

Research Article

Why Existence? The Question is the Answer

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The riddle of existence is approached through an analysis of the meaning and existential significance of the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” It is argued that this question asks for both a *reason* and a *cause* for existence and must (as Plato suggested) involve an appeal to something “beyond existence.” It is further argued that values are objective and (like logic and mathematics) pre-exist the cosmos. It is then demonstrated that values are the only “beyond-existent” that can provide *both a reason and cause for existence*. The author thus suggests that a “quest” for value gives rise to all existence, and that this quest is both linguistically and existentially expressed in the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” As such, this question, as per the dictum of the 16th century Kabbalist Shimon Labis, is its own answer, answering itself without leaving anything to be explained.

“Concerning everything that cannot be grasped its question is its answer” –Shimon Labis, *Ketem Paz*¹

In this essay, I put forward the thesis that an analysis of the meaning and existential significance of the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” leads to the conclusion that the question effectively answers itself. I argue that any answer to this “ultimate question” must reference something that is beyond existence and serve as *both a cause and reason* for everything. I further argue that “values” are objective (and like logic and mathematics), pre-exist the cosmos, and that they are the only “beyond existents” that can provide both a reason and cause for existence. I seek to demonstrate (in accord with Plato’s claim in *Republic*) how it can be that “the Good” is “beyond existence,” and yet “gives existence to all things.” I argue that this conclusion is linguistically and

existentially implicit in the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” and as such, this question, as per the dictum of the 16th century Kabbalist Shimon Labi, “Concerning everything that cannot be grasped its question is its answer,” provides its own answer, one that leaves nothing further to be explained.

1.1. Why is There Something Rather Than Nothing?

The question we are here considering, famously posed by Leibniz²—and later so insistently by Heidegger would seem to be the most basic philosophical question.³ While a scientific explanation of the conditions, causes, and events leading to the present state of the universe may appear to promise an answer, any scientific explanation must invoke antecedent conditions and causes that will themselves require an explanation, and so on, *ad infinitum*, thus leaving the ultimate question unanswered. As Nicholas Rescher has put it, all causal or scientific explanations are “transformational” rather than “formational,” as they all rest upon something that “already is” and thus cannot satisfy the question of how it is that anything exists at all.⁴ Further, even if a scientific explanation could *somehow* provide a causal account of how the universe came into existence it would leave at least part of the “Why” unanswered. As we will see momentarily, this is because a “why” question of the sort “Why is there something rather than nothing?” calls for a “reason” as well as for a “cause.”

While a variety of thinkers have held either that existence is logically necessary⁵ or “natural” and requires no explanation⁶, that non-existence is logically impossible⁷, or that our question is meaningless⁸, unanswerable⁹, or an expression of “awe at existence” as opposed to a genuine question¹⁰, there has in recent years, been a resurgence of interest in the origins of existence, and a number of interesting and in some cases original responses to this question have emerged. Amongst these are sophisticated defenses of the traditional view that God is the origin of the cosmos¹¹ and renewed support for the once-respected notion that intellect or mind lies at the foundation of all existence.¹² It has also been suggested that a “principle of selection” such as “simplicity,” “fullness” or “complexity” must be invoked in order to explain the nature, if not the origin, of the cosmos.¹³ Others have held (not without controversy) that while there are countless ways in which a universe can exist there is only one way in which there could be absolute nothingness, and for this reason, chance and probability alone explain the existence of the cosmos.¹⁴ On the other hand, there are those

who (responding in part to the question of why the universe is the way it is) have held that since there are innumerable ways a universe could exist that are inimical to life and mind, the fact that our universe is “fine-tuned” so as to be hospitable to human existence proves that it was created by intelligent design.¹⁵ And in response to this, it has been said that modern physics suggests that there are countless universes, with countless combinations of physical parameters, and that since we exist, we necessarily find ourselves in one that is hospitable to our existence and thus it only appears to be “fine-tuned”¹⁶

Recent years have seen a revival of the idea that the universe exists to fulfill a certain process, goal or end. For example, David Birnbaum has defended the thesis that the universe was/is in effect ignited by an explosion of “Holy Potential” that embodies a drive for complexity and meaning.¹⁷ A related response advocated by John Leslie¹⁸, and in a rather different form by Nicholas Rescher,¹⁹ holds that the actualization of *value* is what brings the universe into existence. This view can be traced at least as far back as Plato, who in Book 6 of *The Republic* (509b) wrote that “the Good” is “beyond existence,” and yet “gives existence to all things.” It is a view that was held in one form or another by Neoplatonists, Kabbalists, Spinoza, Lotze, and Hegel, and in various forms is present in the writings of several 20th-century philosophers, including Husserl,²⁰ Sorley²¹, and Levinas.²²

As we will see, there have also been suggestions that the universe is created via a form of retroactive causation, and that what we perceive to be a late stage or event in its development is paradoxically a causal factor in its origin.²³

Several of these ideas will play a role in the current analysis.

Efforts to address our ultimate question are handicapped by a certain ambiguity in the relevant terms.²⁴ Granted that the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” asks for an explanation of “all being” or “all existence” as opposed to asking about the origins of the (our) universe or world, several questions remain: What do we mean by “nothing?” What is to be included in “being” or “existence?” Is “potential” or “possibility” to be included as part of “being?” What about abstractions, like those in logic and mathematics? By what criteria can Plato claim that “the good,” clearly an abstraction (some would call it an “abstract entity”) lies “beyond being?” Is there a difference between “being” and “existence”, such that, for example, the explanation of why there is “something” lies beyond existence but nonetheless “is”? Further, there is lack of clarity regarding

what would constitute an adequate answer to our question, i.e. a complete explanation of “everything?”²⁵

My goal in this essay is to pursue an answer to the ultimate question (and hence a complete explanation of “all existence”) through a close examination of both the linguistic meaning and existential significance of the “why” in the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Along the way, I will attempt to provide both a rational and existential justification for the view of the origin of all that appears in different forms in Plato and the Kabbalah and in the works of such thinkers as Sorely, Birnbaum, and Leslie, each of whom gives ontological primacy to value and meaning. However, I go beyond providing a justification for what Leslie has referred to as “axiarchism.” I endeavor to show that an answer to the “ultimate question” not only follows from a deep consideration of the question, but that the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” *is its own answer*, and in this manner leaves us with nothing further to be explained. In the end, the reader will be the judge if my pursuit gets us any closer to an explanation of all (being or) existence, if it does so “without remainder,” or if I have even provided a cogent explanation of the *nature* of our cosmos, an answer to the more limited question, “Why this?” as opposed to “Why anything?”²⁶

1.2. The Meaning of “Why”

Ordinarily, when we ask a “why” question, we are asking for either a *cause* or a *reason*.²⁷ “Why is it raining?” for example, is answered when we provide the antecedent, and presumably causal, meteorological events that have resulted in precipitation. A question like “Why did you move to Florida?” however, is not answered via reference to physical causes, but through an appeal to the reasons, motives, or ends one hoped to achieve by relocating one’s residence. While it is hotly debated whether reasons are themselves “causes,”²⁸ it is clear that when a question is answered with a “reason,” as opposed to a (material) “cause,” a motive involving a value or values must be involved. I might say that I moved to Florida because it will be better for my health, or because I want to enjoy playing golf year-round, or because I need to care for a sick loved one—and in each case, I make an appeal to something I *value*—health, enjoyment, love, etc. A “why” question that calls for a reason and which is answered without at least an implicit appeal to a value is no answer at all. If I am asked why I moved to Florida it is not adequate to reply, “Because certain neurons fired in my brain causing my legs to move and I got on a bus.”

There is an ambiguity in the question “Why is the something rather than nothing?” as it carries both meanings of “why?” that I have described above, meanings that we would ordinarily associate with both the questions “Why does warm air rise?” and “Why am I staying in this job?”—the former presumably calling for a physical *cause*, the latter calling for an (axiological) *reason*. However, as we have seen, any physical *cause* that we would invoke to explain the world’s existence would itself require an explanation and be subject to our original question, which would remain unanswered. If we say, for example, that the universe is the result of the “Big Bang” and such subsequent events as the formation of heavy elements in the nuclear furnaces of the stars, we are left with two questions—our original request for a cause (now the cause of the “Big Bang”, etc.) and the perhaps more pressing Why? that asks for a reason. It is, I believe, this second question, the request for a reason, that is often the more powerful motive behind our *philosophical* quest. When we ask, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” we are not simply asking a question of the sort, “Why is it raining?” or “Why will there be a solar eclipse?” We are not simply requesting a causal account, but are instead also set on uncovering a *reason* for the world’s existence. The answer to our *ultimate why question*, if there is indeed an answer, must appeal to some form of value and (value-generated) meaning.²⁹ In Douglas Adams’ *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* a supercomputer, “Deep Thought” calculates for 7.5 million years to conclude that the “Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything” is “42.” This “answer” is absurd at least in part because it provides nothing of *meaning* or *value*. The reason why an appeal to “God” as the creator of the universe seems satisfying—is because God is thought to be both the “cause” of the world’s existence and the being who provides the universe with a rationale, purpose, significance, and value. While, historically, a number of philosophers have appealed to Anselm’s ontological argument that God is a necessary being and, as such, is the explanation of all existence, others have argued that 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.³⁰

What if we were to move in another direction and jettison the appeal to a creator God? Might the universe, even in the absence of such a god, have a *reason* for its existence, perhaps even one that from the perspective of time emerges rather late in its history? Might not the values and meanings that exist in the universe and that are brought to it through the minds and activities of human beings and perhaps other sentient beings, constitute the *raison d’être* (and perhaps even serve as the “cause”) of the cosmos? Might we not be mistaken in holding that the foundation of the universe must be in its

temporal beginnings rather than in its later stages? And might it not paradoxically be the case that certain presumably “late stage” occurrences, like our *very asking why the world has come into existence*, are reflective of and even foundational for, *why* the universe exists?

1.3. An Answer Derived from The Question?

The suggestion that the explanation of the entire cosmos is to be discerned from the very question that asks for such an explanation³¹ and is indeed *identical* to the question itself may appear odd and even circular, and one may be inclined to dismiss it out of hand. I ask the reader to bear with me in my efforts to render it plausible. Heidegger held that there is a unique relationship between the question regarding the “why” of being and being itself,³² and Derek Parfit suggested that any explanation of the whole of reality shouldn’t be expected to “fit neatly into some familiar category.”³³ I am going to advance my argument for my “unfamiliar” explanation in stages, through a discussion and critique of a series of topics that will help clarify my thesis.

