

# Review of: "Why Existence? An Explanation with No Remainder"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

There are some interesting ideas in this paper, but also some matters that are worth working on. It is hard to discern exactly what the author feels he is bringing that is new to the debates (as opposed, for example, to gathering scholarship from elsewhere, such as that of Leslie and Steinsaltz, and connecting it together – which can be a useful project in itself). So what is being brought to the table that is original should be signposted more clearly and precisely at the beginning of the paper. Relatedly, by the end I wasn't entirely sure what the conclusion was.

Some of the discussion is a bit broadbrush and allusive, and lines are taken on contentious topics without sufficient acknowledgement that these are contested. Certain argumentative sections and positions could be elaborated further and supported. Towards the end of the paper (later sections of 4 onwards), the lines of thought become increasingly murky. A number of conceptual points that are referenced (such as the various questions of disambiguation of meanings in section 1.1) need to be made good on; as it is they seem to be merely dropped.

Overall, I think the author has some marshalled some interesting material which could form the basis of a thought-provoking paper, but more clarity and argumentative rigour is needed, as well as a sense of what is being added to the debate, before the true value of what he has to say can be assessed.

Specific comments follow:

Section 1.1:

The discussion of fine-tuning doesn't seem relevant to the question this article is trying to deal with.

'who in n Book 6' – delete 'n'.

I think it will be important for the author to sort out whether he wants to class certain 'items' as 'abstractions' or as 'abstract entities'.

I find the final sentence of the penultimate paragraph of this section opaque: clarify.

Is the author planning to answer the 'Why this?' question as well as 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' Be clearer about the aims of this article.

Section 1.2:

“Why did you move to Florida” needs a question mark.

I'm not sure I see the 'Why? that asks for a reason' as the more pressing question. I think the author needs to do more support this; that Deep Thought's answer seems partly absurd as it provides nothing of value does not show that the reason-question is more pressing. And the appeal to 'God' surely only *partly* seems satisfying due to the axiological element that God brings. Surely it also seems satisfying due to the explanatory element, and so is on all fours with the point about Deep Thought (albeit inversely, as an answer appealing to God provides both, whereas Deep Thought's answer lacks both).

The sentences 'However, the appeal to God suffers from the same infinite regress problem as the scientific explanations we have discussed above. This is because it leaves us with a new mystery, this time regarding the existence of God, his will, and his purposes' are far too underdeveloped; thousands of years of philosophical work has been spent on attempts to show that appeals to God do not suffer from such problems. Rather than this kind of overreaching offhand comment, it would be more judicious for the author just to say that he does not want to look at this literature and wants to explore a different line.

The verbs 'reveal' and 'is' at the end of the last sentence of this section don't agree.

Section 1.3:

Odd capitalisation in the first sentence of this section.

Section 2.1:

For the first paragraph here, the author may find Bergson's discussion of nothing in *Creative Evolution* a good source for the argument concerning the impossibility of emptying one's thoughts that he is considering.

I'd like to see a citation (rather than 'it is said') for the claim that possibility is a 'something' even in the absence of all existence.

I don't see how x can be a condition for y's existence and yet not be represented at all; the author is representing these gaps in some fashion to us through use of analogy. Maybe we have to cancel this analogy once we understand it, but then I am reminded of Wittgenstein's ultimately unsuccessful (in the opinion of many) claim that we have to use the *Tractatus*' propositions as a ladder that we throw away after we get to where we want to go.

Section 2.2

Leslie's dictum ('... we could not fancy ...') doesn't seem obvious to me. Suppose we define nothingness as the absence of reality. Logical laws govern every possible state of reality. But if there is no reality, due to there being nothing, there is no reason to suppose that logical laws exist.

I don't see how the claim that actuality entails possibility helps here. It may be that actuality entails possibility, and so our universe is possible, but if there had been nothing, there would have been no actual universe to entail its own possibility.

I found the gloss on ‘synthetic necessities’ a bit elliptical; elaboration would be welcome.

