

The World's Haecceity is the Dual of My Thrownness

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1 Introduction

We live in a contingent world, a world that could have been different. A common way to deal with this contingency is by positing the existence of all possibilities. This, however, doesn't get rid of the contingency - it merely moves it from the third-person view to the first-person view.

2 Haecceity

The haecceity of the world is its contingent thisness - the fact that is it what it is, even though it could have been different. One way to account for it is by postulating a total encapsulating the other options. Some examples:

- Hugh Everett III posited the existence of all possible outcomes of a quantum collapse in his many-worlds interpretation.
- David Kellogg Lewis posited the existence of all modally possible worlds, thereby removing the special status of our world relative to others.
- Many people have proposed a multiverse, for instance to explain the anthropic effect.
- Max Tegmark has proposed that all finitely-describable mathematical structures exist.

All these approaches have as their effect that the third-person contingency, the haecceity, of the total thus posited disappears.

3 Thrownness

I am placed in this world, in this place and time, with this mind and body, without having a choice about it. That is my existential given, and the place from where I must live my life. Martin Heidegger called this my *Geworfenheit*, my "thrownness". Though I see others, and can imagine myself, in different situations, I shall have to come to terms with me being what I am, and from there to become what I ought or want to be. I have no other option.

The characteristic features of my thrownness are inaccessible from the third-person perspective - and so to science. Consciousness, qualia, moral obligations, conscience, freedom, religious experience - all of those are subjective, and hidden from objective investigation. Yet subjectively they are the most important aspects of reality.

Of course *reports* of these subjective features, or *physical correlates* of them can be investigated scientifically, but not *as* phenomenal, *as* existential, me-related.

4 Duality

Max Tegmark has introduced the useful concept of our *address* in the multiverse: we are here, and not elsewhere. The larger the multiverse, the larger also our address. But that address is precisely the third-person representation of my thrownness - it describes what I am relative to what I could or might have been.

My thrownness is the very contingency that matters to me - and it still bears all the philosophical questions that apply to third-person contingency, only with a "me" pointer in them. "Why is¹ the world this way (of all the ways it could have been)?" merely becomes "Why do I have² this address (of all the addresses I could have had)?"

The fact that with most other addresses I would not have been a rational, living, or even physical being is hardly an answer - it answers why *given the fact that I can ask this question* I am here, but that given is already part of the question itself. If a peloton of twenty sharp-shooters shoot at me from close range and I survive, I have all reason to be amazed, and the fact that if I hadn't survived I wouldn't have been there to be *not* amazed doesn't change that.

1 Or "did God make", and so on.

2 Or "did God give me", and so on.

Given the questionable meaning of “existence” when applied to worlds one cannot even in principle observe, the first-person question is the more important one, and what positing many worlds – whatever their factual status – does, is to move contingency from third-person to first-person, and thereby outside the scope of science. It does not eliminate it, but it helps bring the question of our thrownness into focus.

5 References

- Everett, Hugh (1957). *On the foundations of quantum mechanics*.
- Lewis, David Kellogg (1986). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Blackwell.
- Tegmark, Max (2014). *Our Mathematical Universe*. Vintage Books.