The reader will note that my argument is built on several and, in some instances, controversial philosophical positions, including an affirmation of the objectivity of values, the preeminence of mind in constituting the objective world, the supervenience of value on mind, and the non-absolute nature of time. It should also be noted that I am of the view that these positions and the conclusions I draw from them are compatible with everyday experience and do not add anything “supernatural” to the world. In the course of my discussion, I provide what I take to be brief, but cogent arguments for each of these positions, but a full treatment of any of these questions is clearly beyond the scope of this paper.

In outline, my argument is as follows: I first provide an intuitive explanation of how a nonexistent *x* can be a condition or foundation for existence (2.1). I then argue that values, like logic and mathematics, have validity independent of their existential realization (2.2), that (in contrast to the view of many philosophers) values are objective and universal, and hence, candidates (indeed the best candidates) for the nonexistent *x* that can serve as the foundation for existence (2.3). I argue that, since time is something to be explained by a theory of existence, such a theory can bypass temporally ordered causality (2.4, 2.5) and must posit a foundation that is *atemporal*. This paves the way for value, which appears late on the world scene, to be such a foundation (2.6).

I then consider the question of how value can be considered the foundation or even “cause” (as well as the *reason*) for existence (3.1). To this end I consider the place of value in the theory of knowledge, review John Leslie’s suggestion that “the world exists because it should” (3.2), and introduce the notion of “open teleology” (3.3).

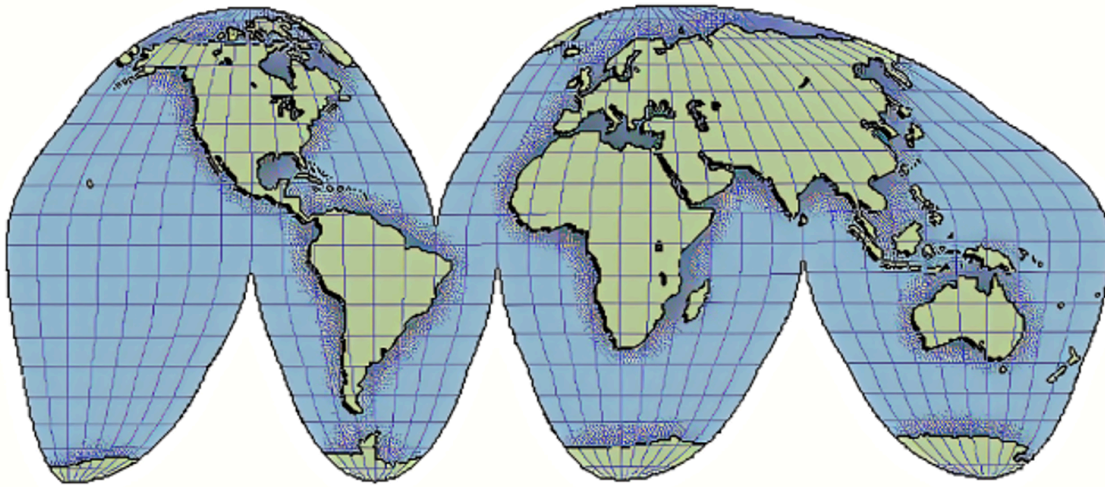
I then turn to a series of objections to an axiological explanation of existence. I consider the problem of evil (4.1) and the claim that the world exists for the sake of evil and suffering (4.2). I take note of the objections that “design” requires a “designer” and “reasons” require an agent (4.3). I consider the objection that my analysis simply uncovers our *expectations* for a response to the “Why” of existence and examine my thesis from an existential perspective (4.4).

Finally, I return to my claim that with regard to the ultimate question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” the question is the answer (without remainder) (5.1) and consider whether this response can be understood in theistic or mystical terms (5.2).

2.1. The Representation of Nonexistence

I will begin with the question of whether it is possible to think and represent a “non-existent” that can serve as the condition for the emergence of “something” (viz. *creation ex nihilo*). It has often been observed that any effort to think away everything results only in an emptying of one’s thoughts of all “entities”, and that it is impossible to eliminate the spatial background of these entities, and that such spatial background is a “thing.” We can *verbalize* reference to a condition of “no state of affairs whatsoever”, and speak of it as an absolute nothing with no existence, no space and time, no void, and even no logic and mathematics, but can we *conceptualize* a version of “nothing” to meet this verbal description? As we have seen, Plato held that the Good is “beyond being”³⁴ and yet gives rise to all things. Here I will describe a cartographic analogy that will enable us to intuit and even represent a non-existent that is nonetheless the ground of all.³⁵

Consider the Goode Homolosine “equal areas” projection of the earthly globe, in which the surface of the Earth is flattened, as if one were flattening an orange peel, with the result that there appear to be gaps within the world.



I would suggest that while these gaps are a necessary condition for the map, they represent “nothing whatsoever.” as they have no cartographic interpretation. They do not, for example, represent a series of disjunctures on the earth’s surface. They do not represent the Earth’s atmosphere or surrounding space. And most importantly, they do not represent a region of cosmic emptiness, or nothingness that surrounds, or somehow infiltrates the world. In fact, within the map itself, these gaps are uninterpretable—they do not represent anything whatsoever, they do not exist. And yet, they are a *condition* for the map’s existence and its representational function.”³⁶ If we imagine our map of the world to be a representation of “all existence,” the gaps in the map, indeed, the paper on which the map is printed, is, a condition that lies *beyond the represented existence*, and yet is a condition for that representation.³⁷

I will argue that values are analogously a condition beyond *existence* that is necessary in order for all things to come into existence. However, in order to establish this argument, we must consider the question of the status of values, if it is reasonable to suppose that they transcend existence, and, moreover, if they are in some sense “objective” and “real”. I will consider these questions in the following two sections.

2.2. What Is There When There Is “Nothing”

It is important to note that when we ask the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” we do so from the perspective of our existence within an *actual* universe; otherwise, the question could not arise. And we should also note that the truism that *actuality entails possibility* (anything we know to

be actual must be possible!), entails that we know from reason alone that any non-existence out of which a universe could have arisen contains the *possibility* of a cosmos. As John Leslie puts it, “we could not fancy that any emptiness could be so very empty that even logical possibilities were banished from it.”³⁸

Leslie argues that with the introduction of possibility we might surmise that the “nothingness” of non-existence, what he refers to as the “blank,” also “contains” logic, mathematics³⁹, and a range of “facts,” including the wide range of logical and mathematical facts and a countless series of factual contingencies of the form “if x...then y;” for example, “If there were six dodos there would be more than five.” According to Leslie, there are countless other facts in a “blank,” including, for example, facts about the relationship between colors on the color wheel—“which depend not in the slightest on the actual existence of anything.”⁴⁰ Whether or not anything with color actually existed, it would still be a fact (if there were colors) that purple would be closer to blue than it is to orange.

Leslie has argued that a “blank” would also contain a host of “ethical facts,” also in “if then” form; for example, “If there were innocent children then it would be evil to cause them needless suffering and death, and good to show them kindness and compassion.” Even in a blank, it would still be true that *if there were a world* it would be good for it to manifest love, beauty, wisdom, etc. (The assertion that these “pre-existent” ethical and axiological propositions are “facts” rather than “opinions” rest on the assumption, to be discussed below that at least certain values are objective and trans-world). Leslie calls such pre-existent facts, i.e., facts that hold regardless of whether anything has existed, does exist, or will ever exist, “synthetic necessities.” They are not “logical” or “mathematical truths” as they require some form of at least hypothetical experience to assert their validity—but they are necessities, nonetheless.

The notion that there are facts and truths even in a condition of non-existence helps to explain how Plato could claim that values, i.e. “the Good,” *precedes* existence, and why certain Kabbalists could hold that the *sefirot*, the value archetypes which they spoke of as the elements of creation, exist indistinguishably *en potentia* within *Ein-sof* (the infinite/nothingness they regard to be beyond existence and the highest expression of divinity) and only “later” serve as the elements of a created world.

2.3. Values and Possible Worlds

I mentioned earlier that there are philosophers who hold that because the physical parameters (e.g., the gravitational constant, the strength of electromagnetic forces...) are so fine-tuned for the existence of life in the world we live in, the universe must be the product of intelligent design. Others have countered this claim by arguing that the theory of cosmological inflation in physics strongly suggests that there are an infinite number of universes with *varying physical* characteristics and it is therefore chance rather than design that dictates that our universe has a series of physical parameters suited for the development of life and mind, as it is obvious that if we were to find ourselves in any universe at all it would be one that appeared to be “fine-tuned.” An important implication of this view is that the so-called laws of nature in our universe are *accidental* features that differ in other regions of the multiverse. Similarly, if as Nick Bostrom⁴¹ suggests, we may be living in a simulated reality created by a vastly powerful computer in a “base world” (or at least one level closer to the base world than our own) it is clear that what we take to be the laws of nature have been “programmed” into our reality and are not necessarily universal. As the cosmologist Max Tegmark puts it, “...if we are living in a simulation, we have no clue what the laws of physics are. What I teach at MIT would be the simulated laws of physics.”⁴²

For these reasons it has, in recent years, become clear to many physicists and philosophers that the so-called “laws of nature” and such parameters as the gravitational constant and the speed of light could be (and on some views almost certainly are) different in other regions of the multiverse. However, such “relativity” would presumably not apply to the laws of mathematics and logic, as these cannot even be conceived of varying from world to world. *Neither would it apply to at least a range of ethical and axiological propositions.* This, I would argue, is because while we can conceive of a universe in which the laws and parameters of physics (such as the gravitational constant and the speed of light) vary greatly from those in our world, we cannot conceive of a universe where the values of truth, compassion, beauty, freedom, and wisdom are vitiated.⁴³ For example, if we were to somehow find ourselves in an alternative reality where the speed of light is 10 miles per second, we would see the evidence for this and accept it as fact. But if we traveled to a universe where we observed the inhabitants honoring mathematicians and scientists for their lies and errors, praising those who tortured children for sheer amusement, celebrating the enslavement of minorities, and morally

justifying the incineration of an entire ethnic group, we would not (even if we held a relativist or culturalist view on values) accept and could not be convinced of the validity of their *values*.⁴⁴

We simply *cannot conceive* of worlds in which it would (without significant qualification) be *morally or axiologically right* to value truth over untruth, ugliness and disease over beauty and health, enslavement of minorities over their freedom, or arbitrary inequality over impartial justice.⁴⁵ Many individuals might hold such wrong values⁴⁶, and in the modal realist view that all possible worlds exist, certainly would, but they would clearly be mistaken, i.e.—as mistaken as those who believe the truth of the formula $2 + 2 = 5$. Values, unlike the laws of physics, are in many instances “trans-world.”⁴⁷ While I cannot in this brief space claim to resolve all issues related to value objectivity, the conclusion that at least certain values are objective⁴⁸ and universal is critical (and in my view justified) if we, like Plato, are to appeal to values or “the Good” as the foundation of all.