### Section 2.3

This first paragraph gets things backwards; philosophers and physicists didn’t first believe in fine-tuning and then as a result believe in that the laws of nature were metaphysically contingent – they believe that the laws were metaphysically contingent and so the fine-tuning of them needed to be explained. (So I don’t withdraw my earlier comment that discussion of fine-tuning is unnecessary for this article.)

Delete comma after ‘Elon Musk’.

Add ‘be’ after ‘speed of light could’.

‘ . . . the modal realist view that all possible worlds exist . . . ’ I take it the author means Lewis’ theory of the metaphysics of possible worlds. But all possible worlds exist in actualist theories, which are the main rival to Lewis’ theory (indeed, they even *actually* exist, unlike Lewis’ possible worlds). I’d just delete this parenthesis.

### Section 2.4

In the second paragraph ‘significance’, ‘value’, and ‘meaning’ are run together; I would be attentive to potential differences between these.

It doesn’t seem obvious to me that the universe could not have a purpose at all until purpose, meaning and value developed within it. If God’s existence is possible, then God could have created a universe which had a purpose right from its inception.

The discussion of life’s meaning is rather contentious and makes a number of assumptions; many philosophers believe there is no meaning *of* life in the absence of some external bestower of meaning, and that only meaning in life is possible if such absence is the case.

There is a significant philosophical literature on retroactive causation; it might be helpful to consult this.

I find this section rather too allusive and speculative.

### Section 2.5

‘ . . . and Plato himself seems to have deeply considered Pythagorean this view’ Grammar?

‘pre-existent’ for ‘pre-existence’.

I don’t think it’s just a linear temporal view that leads us to regard logic as foundational; logic seems implicit in any form of reason-giving, including reason-giving by values.

### Section 3.1

Full stop between ‘value’ and ‘Hegel’.

The interpretation of Hegel on Sense-Certainty here is, to say the least, controversially phrased – it’s a very Kantian reading.

Re: the claim that values are ‘constitutive’ of both consciousness and the world, presumably this can only mean ‘partly constitutive’? If the claim is more radical than that it seems unsupported by the foregoing.

‘ . . . something analogous to causation survives our decommissioning of time . . . ’ I’d like to hear more about this.

## Section 3.2

Doesn’t the Humean tradition more commonly state that we can’t obtain ‘ought from is’ (rather than vice-versa)?

Will you be analysing the idea that abstracta (which, presumably, values are) can be causally efficacious? This seems very important; it is often taken to be a criterion of being an abstract object that the object is not causally efficacious.

## Section 4.2

I don’t see why disvalues bringing destruction upon the cosmos makes them a poor candidate to explain its existence – this destruction is not destruction *of* the cosmos (if it were, the disvalues *would* be a poor candidate), but destruction *within* it, which, to allow disvalues to ‘be all they can be’, i.e. to be maximally destructive, requires the continued existence of the cosmos.

## Section 4.3

It is hardly surprising that the consensus amongst naturalists that the architecture of the universe need not be explained by a designer – if they thought it did need to be explained then, given that we are speaking of the architecture of the *universe* (*qua* the totality of nature), they would not be naturalists!

‘Metaverse’ – this new term needs glossing.

## Section 4.4

I find some of the claims in this section somewhat unclear – careful elaboration would be helpful.

## Section 5.1

‘nothing inevitable’ – close quotation marks and add a question mark after ‘nothing’.

‘ . . . our analysis has shown . . . ’ I think we need more clarification here as to how the ‘quest’ referred to, which is surely a human quest, relates to the axiarchial explanation of the universe which is meant to explain the universe’s existence without appeal to concreta.

‘ . . . in a manner that leaves “no remainder” to be explained . . . ’ Why?

## Section 5.2

'I believe it was' – Check the reference.

I don't see how appeal to God requires 'linear thinking'. Both Leibniz and Aquinas argued for God as an explanation for the universe's existence despite accepting the possibility of the temporal pastwards infinitude of the universe.

Footnotes:

Some of these need clearing up:

4 spells Leslie's name incorrectly.

6 and 8 contain what appear to be the author's notes to self.

28 omits a question mark.

34 requires 'D' to be deleted.