglar a single time. It is beneficial to me if I am frequently spooked by the wind moving the prairie's grass rather than not notice the saber-toothed tiger only a single time. But sometimes we want to see agents at work where it makes absolutely no logical sense to do so - where it may even be harmful to do so, as the benefits have always outweighed the harm.

This is the reason for the citation's assertion that we must "entertain the possibility" that there is no relatable agent as a reason behind existence - it is not only difficult to think for us and has been even harder at other times in human history, it is also precisely not what we *want* to think. We want the world to conform to the bias that have served us well in the past, and there is a reason why we discard them so unwillingly in even when it concerns only a single instance and there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

This is the reason why he refers to the origin of our knowledge as "equally as accidental" as our knowledge itself in the way he does - as something which is inherently hard for us to accept. In our world of agents, human beings want to be special - we want to be a species with a purpose and a less profane origin than an accident of evolution, we want to be the center of the world and have the sun around us.

This is the reason why he refers to his last proposition - that the order of the cosmos is indifferent to our existence - as the one which is the hardest of all to accept. An agent would not be indifferent to us. An agent could (possibly) be bargained with. We might be able to influence him in turn, as he has influenced us. If there were an agent, we would not be alone. If there were an agent, our life would be easier - or that is what we like to think.

This is the reason why the citation's author presents his propositions as truths which are hard, but necessary to accept. Up until this point, I have agreed with him. The things which

we least want to hear are very frequently the very things which we need to integrate if we want to go forward, to grow and evolve. Now we have come to the point where I, at least in part, have to beg to differ.

Only because the author of a book called "In the Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy" presents us with bleak and depressing truths does not mean that our outlook on life has to be equally fatalistic. In the end, what matters are the things that matter to us - are relevant to us, for our life, future and happiness.

The order of the world referred to in the citation must be the impersonal logic of the physical universe, since otherwise the assertion that it is not concerned with us - that we have no influence over it - makes considerably less sense. But the world in which we live is not the impersonal and unfeeling physical universe, it is a microcosm which is neither obligated to be depressing nor overwhelming - and which our acts can shape according to our will. It is by definition not indifferent to us, since it is us who created it, who maintain it and update and transform it - whether we want to do this or not.

Of course we ought to seek truth, a metaphysical value with practical benefits. It relates to the "update your worldview" part from the enumeration above which we can not get out of no matter how hard we try, and which for which I hope to have provided us with some applicable tools in this essay.

They are, most importantly, a very rudimentary and incomplete and likely flawed sketch of how our perception introduces systemic bias into our worldview. I would like to present this sketch as a contribution for further thoughts on how we can approach our mental world-representation as much as possible to the actual world - how we can insert as much truth into our worldview as is possible to us.

We are human beings, with a will and with desires. We need sustenance to survive in this world, we need to take action to obtain it - and in order to act, we need to have a vision for what ought to be that we can strive to realise. But before our assessment of what "ought to be" can be of any value whatsoever, we need to accurately assess "what is". It is the only way for human beings to live in this world, and for philosophers in particular. That is the aim with which I have written this essay.

Lastly, I want to give a reason for why I think that our knowledge of the universe has to be neither bleak, nor depressing or fatalistic. It is simple:

Why would it have to be so? We cannot change what is, but we can decide what we do with it. All of those negative attributes above, which seem to be implicit in the tone of the citation, seem to me like a not very useful attitude to have. So why have that attitude?

It's my life and my choice. I choose according to my goals and values, and I do "pursue happiness" in the way the one who popularised this expression intended it.