Here, I would note that while for much of the last century, philosophers regarded values to be subjective, culturally determined and relative, recent philosophers (including Leslie⁴⁹, Bloomfield⁵⁰, Maxwell⁵¹, and Shafer-Landau⁵²) and psychologists (e.g., Brinkman,⁵³ Drob⁵⁴) have taken a hard look at the question of value-objectivity and have concluded that while values enter the world through consciousness and human praxis, they are, at least in certain cases, objective, trans-cultural, and even “trans-world.”

2.4. The Privileging of Temporal Origins

In seeking an answer to the question of why anything exists we are prone to become mired in a linear form of “bottom-up” thinking where we look for an origin, as if the answer will appear only if we go back far enough in time. But since in our quest to determine the ground of existence, *time is itself an aspect of the universe that we need to explain* it makes no sense to think in terms of its categories, or even in terms of categories such as “beginning” that are built upon temporality. Perhaps we can further our quest if we first set aside the idea of beginnings and look at what the universe is or has become.

As we progress, I will discuss the “ultimate question” in the context of a *complete suspension of linear time*. But I would like to first note that even from within a temporal framework, we can gain some understanding of how the “reason” answer to our ultimate question might operate “backwards” through time. In both history and biography, we find that it is invariably only *after* the occurrence of

certain events that earlier events take on their significance. For example, it is only after an individual achieves great heights as a violinist that his uncle's gift of his first violin at age five becomes so valuable and significant. In a sense, value and meaning have a way of flowing contrary to the direction of time. We typically find that it is only *after* individuals achieve their adult identity, for example after Obama has become president of the United States, that we can begin to make sense of the “why” and “how” of who they are, the essence, meaning, value, purpose⁵⁵ and even the “reason” for their existence. In such cases we can create a biographical narrative leading to the individual's becoming, a narrative that would be completely unavailable to us if we tried, as it were, to start from the beginning without any consideration of what came afterwards. In history, too, we are always working backwards, beginning with the end, for example the fall of the Roman empire, and then tracing events that brought it about. History could not be written at all without a constant looking backwards from the perspective of what has become. Such looking backwards is always conducted from the point of view of what the biographer or historian finds interesting, i.e., meaningful (i.e. fulfilling a value or disvalue), in subsequent events.

Once something has occurred—once there is an “effect”—we can know with certainty that this occurrence or effect was both logically and empirically possible, i.e., that it existed *in potential* at some “earlier” point in a temporal or logical series. Thus, when we say that an individual or a nation has attained its *raison d'être* once it has realized certain values or significances this does not mean that these values and significances appeared out of nowhere, but rather a potential, perhaps one of many that are too numerous to fathom, was fulfilled in its development. Might not the same reasoning be applied to the cosmos as a whole?

Looked at from a temporal perspective, unless we posit that a God imbued the cosmos with purpose and value at the outset, the universe *could not have had a purpose at all until purpose, meaning and value developed within it*, and once purpose, meaning and value did develop, they become the only possible *reasons* for its existence. This can again be understood through the analogy with life-meaning. Arguably, when individuals “discover” their life's purpose, meaning, and value they have not discovered something that was pre-ordained before or at the time of their birth, nor does this mean that some external force guided their development. One's life purpose and meaning, if one is fortunate enough to have “discovered” it, is something that evolves out of the course of one's life. Its only “pre-existence” was its *potential*, a potential that can be inferred from the fact that it ultimately became actual. While the meaning or purpose of one's life (whether we regard it as “subjective” or

“objective”) is very often experienced as a discovery, it is actually just as much a creation. I am arguing that the same reasoning applies to the purpose and *meaning* of the universe as a whole—it evolves out of and is created from the sentience and values that have developed within it.

2.5. Retroactive Causation

I have just argued that the *reason* for existence involves a form of retroactive *explanation*. Several writers on our subject have suggested that the world arises through retroactive *causation*. The physicist Paul Davies points to the scientific discovery that the character of a photon of light, as either a wave or a particle, is altered by an experimenter’s observation. Unobserved, a photon acts as a wave, but once observed, it loses its wavelike behavior and acts as a particle. Davies notes that John Wheeler suggested a hypothetical experiment in which the experimenter delays his decision whether to observe the photon or not, for example, by utilizing a pair of telescopes from a great distance. In such a case the experimenter’s observation retroactively determines whether the photon of light was a wave or a particle, and as such has an impact upon the past.⁵⁶ Theoretically such retroactive causation or “quantum post-selection” could reach all the way back to the beginning of time, a hypothesis that prompted Stephen Hawking and Thomas Hertog to assert that one is mistaken to think that there is a single cosmic history leading from the Big Bang to our current universe.⁵⁷ According to Hawking and Hertog, there are numerous possible cosmic histories, and we, in a sense “select” which possibility is realized through the measurements we make and the precise *questions* we ask. Davies writes that “in other words, the existence of life and observers today has an effect on the past.”⁵⁸

Davies goes so far as to suggest that, in Wheeler’s view the fine-tuning of the universe, which permits the emergence of life and mind, might well be explained by our own “reaching back into the past through acts of quantum observation.” There is, according to Davies, a coincidence of opposites in which “the bio-friendly universe explains life even as life explains the bio-friendly universe.”⁵⁹ He speculates that because the physical laws emerging from the Big Bang, were initially flexible, some form of retro-causality might be said to have resulted in the universe having created itself in a circular temporal loop.⁶⁰ Pointing to the various “fine-tuning” accidents of physics which have resulted in the possibility of life, Davies follows Freeman Dyson in suggesting that the early universe can be said to have anticipated the actualization of life and mind.⁶¹ For Davies, “life and mind are etched deeply into the fabric of the cosmos.” He believes that there is evidence that the universe is “about something.”⁶²

In this manner, Davies provides a naturalistic, if speculative, pathway that supports David Birnbaum's retroactive theology. Birnbaum uses a business metaphor to suggest that like an individual involved in a "leveraged buyout" and who utilizes a company's projected future earnings as a vehicle for purchasing that company in the present, the later fulfillment of what he calls "Holy Potential" retroactively ignites creation.⁶³ Birnbaum's thinking is rooted in the theosophical kabbalah, where such retroactivity is present in *Sefer Yetzirah's* dictum that the beginning is embedded in the end,⁶⁴ the *Zohar's* notion that one who walks in God's ways in effect "makes" the One above,⁶⁵ and in the Lurianic notion of *Tikkun ha-Olam*, in which the infinite God, *Ein-sof*, is said to only become itself only once its potentiality is actualized through human actions that restore and emend the value structure in a redeemed world.⁶⁶

In sum, we must consider undoing the privileging of Alpha over Omega and treat the end (as well as all processes and points along the way) with the same respect that we are prone to give to the beginning. However, as we will see, because "time" is itself something in need of explanation we do not ultimately require recourse to temporal reversals in order to explain the role of value and meaning in existence.

2.6. Value and Meaning as the Atemporal Condition for Existence

Once we surrender the linear temporal perspective, which assumes beginnings in time must be equivalent to origins, we have the opportunity to look at the cosmos from a more neutral standpoint, one that recognizes values and meanings, like logic and mathematics, are atemporal, hold in all worlds, and are hence candidates for the foundation of all existence.

While Tegmark, for example, has argued that mathematics is the foundation for everything⁶⁷ (and Plato himself seems to have deeply considered this Pythagorean view⁶⁸) it is, as I am about to explain, only values, and not these other presumably⁶⁹ atemporal, "pre-existent" and trans-world elements of reality that can provide a *reason* for the world's existence. To return to our cartographic analogy, it is only values that can serve as the "paper" on which existence is "written," i.e., only values can serve as a proper pre-existent "condition" for all existence.

Think of a metaphorical "box" in an atemporal, non-spatial non-actual, non-existence that contains within itself a variety of *possible* elements: matter and energy, space-time, logic, mathematics, mind,

value, and meaning. Now ask the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” (or “Why does possibility become actuality?”) and arrange these elements to accord with your answer.

Like John Leslie, I believe that there is only one *reasonable* answer. Our question, “Why is there something...?” is understood as an inquiry into the *reason* for existence points to values as the only possible candidate. While we can readily conceive of time, space, logic, mathematics, matter, and energy *serving as the mediums or vehicles* through which values (and hence meanings) are realized, it is hardly possible to conceive any of them as ends served by value. Within a linear, temporal view of things, it is perhaps natural to regard the non-axiological elements as foundational. However, in our atemporal understanding, when we ask for the reason not only for existence, but also for logic, mathematics, space and time, matter, energy and mind we find that each of these is readily conceived of as vehicles for the actualization of such values as truth, beauty, love, compassion, pleasure, wisdom, beauty, etc. Logic and mathematics serve the value of “truth,” while space, time, matter, and energy provide the conditions for and thus serve such values as beauty, love, pleasure, etc.⁷⁰ Based on this analysis, we can see that values not only qualify as the reason for existence but also, as Plato suggested in his Second Epistle (312d-e), reign supreme and are foundational within the pre-existent realm of possibility.

While many are attracted to the idea that “mind” or “sentience” serves as the reason for existence, it is hard to imagine a mind disassociated from value serving in this role. Such a “valueless” or “value-neutral” mind would not be unlike an elevator camera passively and indiscriminately processing and recording whatever is in its environment. Without values, such a mind would have nothing to recommend itself as the reason for the cosmos. (I will discuss the supervenience of values on mind, and their dual role as the *cause* of existence below.)

In sum, among the elements in our primordial box, only value can provide us with the reason for the existence of the other elements, and only value can provide us with the reason for existence in general. Value and meaning are the only possible “reasons” answer for why there is something rather than nothing.

3.1. Value and Mind as the “Cause” of Existence

We have seen that values are the only possible *reason* for existence. Either there is no reason for existence, or the reason involves the realization of one or more values. Given that finite values answer finite “why questions” we might provisionally surmise that since existence is (presumably) infinite its

reason is *infinite value*. We will have occasion to qualify this later, but before doing so we must ask the important question of whether values might also be the *cause* of existence, the power that brings potentiality into actuality. Here I would note that Plato himself recognized that the Good played a double role as both the *reason for* and *cause of* all existence. In his second epistle, referring to “The Good” as the “King of All,” Plato writes that “for his sake, all things exist, and [he] is the Cause of all lovely existence.”⁷¹ To grasp why this is the case we need to further flesh out the relationship between values and mind.

Philosophers in the idealist tradition have long suggested that mind is both the foundation and goal of the universe. There is, however, what might be spoken of as a “bi-directional” or interdependent relationship between mind and value. On the one hand, it is intuitively clear that most, if not all, values are necessarily correlative to consciousness or mind, and can be expected to be realized only in a realm where mind exists. Indeed, a wide range of thinkers have taken this position. The Scottish moral philosopher W. D. Ross held that all “intrinsic goods” are “states of mind” or the relations between them.⁷² In recent years, the neuropsychologist Sam Harris, who holds that science can determine human values, writes, “We can know, through reason alone, that consciousness is the only intelligible domain of value.”⁷³ Charles Siewert argues that conscious experience is the *sine qua non* of value and that life without conscious experiences would be “little or no better than death.”⁷⁴ Even Tegmark, for whom the entire universe is a vast “mathematical object,” writes that value arises only because “through us humans and perhaps additional life-forms, our Universe had gained an awareness of itself.”⁷⁵ For each of these thinkers, values are dependent upon consciousness because unless something is experienced or supports the possibility of sentience, it will not have value for anyone or anything.⁷⁶

While mind certainly appears to be a necessary condition for the actualization of all, or at least most, values, I believe a strong case can be made in the opposite direction as well, for the proposition that values are intrinsic to the mind’s very operation and existence. To see why this is so we need only ask what would determine the *direction* of a mind’s attention and intention if there were no values directing it. What principle would a mind utilize to select one object or perspective over any other? What principle would it use to comprehend and categorize experiences? The movement from sensation to a world of objects arises because *consciousness encounters a world that it conditions via value*. Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, critiqued the notion that sensation is the foundation for knowledge on the grounds that all sensations, all experiences, are conditioned by thought. But what

leads a mind to one thought, one category as opposed to another? Our categorical schemes and language are always conditioned by and reflective of values. This is not only because our interest and values dictate the categories through which we think and speak about the world, but also because the very acts of speaking and thinking are themselves conditioned and regulated by values such as truth, freedom, mutual respect, and trust, which enable us to create, speak and think about a reality consensually shared with others.

From an epistemological perspective, the very objects, categories, ideas, actions, persons, etc. that comprise our world are conditioned by value. There is a serious question of whether there could be facts, *information*, and even “things” in the absence of value. What are facts, information, and things except that which is cognized by a conscious mind for a particular goal or purpose?

A similar point is made by Iain McGilchrist, who is known for his research and writing on the divided brain. He writes:

*Attention is not just another ‘function’ alongside other cognitive functions. Its ontological status is of something prior to functions and even to things. The kind of attention we bring to bear on the world changes the nature of the world we attend to...Attention changes what kind of a thing comes into being: in that way it changes the world.*⁷⁷

And yet, as McGilchrist suggests, attention is in all instances guided by human goals and interests: “A mountain that is a landmark to a navigator, a source of wealth to the prospector, a many-textured form to a painter, or to another the dwelling place of the gods, is changed by the attention given to it.” While, according to McGilchrist, “[t]hrough the direction and nature of our attention, we prove ourselves to be partners in creation, both of the world and of ourselves,” our attention, as well as other psychological functions (thinking, memory, feeling, imagination), are guided by values. He writes, “Values enter through the way in which these functions are exercised.”⁷⁸

The upshot of McGilchrist’s observations is that if attention is of ontological significance values are at an even deeper, more fundamental ontological level, and are *constitutive elements* of both consciousness and the world. We might say that attention directed by “value” causes the cosmos to appear as cosmos. This is a point that is seldom recognized by idealists,⁷⁹ who by virtue of their view that reality is grounded in consciousness, should be the first to understand that values direct consciousness, and are hence foundational for both mind and world.⁸⁰ As we have seen, if mind could

be abstracted from all value it would hardly be a proper candidate for a response to the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

Here we have another important reason for selecting values from our “box” of pre-creation elements to serve as the foundation for everything. Values serve not only as the *reason* for existence, but also, to the extent that something analogous to causation survives our decommissioning of time, as the power (at least from an epistemological perspective) that brings objects, the “things” that exist into existence.⁸¹ To the extent that mind serves as the foundation for existence, it is a mind that is immersed in and conditioned by an entire matrix of values.

When one awakens in the morning from the nothingness of sleep (or the realm of possibilities of dreams), the world appears not through the lens of a passive, disinterested camera or as a meaningless chaos of lights, colors and forms, but rather presents itself through the senses of a conscious living being whose interests and purposes are thoroughly conditioned by various values. Why (for one who awakens from the nothingness of sleep) is there something rather than nothing? Our answer is that the world appears and exists (at least for us) because it is an arena in which consciousness pursues values, what Plato called “The good.” To the extent that consciousness lies at the foundation of reality, it is a consciousness directed by value.⁸²

3.2. The World Exists Because It Should

John Leslie has proposed another reason why when considering our box of atemporal elements we would select values as the foundation for everything. Leslie has pointed out that of all the possibilities in the *blank*, only values have the characteristic of “shouldness.” Unlike logic, mathematics and purely factual possibilities, axiological possibilities, as Leslie has argued, carry with them *the demand for their own realization*.⁸³ Truth, justice, ethics, love, and compassion have a hortatory aspect missing from logic and mathematics. “If six dodos exist there would be less than seven” demands nothing, but the possibility of a good, just, and beautiful world demands implementation. Leslie holds that this demand is sufficient to create the world. He thus argues that the Good is not only the reason for the world’s existence, but also its cause. Leslie holds that with regard to the general case of “being,” “ought” is sufficient to produce “is,” and that no god, force or catalyst beyond this ought is required to effect the transition from a possible good to an actual world. He writes, “The ethical requirement that a *good world exists* is ‘itself beyond existence’ because even if nothing existed the presence of such a world would still be called for ethically.”⁸⁴ The world, according to Leslie, *exists because it should*.

Leslie writes that he believes the ethical requirement *that there should be a world* is the only possible “beyond being” notion that could conceivably account for the world’s existence.⁸⁵ He explains that the “should” quality of the world’s existence is *not a moral requirement*, which could only exist in a world of beings that had duties towards one another. Rather, it is an *axiological* requirement that doesn’t involve duties or even “how the thing stands to intelligent agents.” Leslie argues that the “status of being marked out for existence” is a good in and of itself.⁸⁶

We will return to Leslie’s argument below.

Here, I would note that when confronted with our question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Sidney Morgenbesser, who for many years was a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, is said to have responded “... And if there was nothing *you would still be complaining*.”⁸⁷ If we look behind Morgenbesser’s unmistakable Jewish humor we realize that, like Leslie, he may well be suggesting that the demand for value logically precedes and transcends existence, for even if there was nothing there would still be a *complaint*, which is a call for the fulfillment of an unrealized value. When one complains one asserts that something that is not should be, or that something that is should not be, and in each case one is claiming that that some form of the good that is not present should be present. Morgenbesser’s philosophical joke can be read to imply the metaphysical claim that the world, in effect, arose from a *complaint about nothing*.

3.3. Open Teleology

We have thus far considered epistemological and axiological accounts of how values can serve not only as the *raison d’être* of the universe but also as its “cause” or the power that brings it into existence.⁸⁸ With regard to “cause,” from an *epistemological* point of view, we have seen that values serve as the guiding impetus to consciousness’ discernment and differentiation of objects in a world. Without values to guide consciousness’ attention and intentions, “existence” would at most be an undifferentiated chaos, effectively indistinguishable from the nothingness out of which it is said to have arisen. From an *axiological* point of view, we have seen that values have a “hortatory” quality that is absent from each of the other elements of existence. This quality, the “shouldness” of their existence provides values with an impetus and potential causal role in the cosmos, one that is foreign to a mechanistic worldview, but which is quite familiar from the realm of human activity, which, after all, provides our template for understanding values and their actualization.

I would like now to consider a *metaphysical* perspective on the causal role of values in the universe, one that is evident in the thought of Steinsaltz⁸⁹ and Birnbaum.⁹⁰ This perspective, what I will call “open teleology,” suggests that the universe, from its atemporal inception, is structured as an *arena for the realization and development of values* and, as I suggested earlier, space, time, matter and energy, and the entirety of the natural world, are the vehicles for this realization and development. However, this is not to suggest that the universe will inevitably and teleologically realize a certain end but only that it is a realm of axiological possibility within which certain value ends are pursued and potentially achieved. In this way, the universe is analogous to a human life, a life that is born into a realm of value possibilities and endeavors to realize a range of these possibilities in the face of various and at times insurmountable obstacles. Similarly, the universe, indeed the entirety of existence, is conditioned by the general principle that provides the reason for its existence, the potential maximal realization and development of value in each of its multifarious forms.

4.1. The Problem of Evil

To gain a fuller appreciation of “open teleology,” we need to consider a major objection to the view that the Good is both the cause of and the reason for existence, i.e., the obvious fact that the universe is riddled with both natural and intentional destruction and evil. How can Plato and others claim that the “the Good...gives existence to all things,” if as we can readily observe the world is filled with death and destruction? How can John Leslie claim that all of existence arises out of an ethical and axiological requirement, when it is filled with immense disvalue and suffering? What efficacy can we grant to an ethical/axiological “should” when it is obvious that many things that should be, are not and that many that should not be, are? Indeed, it is precisely these considerations that led the moral philosopher Derek Parfit to reject what he regarded to be an otherwise reasonable philosophical hypothesis that value is the metaphysical principle that lies at the foundation of existence.⁹¹

We can address this problem by considering the conditions that would lead to a maximization of values in an actual universe. The 20th-century kabbalist Adin Steinsaltz argued that both natural and moral evil must exist because it is only in a world within which obstacles to values are maximized that the values that are the *raison d’être* of the world’s existence can be fully actualized. Steinsaltz held, “We live in the worst of all possible worlds in which there is still hope--and that is the best of all possible worlds.”⁹² According to Steinsaltz, a “world on the brink of disaster” is the best possible arena for realizing infinite value and meaning. This is because value can only be fully realized in a

realm of pain, suffering, and dis-value. Compassion can only be maximized in a world of great suffering, courage in the face of great danger, the values of truth and knowledge appreciated only when they are hard-won, and morality fully realized when it confronts rank evil. These considerations explain why classical narrative moves us and is most meaningful when protagonists overcome immense obstacles to achieve their value-goals. It also, according to Steinsaltz, helps to explain why, on the basis of observation and experience, it can readily be concluded that the world is largely evil, tragic, and absurd.

In making his claims Steinsaltz explicates the Kabbalistic principle that the repair and transformation of a broken world, is indeed the highest perfection, a perfection that is axiologically superior to any “Eden world,”⁹³ and it is for this reason that evil exists. In the Lurianic Kabbalah, the tradition Steinsaltz addresses, both God (*Ein-sof*, the Infinite) and the world become fully actualized only after the *sefirot*, the value archetypes through which the cosmos was created, *shatter*, and “sparks” of value (kindness, beauty, compassion, etc.) fall into a shadow realm of evil and destruction and are then restored and elevated through the ethical and spiritual activities of humankind.

For Steinsaltz there is no guarantee that the world will realize all or even a portion of its “should,” and this *possibility of failure* is the very condition for the potential maximization of value. He uses a race car analogy to explicate this idea: we only come to understand the limits of a car’s excellence when we drive it at enormously high speeds on an extremely difficult track on which it *might* fail. In Steinsaltz’s analogy the “extremely difficult track” is a proxy for our world.

Steinsaltz (and Birnbaum) suggest that the guiding open teleological principle of the world is one that maximizes the possibilities for value rather than directly maximizing value itself. While existence does not guarantee that any value will be realized, it provides an arena in which all values *can* be realized to the greatest degree. On this view, the multiverse is in effect a “high-risk portfolio” for the realization of value.⁹⁴ This is essentially also the view of Birnbaum, who views the cosmos as being driven by “Holy Potential,” a potential that can only be maximized by free agents acting in a world of evil, i.e., a world that provides severe obstacles to the realization of the good. Indeed, on this view, it can be argued that the process through which value is pursued is as significant, or even more significant than the end achieved.

The philosophical problem of evil becomes less acute if we regard the *reason* for existence to be the possible (but hardly inevitable) maximization of meaning and value (which can only occur) *in the face of obstacles*. This claim does not require our world to be perfectly or even largely good, only that it be,

as we have seen, *an arena within which value and meaning can be pursued, realized and potentially maximized*. What I have described as the *open-teleological* “reason for existence” entails that there be a world in which there is not only the possibility but the actuality of evil.⁹⁵

4.2. The Asymmetry Between Value and Disvalue

A related problem that could cast doubt on our analysis rests upon our elevation of value (and the Good) over disvalue (and evil). Why not answer the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” with an appeal to disvalue or evil? After all, we often answer finite “why” questions by pointing to an individual’s immoral or otherwise bad intentions. For example, it is perfectly appropriate to respond to the question “Why did Robert travel to Florida?” with the response, “In order to poison his mother so he could receive his inheritance.” This shows that an appeal to disvalue (in this case extreme avarice) can adequately answer finite *why questions*. If so, why can’t we respond to the *infinite why question* with an appeal to infinite evil? Indeed, this appears to have been the view of the ancient Gnostics, who held that the world was created by the demiurge with bad intentions, and it also comports with the Buddhist view that our world is a world of suffering. Indeed, *based on the evidence* we might argue that the world was created to produce suffering in humans and other living things. While we read in Genesis that at each step of creation “God saw that it was good,” it might seem that precisely the opposite is the case in the actual world, and that the struggle to realize good in the face of evil only serves to maximize pain and suffering.

Here, in addition to the observations we have made above regarding the Steinsaltz theodicy, we might reply that there is an *asymmetry* between good and evil. One reason for this is that all “why” explanations that involve an appeal to disvalues or evil also appeal to one or more values that are fulfilled, albeit in unethical or perverse ways. Plato, in the *Gorgias*, suggests that when we do the simplest of things like walk and sit we do so for the sake of the good, and even “when we kill a man we kill him...because, as we think, it will be conducive to our good...”⁹⁶ The sadist who tortures his victims does so because he finds *pleasure* or *satisfaction* in doing so, and certainly pleasure and satisfaction (when ethically obtained) are one of the “goods” of sentient experience. On the other hand, one who pursues truth, love, compassion, wisdom, etc., does not (except under the most unusual circumstances) do so to achieve a disvalue.

There is a second “asymmetry” between values and disvalues that we should take note of: the actualization of values such as kindness, compassion, truth, and wisdom promote life and sentience,

whereas disvalues such as cruelty, malice, heartlessness, lies, error and ignorance tend to limit or destroy it. Indeed, it can be argued that disvalues, if permitted to reign unchecked, would ultimately bring destruction upon the cosmos, and hence are hardly a viable candidate to explain its existence. However, as have seen, even in a world conditioned by a Platonic “Good,” disvalues and evil play an important role. Even death, which on an individual level is a supreme disvalue that brings an end to sentience and the actualization of values by the individual who succumbs to it, has value for the species, community, and, it has been argued, even for the individual.⁹⁷

4.3. Design Without a Designer?

I have argued that when we ask the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” we are often asking for a *reason* without necessarily implying that there is a God or other agency behind it. However, it might be objected that in every ordinary case where a “reasons” explanation is provided for a thing, event, or idea, there is a human (or in some cases a non-human living or sentient) agent who acts with intention or design. To argue that there is a “reason” for existence without attributing that reason to such an agent might be said to be taking “reasons” outside of their “natural home” and importing them into an arena within which they have no legitimate application.

My response to this objection is as follows:

Some, including Leslie, have been prompted to suggest that a universe itself must in some sense be sentient for it to be governed by value, and there are both spiritual and philosophical traditions that view all existence as being imbued with, or manifesting a collective, mind. The Indian notion of *Brahman Atman* and the Kabbalistic *Ein-sof*, each in their own manner, come close to symbolizing such a universal mind or soul. Hegel described a series of dialectical stages in thought and human history, culminating in the “Absolute” mind or spirit which achieves a condition of self-knowledge not unlike Aristotle’s “thought thinking itself.” C. G. Jung was of the view that we each have the capacity to realize an inner universal “self,” a self that provides us with a connection with the collective unconscious, which he regarded to be experientially indistinguishable from a “higher world.”⁹⁸ Whitehead proposed a form of “panpsychism” in which sentience is present everywhere and in everything.⁹⁹ While such proposals are intriguing, they are not, to my mind, necessary as support for the notion that there is an axiological reason for all existence. While, as I have argued, value is to a very large extent interdependent with mind, for an explanation of existence to hold it is sufficient that there are sentient, agential, beings *within* the universe, and it is their intentions that provide the

universe with its value and meaning. These sentient, agential beings, and their intentions, are part of what might be called the architecture of the multiverse, the full range of existence. I am arguing that this “architecture” involves the *quest towards the maximization value* that I have described herein, a quest that is carried out by agential agents within the multiverse without the need for a superordinate agency to provide it with its impetus or explanatory power.

4.4. A Being Who Interrogates Being

Another objection to our analysis is that the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” simply uncovers our *expectations* regarding the answer and tells us nothing about whether those expectations are valid. When we ask our ultimate question, we may well be asking for or even demanding that there be a value or values that serve as the reason or ground for existence, but this in no way guarantees that there is one. This is an important objection, one that I will respond to in stages.

When we examine our own *being* we find that the *reason* for our existence is the values and meanings that over a lifetime become important to us, direct and characterize our lives. It is reasonable to assume that the same applies to all intelligent creatures. Since values and the meaning they generate are the reasons for existence for the only portion of the universe for which this could possibly matter it is not too much of a stretch to argue that in evolving beings for whom value and meaning are the *raison d’etre*, that value and meaning are the *raison d’etre* of the multiverse.

One way of looking at our question is to understand “Why is there something rather than nothing?” in existential terms. We might say that in the case of our asking this question the “multiverse” or even being itself has come to question itself through us. As we have seen, Heidegger held that a “unique relation arises” between being as a whole and the question regarding its foundation; “For through this questioning the essent as a whole is for the first time opened up as such with a view to its possible ground, and in the act of questioning it is kept open.”¹⁰⁰ Insofar as we questioners are beings ourselves, our questioning amounts to *an interrogation of being by being itself* and is thus potentially of profound ontological significance. As human beings, we are in the unique position of being a *being who can interrogate being*.

And what is the existential response to this interrogatory? The response is not some proposition regarding the absurdity of nothing, probabilities, God, the Big Bang, or “fine-tuning,” but is rather, I

would argue, an infusion of our existence with values, disvalues, meanings, and absurdities.¹⁰¹ It is not only, as I have argued, that when we ask the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” we are implicitly (and necessarily) asking for an explanation in terms of value and (and value generated) meaning, but also that the existential and ontological press of our question demands and inevitably receives a response in value/disvalue (axiological) and meaning/absurdity terms. Even if, in a dark mood, we experience the response that the cosmos is valueless and meaningless chaos, the response is on the plane of value and meaning.

The notion that value and meaning answer the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is, as we have seen, implicit in the question itself. However, this does not mean that this answer is simply a matter of language or that it is true by arbitrary definition. Rather it is present in language because, as we have just seen, it reflects the very nature of the existential quest of a being *who has the capacity to interrogate being*. This interrogating being is a being immersed in value and meaning, and this informs us about the nature of being itself. By asking the question we show, even though we may not be aware of this (and thus feel we must ask the question) that we are immersed in the answer prior to our asking the question, and our asking facilitates the process of revealing this answer to ourselves.

While I have argued that our answer to the ultimate question follows from an analysis of its meaning, the above considerations demonstrate that our answer is neither stipulative nor trivial.

The argument that our answer is implicit in our question involves reasoning that can be thought to be paradigmatic for philosophy, and helps to distinguish philosophy from science and other disciplines; it is a reasoning that involves making explicit what had hitherto been implicit in both language and existence.

Fifty years ago, it was common amongst philosophers to argue that philosophy works on the assumption that our ordinary ideas and language about the world embody certain basic truths and that it is the philosopher’s role to work out the sometimes-hidden implications of these ordinary notions in a manner that endeavors to resolve philosophical puzzles. Here, I am making the similar but, I believe, deeper claim that, at least in the case considered here, philosophy not only discerns and reveals the implications of language, but also works out the hidden implications of the privileged existential position of a being who interrogates being by reflecting on itself.¹⁰²

The notion that at least our world exists for the development of life, mind, meaning, and value makes eminent sense even without formal argument. Anyone who gives it serious thought will realize that the truly important things are the values that ought to guide human life. This has been recognized by a wide range of philosophical and spiritual traditions. While there are traditions that deemphasize the importance of human goals, even these, including Buddhism, recognize values such as generosity, loving-kindness, compassion, truth, and wisdom that appear to be nearly universal.¹⁰³

If one answered the ultimate question by saying that the universe exists for the development of a particular supernova in a distant galaxy, we would find this perplexing and unsatisfying unless it could be shown that this supernova had some sort of supreme cosmic value. There are moments when each of us believes that the universe has no reason for its existence and no value or meaning at all but such an attitude of despair flies in the face of our absolute certainty that there are indeed values and meanings within it. One does not completely deny the existence of gold on earth because of its scarcity.

5.1. The Question is the Answer

I have argued that the answer to, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” inevitably follows from a close examination of the meaning of the question. What remains to be considered is whether the answer to our ultimate question is *the question itself*. In this section, I will consider this and also, albeit briefly, address certain definitional ambiguities regarding “being,” “existence,” “possibility,” and “nothingness” that I raised earlier in this paper.

Throughout this paper, I have suggested that an analysis of the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” results in the answer that the universe exists as a quest for a pre-existent *x* that is both a cause and reason for existence, and that the only possible preexistent candidate for such a cause and reason is *value*. In this view, the explanation for and foundation of existence is a quest for value. Since the very question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is *itself a quest for that which is both the cause and reason for existence*, and this amounts to a quest for values, the question merges with its answer, and thus answers itself.

It is important to note that this merging of question and answer is specific to our question. If we ask why the sky is blue (or virtually any other finite question), we see that the answer is radically different from the question. We might say that we are on a *quest for the cause of the blue sky*, but our answer is not, and cannot be, that the sky is blue because it is on such a quest; our answer must refer to the

refractive properties of light. It is a unique property of our ultimate question that the very quest that is expressed in the question is the answer to the question.

The position I have arrived at is one in which mind, guided by values, has a constitutive role in existence and, as per our earlier discussion, one in which values are both the reason and foundation for existence and the factor that conditions logic, mathematics, space and time. Our answer, in some ways, echoes Davie's claim that there is a reciprocal relationship between the cosmos and mind: "the bio-friendly universe explains life even as life explains the bio-friendly universe."¹⁰⁴ The question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is, in effect, a shorthand for the psycho-axiological quest for value that I have argued is constitutive of existence.

We have taken a long route, and have appealed to linguistic, scientific, and existential considerations to arrive at the conclusion that existence is grounded in the very quest for value that is reflected in our question.

Earlier, I indicated that efforts to address the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" are handicapped by certain ambiguities; regarding the meaning of *nothing*, the differentiation of *being* from *existence*, and whether *possibilities* and *abstractions* are to be included in either or both of these realms. I also raised the question of what can count as a complete explanation of existence. In light of our discussion thus far, we are now in a position to return to these issues.

Following Leslie, we have held that certain abstract notions and what might be called "abstract entities," including values, have a certain "being" even in a blank devoid of all "existence." I have referred to these abstract entities (including the verities of logic, mathematics and certain "if-then" propositions, e.g., in axiology and ethics) as "pre-existens" and have argued that, *through their actualization by sentient beings* such as ourselves, they have explanatory efficacy and a certain atemporal "causal" power. These conclusions stem from the observation that actual existence (which is the explanandum in our study) entails possible existence, including a wide range of abstract truths.

While it might be possible to argue that I have mischaracterized the "nothing" in our ultimate question, and that if there was never any actual existence, there would have been no possibility, logic, mathematics or values. However, the assumption of no actual existence also removes our question, since "Why is there something rather than nothing?" begins from and, of course, assumes, an actuality to be explained. If we assume the counterfactual of non-actual-existence, we can't ask why there is something rather than nothing because there is no existence to explain, and no one to ask the

question. If neither you nor I have children, your children cannot ask my children why they chose to have children themselves.

We have seen, however, that the view that logic, mathematics and certain value propositions would be void if there was never any existence whatsoever, can be questioned on Leslie's grounds that logical, mathematical and axiological propositions *of an if/then nature* would be valid, even if nothing whatsoever [ever] existed at all. The argument in this paper leads to the conclusion that the *nothingness* out of which emerged somethingness is devoid of existence, but is of necessity host to certain abstract entities that are beyond "existence" but nonetheless "are." I have argued that one set of these "abstract entities," the "axiological set," provides both a rationale for the others (e.g., logic, mathematics, [potential] space, time and matter) and a reason and a cause for existence, and that this conclusion follows from the very asking of the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" itself.

Certain of the Kabbalists held that the foundation of the world is better understood as a question—that the deepest layer of reality is interrogatory as opposed to propositional.¹⁰⁵ We have seen that one Kabbalist, Shimon Labes, phrased this as follows: "Concerning everything that cannot be grasped its question is its answer."¹⁰⁶ Through an analytic and existential consideration of our ultimate question, I have concluded that both we and the multiverse are a manifestation of being reflecting upon and awakening to itself.¹⁰⁷ This awakening, as I have argued is an awakening to a realm of value and meaning, and we now have gone so far as to say that the awakening of the universe to itself is *the awakening of the universe*. As hinted at earlier, the awakening from the "nothingness" of deep sleep to a world imbued with value is, by analogy, a reenactment of creation that we all continually experience.

5.2. No Remainder? Nothing Left to Be Explained?

I have argued that in order to answer the ultimate question of "Why there is something rather than nothing?" we must arrive at a response that leaves "no remainder," i.e., nothing unexplained. Is this achieved by turning our question back on itself so that the question is itself a reflection of the answer? One might, at this point in the argument, ask "from whence the question?", suggesting that the question now calls out for an explanation. Here, I would argue that in this case, we know precisely from whence the question—for it is we who have asked it.

When we arrive at the response that our question answers itself, there is really nothing left to explain. One can, and should, be in awe of the entire system of possibilities and their ordering by value that I have suggested are “pre-existent” and give rise to existence, but, as I have argued above, these are entailed by actuality, and there is no question that can be asked outside of the presumption of actual existence. (Unless there is *something*, the question “Why is there something...?” is void, and there is no one to ask it). Yet one may still stand in awe of actuality and even the very possibility of a being who asks a question about the origin of existence. Or perhaps, as Dragana Favre suggests,¹⁰⁸ there is a form of asking and answering without words. Here, as Heidegger held, we leave the realm of calculative rational thinking and enter what he spoke of as a form of meditative thought. I believe this is also what Wittgenstein was getting at when he spoke of the mystical and suggested that it is an arena about which we must remain silent.

5.3. A Return to God and Awe?

It is important to reemphasize that, while the solution to the ultimate question I have put forth, regards values as an objective part of the universe and places them and subjectivity at the heart of my explanation for existence, it does not require anything “supernatural.” Specifically, it does not require that there be a creator God or universal mind that promulgates, or even contemplates value, and it does not require that anything other than the *potential* for value is inherent in the cosmos, or that the *actualization* of specific values is inevitable or built into the cosmos from the beginning. My solution rests upon the observation that there are indeed values actualized in the cosmos, and that the portion of the cosmos where they can be observed to be actualized very much appears to be a “high risk” arena for their actualization (or failure to be actualized). My argument is that an axiological *principle* (the potential maximalization of values) explains the existence and nature of the universe; existence is a “high-risk” arena for the actualization of values that can result in their utter failure to be actualized. While I consider values and the maximalization principle to be explanatory pre-existents, I do not regard them to be actual and existent, *except insofar as they are actualized by sentient beings acting in the world*, the only example of which we are aware of is ourselves and our fellow life forms on earth. In this regard, my axiarchial explanation of the universe differs from Leslie’s (and Plato’s), which is meant to explain the universe’s existence without appealing to *concreta*. Rather, I am in accord with the view of the Lurianic Kabbalah, which holds, as Jung once put it, that humankind is a partner in creation, actualizing the value archetypes (*Sefirot*) that exist only *en potentia* in the Infinite God, and,

in the process, actualizing God itself. For the kabbalists, this “partnership” involves *tikkun ha-olam*, the actualization and restoration of value archetypes that were destroyed when an initial creative effort misfired. (As Dragana Favre put it in her comments on an early draft of this paper: “Capacity to ask, capacity to value, or if I can paraphrase, capacity to react to beauty maybe created [the] uni/multiverse but certainly can save the world.”¹⁰⁹)

One can conceptualize the drive towards value within the cosmos as both human and *divine*. Indeed, David Birnbaum described this drive as a quest for “Holy Potential”.¹¹⁰ One might even conceptualize the open teleology or *nisus* toward value in personal terms, as it embodies the values and sentience that, in human terms, comprise the person. The kabbalists regarded the realm of values embodied in their *sefirot* to be fully actualized and integrated only in what they termed *partzufim*, representations of the developmental phases of human personality from infancy to old age, and such “personalist” philosophers as Brightman and Bertocci¹¹¹ have suggested that “personhood” is the highest manifestation of the cosmos, as it embodies an integration of values in an agent who can render them fully actual. To the extent that such a *personal axiological* *nisus* or principle is “beyond existence,” this may be the most satisfactory way of understanding a transcendent and, paradoxically, very imminent “God.”

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rosemary Sage, Victor Pambuccian, Dragana Favre, Grzegorz Karwasz, and Nicholas Waghorn for their helpful comments on a previous preprint of this paper.

Footnotes

¹ D. Matt, “Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, Lawrence Fine, ed. New York: New York University Press, 1995, p. 96, note 37.

² Leibniz wrote; “the first question we have the right to ask will be why is there something rather than nothing, For nothing is simpler and easier than something.” J. Leslie and R. Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence. Why Is There Anything At All?* Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 13.

³ My thinking on the topic of this paper dates back to my doctoral studies with J.N. Findlay at Boston University in the late 1970s, my study of Hasidism and Kabbalah with the Chabad Hasidim in Brooklyn, my reflections on the 1989 book *God and Evil* by David Birnbaum, and an interview I and

Harris Tilevitz conducted in 1990 with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Birnbaum's thesis that the universe came into existence in order to realize a potential for complexity and meaning has been particularly influential on my thinking, as has been John Lesley's notion that the world exists because it *should*.

⁴ Nicholas Rescher. "Optimalism and Axiological Metaphysics." *Review of Metaphysics* 53, 4, 2000: 807-835, p. 807.

⁵ Logical necessity. J. Heil, "Contingency" in T. Goldschmidt (ed.) *The Puzzle of Existence: Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?* New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 157-181.

⁶ A. Grünbaum, "The Cosmos Needs No Explanation." Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence*, pp. 56-70. From A. Grünbaum, "Cosmos in Cosmology", in N. S. Hetherington, ed. *Encyclopedia of Cosmology*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993, 126-135, and A. Grünbaum, "Why is Is There A Universe AT ALL Rather Than Just Nothing," in C. Glymour, et. al., eds., *Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science: Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Congress* (London: King's College London Publications, 2009), pp. 7, 9, 10, 15.

⁷ Rundle "Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing" Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence*, pp. 25-26 excerpted from Ch. 5, section 5.2 of *Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

⁸ P. Edwards "Why?" *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: MacMillan, 1967. Vol. 8, 206-302b.

⁹ M. Munitz, *The Mystery of Existence*. New York: New York University Press, 1974.

¹⁰ V. Koestenbaum, "The Sense of Subjectivity," *Review of Existential Psychiatry and Psychology*, Vol. 2 (1962), 47-64, pp. 54-5. Cited in Edwards "Why?", pp. 300-301.

¹¹ T. O'Connor. *Theism and Ultimate Explanation*. Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing: 2009.

¹² P. Davies, "Mind, Cosmos: A Self-Explaining Loop." In Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence* pp. 163-170. From "Laying Down the Laws." *New Scientist* (30 June 2007), pp. 30-34.

¹³ See D. Parfit, "Why Anything? Why This?", in *On What Matters*, Vol. 2. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2011, 623-48.

¹⁴ R. Nozick *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 127ff; P. van Inwagen, "Why Is There Anything at All?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supp.* Vol. 70, 1996: 95-110. For a contrary point of view see M. Kotzen, *The Probabilistic Explanation of Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing*, In T. Goldschmidt, ed. *The Puzzle of Existence*, pp. 215-234.

¹⁵ J. Polkinghorne, “A Purpose behind Cosmic History.” Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence*, pp. 178–189. From. Polkinghorne, *Beyond Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). CHECK

¹⁶ L. Susskind, “A Purpose behind Cosmic History” in Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence*, pp. 189–192. Reprinted from “Because We’re Here.” Interview in the *New Scientist*, Vol. 188, No. 2530 (17 Dec 2005), pp. 48–50. Portions reprinted as “Tuning in String Theory’s Multiverse”

¹⁷ D. Birnbaum, *God and Evil*. New York, Ktav, 1988.

¹⁸ John Leslie, “Existence Because Ethically Required.” In *The Mystery of Existence: Why Is There Anything at All?*, edited by John Leslie and Robert Kuhn, 126–141. West Sussex: Wiley–Blackwell, 2014.

¹⁹ Nicholas Rescher. *Optimalism and Axiological Metaphysics*.

²⁰ Husserl wrote about “values extending indefinitely” as an “Absolute” that transcends both the world and absolute consciousness (*Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, W. R. Boyce Gibson, trans, London: Collier Books, 1931/1969) p. 158). Further, in his *Nachlass* we read: “The ultimate meaning of being is the Good, and that is the divine activity toward which the All of divine action is directed...God as will of the good is ultimate reality” (quoted in Edith Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries: Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy’s Others*. New York: Fordham University Press. p. 19, n. 13, p. 507. Wyschogrod cites Husserl’s *Nachlass*, BII, 2, 54, 146, as cited in James G. Hart, *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, SUNY Press, 1986.

²¹ Sorley, W. R. *Moral Values and the Idea of God*. Cambridge University Press, 1918.

²² Emmanuel Levinas writes, “The Place of the Good above every essence is the most profound teaching, not of theology, but of philosophy” (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; An Essay on Exteriority*, A. Lingis, trans. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961/1969, p. 103).

²³ P. Davies, *Mind, Cosmos: A Self–Explaining Loop*. in Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence* pp. 163–170. From “Laying Down the Laws.” *New Scientist* (30 June 2007), pp. 30–34.

²⁴ T. Goldschmidt, “Introduction: Understanding the Question.” In T. Goldschmidt, ed. *The Puzzle of Existence*, pp. 1–21.

²⁵ T. O’Connor. “Could There Be a Complete Explanation of Everything?” In T. Goldschmidt, ed. *The Puzzle of Existence*, 22–45.

²⁶ Here I am alluding to D. Parfit, “Why Anything Why This?”

²⁷ Under certain circumstance, e.g. when we ask “Why do you believe x?” “why” may also call for *evidence*, but this use of “why” is not relevant to the present inquiry. See M. Munitz, *The Mystery of Existence; An Essay in Philosophical Cosmology*. New York: New York University Press, 1974, Ch. 10.

²⁸ The classic statement of this problem dates to Donald Davidson’s 1963 paper: “Actions, Reasons, and Causes,” Reprinted in *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 3–19.

²⁹ In discussing “value and meaning” I am referring to “meaning” in the sense in which it is intrinsically related to purpose and value. See S. Drob, Psychology, Values, and the Meaning of Life: Bridging the Philosophy—Psychology Divide. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Aug 2022, 1–24.

³⁰ R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London: Bantam Press, 2006.

³¹ The kind of explanation I have in mind might be imperfectly analogized to an explanation that can be offered in response to the question, “Why be rational?” In such a case the very fact that we are asking this question means that we have already assumed the possibility of a rational answer, and the question, in effect, answers itself, with no further remainder requiring an additional explanation. An analogous (but not equivalent) point is made by Nicholas Rescher, who argues that if one asks the question “Why should it be that reality is rational? it is “already too late to raise the issue.” This is because once we ask for the reason of the world’s rationality, we have already in a sense assumed the possibility of a rational answer.

³² M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, New York: Doubleday, 1961, p. 4.

³³ D See D. Parfit, “Why Anything? Why This?”, p. 633.

³⁴ The distinction between “being” and “existence” is more than semantic. It can be argued that abstractions such as “the Good” have “being” even when they are not actualized in existence. Plato’s claim may work better for “existence” than it does for “being.”

³⁵ I introduce and provide an extended discussion of this analogy in Chapter 8 of my book, *Kabbalah and Postmodernism: A Dialogue* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), where I relate it to Jacques Derrida’s claim that “*différance* is older than being.” Jacques Derrida, “Différance”, *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982, p. 11. Original French edition, 1967.

³⁶ This is reminiscent of the Midrashic dictum (Genesis Rabbah 68.9) that “God is the Place of the world.”

³⁷ This analogy not only helps us to understand how Plato could hold that a condition for all existence lies beyond being (or at least beyond “existence”), but also why he considered this condition to be “The Good.” Extending our analogy, we might observe that Plato’s “Good” is, in effect, *the potential for significance and value*, just as a blank piece of paper provides *a potential for significance and value* prior to it being written, drawn or printed upon.

³⁸ John Leslie, John. “Existence Because Ethically Required.” In *The Mystery of Existence: Why Is There Anything at All?*, edited by John Leslie and Robert Kuhn, 126–141. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, p. 129.

³⁹ The assertion that “mathematical facts” exist in a “blank” is generally consistent with realist and logicist views of the foundations of mathematics but would likely not be supported by conventionalist, constructivist, embodied mind, psychologicist, fictionalist, empiricist and certain formalist interpretations of mathematics.

⁴⁰ John Leslie, John. “Existence Because Ethically Required”, p. 130.

⁴¹ N. Bostrom, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?” *Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (211), 2003: 243–255. Available online: <http://www.simulation-argument.com/> (accessed on August 2, 2022).

⁴² Quoted in Olivia Solon, “Is our world a simulation? Why some scientists say it is more likely than not.” *The Guardian*, Tue 11 Oct., 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/oct/11/simulated-world-elon-musk-the-matrix> Downloaded, February 6, 2018.

⁴³ Conceivability arguments have been used in other contexts, most notably by Anselm in his proof of God’s existence and by Descartes in his effort to demonstrate that the soul is independent of the body. This form of argument has been held to be specious on the grounds that we can readily be mistaken about what we can and cannot conceive. I might, for example, be able to conceive of π being resolved after 100 digits but my conception would be wrong and the imagined resolution impossible. It is a mathematical matter that requires investigation and calculation as to whether π is resolvable.

However, in the case of values it is precisely their *mind dependence* that makes them different from objects in the natural world and the truths of mathematics, and which makes “conceivability” arguments regarding them so strong. Values, as many as observed exist only for the mind, and mind is not only their arbiter but, from a certain perspective, their origin, and as such conceivability is in a

sense necessary for and even identical with their existence. Can I truly be *mistaken* that (*ceteris paribus*) it is wrong to torture and kill innocent children or value error over truth?

⁴⁴ The question of whether ethical and axiological “facts” are “trans-world” in the sense I have described differs from the question of whether logical and mathematical truths are “real” and universal. There are “conventionalist” theories of both ethics and mathematics but the criteria for evaluating them are different. Indeed, it may indeed be the case that certain ethical and value propositions have a stronger claim to universality than either logic or mathematics, a proposition that I do not argue for here, but which is consistent with my overall thesis. I would only observe that if mathematics is “socially constructed” it would be constructed on the basis of values.

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Isaac Luria held that the *Sefirot*, which are, according to the kabbalah, the archetypes of mind and value, are present in all worlds.

⁴⁶ Some *wrong* values might even have survival value for the species—for example robust males fertilizing as many women as possible. Some “right” values (e.g. those involved in preservation of the earth) might even entail bringing an end to the human species.

⁴⁷ See S. Drob, *Are you praying to a videogame God? Some theological and philosophical implications of the simulation hypothesis*. March 2023. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 84(4):1-15. DOI:[10.1080/21692327.2023.2182822](https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2023.2182822).

⁴⁸ By “objective values” I am not suggesting an absolute position on specific ethical issues, e.g. abortion, but only a universality regarding general ethical principles such as truth and compassion. My view is that ethical conflicts arise when there is disagreement on how to apply these general principles to real world dilemmas.

⁴⁹ J. Leslie, “Existence Because Ethically Required”; P. Bloomfield, *Moral reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁵⁰ P. Bloomfield, *Moral Reality*. Oxford University Press;

⁵¹ N. Maxwell, Are there Objective Values? *The Dalhousie Review*, vol. 79.3, Autumn 1999, pp. 301–317.

⁵² R. Shafer-Landau, *R. Moral realism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁵³ S. Brinkmann, *Fact, values, and the naturalistic fallacy in psychology*. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 27, 2009.

⁵⁴ S. Drob, An Axiological Model of the Relationship between Consciousness and Value. *New Ideas in Psychology* 43, 2016, 57–63.

⁵⁵ In this discussion I take it that “purpose,” “meaning,” and “significance” are related, and often cognate axiological notions that are derivative of value. An action or object has a purpose, significance or meaning only to the extent that it fulfills (or subverts) a value or values. See S. Drob, Psychology, Values, and the Meaning of Life: Bridging the Philosophy—Psychology Divide. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Aug 2022, 1–24,

⁵⁶ P. Davies, Mind, Cosmos: A Self-Explaining Loop. in Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence* pp. 163–170. From “Laying Down the Laws.” *New Scientist* (30 June 2007), pp. 30–34.

⁵⁷ S. Hawking and T. Hertog, “Populating the Landscape: A Top Down Approach.” High Energy Physics–Theory Corbell University, 2006. [[hep-th/0602091](https://arxiv.org/abs/hep-th/0602091)] [Populating the Landscape: A Top Down Approach \(arxiv.org\)](https://arxiv.org/abs/hep-th/0602091). Downloaded May 7, 2023.

⁵⁸ Davies. A Self-Explaining Loop, p. 167.

⁵⁹ Davies. A Self-Explaining Loop, p. 168.

⁶⁰ Davies. A Self-Explaining Loop, p. 169.

⁶¹ While the role of value as the reason for all existence is highly compatible with the observation that our universe is “fine-tuned” for life, it is not vitiated by the argument that the existence of “many worlds” in a multiverse shows that our world is not fine-tuned *by design*. Consider the following analogy: The state lottery sells millions of tickets, and there are millions of possible numerical combinations that can result in the grand prize. When an individual wins, we cannot say that the lottery was fine-tuned for their victory, but neither can we say that it is an inexplicable accident that *someone* won. Indeed, we know that the purpose of the lottery, the reason for its existence, is to produce a single or at most a few winners, and the fact that there are millions of losers takes nothing away from this purpose. This purpose is why there are millions of dollars held by those who operate the lottery, dollars that in effect exist in *potentia* for everyone who enters. Similarly, the fact that our world may be the one world that contains life, mind and value and exists amongst a nearly infinite number of other worlds that do not, shows that the potential for life, mind and value exists *ab initio*, and is in effect, “held in reserve” even in non-existence. It is this reserve, this potential that may well be *the reason* for everything.

⁶² Davies. “A Self-Explaining Loop,” p. 170.

⁶³ D. Birnbaum, *God and Good*, NY: J Levine/Millennium, 2008, pp. 59, 71–2.

⁶⁴ *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:7. Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, revised ed. (York Beach, NE: Samuel Weiser, 1997), 57.

⁶⁵ Zohar III:113a, translated in in H. Sperling and M. Simon, *The Zohar*, 5 vols. (London: Soncino, 1931–1934), Vol. 5, p. 153. Idel translates this passage as follows: “Whoever performs the commandments of the Torah and walks in its ways is regarded as if he made the one above.” M Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 187.

⁶⁶ See my discussion of *Tikkun* in relation to *Ein-sof* in S. Drob, *Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and psychological perspectives*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2020.

⁶⁷ Tegmark, *Our Mathematical Universe*.

⁶⁸ On Plato’s mathematization of the Eide—see J. N. Findlay *Plato: the Written and Unwritten Dialogues*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, pp. 6–7, 17–18 and Appendix I: Translated Passages Illustrating Plato’s Unwritten Doctrines.

⁶⁹ See note 38.

⁷⁰ In holding that value is foundational even for the “truth” that is served by logic, I am not denying that logic is necessary for an understanding of the role of value in existence. There is a certain conceptual and actual interdependence between these pre-existent abstract entities.

⁷¹ Plato, Second Epistle (to Dionysius) 312d–e. As translated by J. N. Findlay *Plato: the Written and Unwritten Dialogues*, p 296.

⁷² W. D. Ross. *The Right and the Good*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1930/2002, p. 140.

⁷³ S. Harris. *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. New York: The Free Press, 2011, p. 32.

⁷⁴ C. Siewert. *The Significance of Consciousness*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. P. 329.

⁷⁵ M. Tegmark, *Our Mathematical Universe: My Quest for the Ultimate Nature of Reality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, p. 391.

⁷⁶ While it can certainly be argued that even in the absence of higher consciousness there is great value to the preservation of the earth and (especially, life, and that, for example, it would be unethical

to destroy lower animal and plant life without good reason, it is clear that a whole range of values (e.g. those involving knowledge and wisdom, and perhaps love and beauty) are inextricably linked to the higher levels of consciousness. Values are in this sense “subjective” in that they are inextricably linked to the experiences, intentions and actions of a sentient subject. This, however, takes nothing away from either their objectivity or universality.

⁷⁷ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 28.

⁷⁸ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, p. 28.

⁷⁹ We have seen that Husserl is a notable exception. He wrote about “values extending indefinitely” as an “Absolute” that transcends both the world and absolute consciousness (*Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, W. R. Boyce Gibson, trans, London: Collier Books, 1931/1969) p. 158). See Note 23 above.

⁸⁰ Leslie, who appears at first to place values at the foundation of the cosmos ends up in a form of speculative idealism in which he sees the universe as grounded in an infinite series of infinite intelligences. My argument in this paper is that his “axiarchism” does not require such speculative support and that at least from an idealist perspective the “mechanism” through which existence arises/appears need be nothing beyond an axiologically directed consciousness.

⁸¹ While the constitutive function of values (and mind) certainly operates within the spatio-temporal world, I am here arguing that values are constitutive of time in the phenomenological sense of “having,” “using,” “needing” time”, etc. the point of which, in each case is the actualization of values. When we decommission or suspend the primacy of temporality we can more readily see that values play a constitutive role in its appearance.

⁸² Perhaps an exception to this occurs in passive meditative states in which mind endeavors to just let things be.

⁸³ J. Leslie, ‘Existing Because Ethically Required.’ In Leslie and Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence*, pp. -141. From “A Cosmos Existing through Ethical Necessity.” *Philo: A journal of Philosophy*, 12 (2) special issue, *Theism and Naturalism* (Fall/Winter, 2009), pp. 172-187, p. 92.

⁸⁴ Leslie, “Existing Because Ethically Required,” p. 131.

⁸⁵ Leslie, “Existing Because Ethically Required,” p. 131. Leslie considers the objection that the values we have are conditioned sociobiologically. He argues that this is of little importance in relation to his

overall argument. Our biological heritage and various social pressures may condition, even “force” us to view “saving happy children from drowning” to be better than “drowning them for fun,” but this neither makes this view wrong nor provides a justification for it being correct. Just as the criteria for whether a mathematical calculation is correct is unrelated to the brain processes that “cause” us to make the calculation, the criteria for whether an action is ethically or axiologically correct is totally independent of the material causes that lead us to believe in its value. There are material (presumably neurophysiological) causes that lead one to conclude that $8+8 = 16$, but those causes do not justify the calculation. Similarly, there may be socio-biological causes that condition one’s negative judgments about lying or murder, but these causes do not have any bearing on whether these judgments are ethical.

⁸⁶ In this Leslie is in accord with G. E. Morre who held that a beautiful world would have value even in the absence of a sentient being to appreciate it.

⁸⁷Sidney Morgenbesser – Wikiquote, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Sidney_Morgenbeser. Downloaded February 26, 2023.

⁸⁸ Leslie, “Existing Because Ethically Required,” p. 131. Leslie considers the objection that the values we have are conditioned sociobiologically. He argues that this is of little importance in relation to his overall argument. Our biological heritage and various social pressures may condition, even “force” us to view “saving happy children from drowning” to be better than “drowning them for fun,” but this neither makes this view wrong nor provides a justification for it being correct. Just as the criteria for whether a mathematical calculation is correct is unrelated to the brain processes that “cause” us to make the calculation, the criteria for whether an action is ethically or axiologically correct is totally independent of the material causes that lead us to believe in its value. There are material (presumably neurophysiological) causes that lead one to conclude that $8+8 = 16$, but those causes do not justify the calculation. Similarly, there may be socio-biological causes that condition one’s negative judgments about lying or murder, but these causes do not have any bearing on whether these judgments are ethical.

⁸⁹ S. Drob and H. Tilevitz, “The Mystic as Philosopher – An Interview with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz” *Jewish Review* 3:4 (March 1990), pp. 14—17.

⁹⁰ **D. Birnbaum**, *God and Evil: A Unified Theodicy/Theology/Philosophy*. New York: Ktav, 1989.

⁹¹ Here we might note that the Talmud (*Eruvin* 13b) informs us that both the houses of Hillel and Shammai concluded that there is so much suffering in the world that it would have been better if man had not been created. (In this they seem to directly contradict the divine pronouncement after each day of creation that “it was good.”)

⁹² S. Drob and H. Tilevitz, “The Mystic as Philosopher.” <http://www.thejewishreview.org/articles/?id=180>. Downloaded May 7, 2023.

⁹³ D. Birnbaum, *God and Evil*.

⁹⁴ It is here interesting to note the *midrashic* narrative that God created and destroyed numerous worlds where the balance between *chesed* (loving kindness) and *gevurah/din* (rigor/judgment), i.e., the balance between good and evil, was different than our own. These worlds were destroyed because an over-abundance of either loving kindness or judgment would fail to result in the kind of reality envisioned by the creator. From a *possible worlds* perspective, we might regard these created and destroyed worlds as infinite variations on the axiological plane, analogous to the infinite variations on the physical plane that some have called upon in order to explain the fine-tuning of our material reality. On this view “fine-tuning” characterizes the axiological and ethical balance that provides our cosmos with the unique opportunity to fulfill the divine will, or in the language I prefer, that maximizes the potential for value.

⁹⁵ Just as an individual person can fail to achieve life-meaning, there is no guarantee that the universe as a whole will fulfill its potential for meaning and value. The fact of the holocaust and other great atrocities proves this, but these events, however horrific, take nothing away from the proposition that the meaning of the cosmos, the answer to “Why is there anything at all?” is the realization of “the Good,” the development and perfection of value and meaning in the face of such horrors and other obstacles.

⁹⁶ *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 6. *Great Books of the Western World*. M. Adler, ed., World. B. Jowett, trans. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 13rd printing, 1991, p. 264.

⁹⁷ For example, in an oft-cited article the philosopher Bernard Williams argued that life without death would be meaningless. Williams, B. (1993). The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality. In J. M. Fischer (Ed.), *The metaphysics of death* (pp. 71–92). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹⁸ C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963p. 473, par 673.

⁹⁹ A. N. Whitehead. *Modes of Thought*. New York: MacMillan, 1938. Reprinted, New York: The free Press, 1968, p. 156.

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, in spite of his disdain for philosopher's preoccupation with "values," observed that the ultimate question is experienced most authentically in moments both great rejoicing and despair "when ...all meaning becomes obscure" M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 1.

¹⁰² Such philosophy, as one might have already surmised, involves a rapprochement between analytic and existential thought.

¹⁰³ See C. Peterson and Ms. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook of Classification*. Oxford: Exford University Press, 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Davies. *A Self-Explaining Loop*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁵ The Zohar, the locus classicus of the Kabbalah, described certain the *Sefirot*, the archetypal elements of creation, as the questions: Who? What? And What are these? See Zohar I:2a, H. Sperling, M. Simon, and P. Levertoff, trans. *The Zohar* (London: Soncino Press, 1931-4), Vol. 1, p. 6, and discussion in I. Tishby and F. Lachower, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) Vol. I, p. 294-5.

¹⁰⁶ Shimon Labis, *Ketem Paz*, Daniel Matt, "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," p. 96, note 37.

¹⁰⁷ Compare T. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 117, 124.

¹⁰⁸ Suggested by Dragana Favre in a review of an earlier draft of this paper. Dragana Favre. (2023). Review of: "Why Existence? An Explanation with No Remainder". Qeios. doi:10.32388/2UZGCY.

¹⁰⁹ Dragana Favre. (2023). Review of: "Why Existence? An Explanation with No Remainder". Qeios. doi:10.32388/2UZGCY.

¹¹⁰ Birnbaum, *God and Evil*, p. 54ff., 66-7.

¹¹¹ P. Bertocci, *The Person God Is*. London: Routledge, 2013/1970.

Declarations

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.