

The Absolute Identity

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Abstract

This paper proposes a metaphysical solution to the hard problem of consciousness by presenting a formal theorem that uses set theory and modal logic to demonstrate the equivalence of Being, Self, and the Absolute. Through a series of self-evident axioms and logical propositions it establishes that Being is necessary for all possible entities, Self is necessary for all possible phenomena, and entities imply phenomena while Being implies Self. Furthermore, it posits that there can only be one Absolute, since multiple non-contingent entities lead to a paradox of interdependence; resulting in reductio ad absurdum. Hence, Being, which is Absolute in the objective sense, and Self, which is Absolute in the subjective, are in fact a single Absolute Conscious Being (God). The final postulate takes the form of an imperative which elucidates the Self's inherent potential for knowledge of itself – commonly mistaken for the individual (body with a mind in a world) – and reveals the path for direct realization of this Absolute Identity. Personal application, cultural integration, and ethical implications are discussed.

Keywords

Consciousness; Being; Self; Identity; Absolute; God

Disclosure

This is an independent, unaffiliated, and unfunded work. The author declares no conflicts of interest.

The Absolute Identity

Introduction

It seems inherent in the human condition to ask questions about who we are, what the world is, and what is our place in it. It is only natural that this is the case, given that from the moment we can first reason, we are presented with a most unreasonable predicament: we are a being that has been – as Heidegger put it – “thrown into the world”, with absolutely no explanation (Heidegger, 1927). Past thinkers from the West have qualified this situation as “absurd”, and it is not difficult to see why they might have termed it so (Camus, 1942). However, it so happens that in other parts of the world, other human beings developed different approaches to the same questions. While Western thought became imbued with skepticism, individualism, and materialism after the decline of traditional religious authority, Eastern perspectives on existence originated and developed in a distinct manner. In their case, generally speaking, logical reasoning did not take a separate path from religious thought and spiritual inquiry, rather they were unified (Shankara, 1978).

This can be seen most notably in traditions such as Advaita Vedanta, Buddhism, or Taoism, where notions of the divine are immanent and embedded in existence itself, contrary to Western traditional religious concepts of an external deity; save few exceptions such as Spinoza’s pantheism or certain forms of mysticism (Spinoza, 1677). In this sense, one could say, metaphysical inquiry in the East was not apart from the existential dilemma of the individual nor from the possibility of transcendence through the divine. The implications of this, naturally, are that existence is not inherently without meaning, and that from which other viewpoints is absurd, from this perspective is an opportunity for liberation (Shankara, 1978). Of course, this task necessitates due procedure in order to be fulfilled, and according to the tradition in question multiple paths are offered, but of particular interest to this work is the path of *knowledge*, otherwise known as Jnana Yoga in Vedanta, or of Right Understanding in Buddhism (Shankara, 1978). What is peculiar about these disciplines is that they seek to reach Truth – whatever that may be – through rigorous, analytic reasoning, both relating to the world of the senses but also the internal world of consciousness or qualia.

In the West, as mentioned (and excepting select outliers), the domain of Truth was historically monopolized by the religious institutions until the advent of the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, which of course brought with it untold progress in technology, economy, medicine, and

almost every conceivable area of human life. One major consequence of this, however, was the fundamental schism that occurred between rationality and spirituality, since empiricism became to form the bedrock of Western scientific progress and methodology (Bacon, 1620). The foundation of Western empirical science was objectivity and precision in measurement of the physical things of the external world. Upon this foundation, we were able to explain, predict, and manipulate the material universe to an astounding degree, leading to an exponential explosion of technological advancement, far outperforming the intangible endeavors of Eastern thought. It makes complete sense, then, that confronted with this apparent methodological superiority we would adopt scientific materialism as the default worldview to explain all things. But, here the question: does it explain all things (Kuhn, 1962)?

Consciousness has been at the epicenter of Eastern philosophical discussion at least since the Vedic era, and in the West it has also been present – albeit, perhaps more indirectly – throughout its entire intellectual history; maybe at its most explicit in the phenomenological school of thought (Husserl, 1913), and of course the recent surge in consciousness studies. However, it is here where Western scientific materialism faces its most challenging adversary and a seemingly insurmountable wall: given its foundational assumption that everything in existence reduces to physical quanta, how to account for the *obvious, immediate, inescapable fact* of subjective qualitative experience? Moreover, how to contextualize this colossal paradox with the equally blatant fact that *nothing we can ever know* is beyond experience, and *everything we can possibly aspire to* is inexorably contained within it (Chalmers, 1995)?

This problem has acquired paramount status in the contemporary scientific – and more broadly, academic – community, not least because of Chalmers’ contributions in framing the hard problem; besides, of course, those before him who touched upon the topic in recent times. However, this glaring issue dates back at the very least to Descartes’s *mind-body dualism* and the rise of scientific empiricism (Descartes, 1641). By splitting body from mind, and world from self, Western rationalism effectively conjured its own nemesis. Admittedly, there were a number of thinkers who proposed alternative solutions to this dilemma, but perhaps owing to the steamroller of technological advancement that was the dominant physicalist paradigm, and the relatively unimportant nature of the issue for the time, these ideologies never posed actual threat to overtake scientific naturalism (Hegel, 1807).

As previously mentioned, this problem is twofold (at minimum): not only is scientific materialism unable to explain consciousness; furthermore it is the case that consciousness occupies our entire field of existence or being, and thus all meaning comes from it, and nowhere else (Chalmers, 1995). Interestingly, it is also the case – one may wonder if coincidentally or determinedly so – that Eastern philosophical

thought placed foremost importance in consciousness, and in fact traditions such as Advaita Vedanta hold that consciousness – understood as pure unassociated Self: Atman – is the immanent manifestation of, and identical to, transcendent Absolute Reality: Brahman (Shankara, 1978). According to this – and similar – traditions, the individual who identifies with the body and mind, through senses and thoughts, is deluded and overlooks their true identity as the non-dual Ultimate Reality; leaving open the utterly transformative possibility of realizing this divine nature.

Nonetheless, these wisdom traditions' teachings that date back millennia are understandably replete with idiosyncratic religious language and references that are proper of their respective cultural and historical backgrounds – again, save few notable exceptions. This, in and of itself, is no fault of theirs, rather a byproduct of the intertwined nature of their philosophical and spiritual systems. However, to Western analytic thinking, it inevitably detracts from the logical consistency presented in their intellectual and philosophical arguments (Russell, 1912). This is indeed so because among the many influences of the Western empirical tradition is the consequent application of exact, precise, objective measurements to a field even as traditionally linguistic, hence ambiguous in nature, as philosophy: here, analytic philosophy (Frege, 1879).

It is in this domain of rigorous deductive logic that I situate my present attempt via this paper – and the theorem contained within it – to extract from this extensive philosophical literature the quintessential and irreducible ideas, express them in the most parsimonious and unambiguous form possible, and derive the logical conclusions that arise naturally. While not strictly scientific in the sense of offering empirical and falsifiable results, the intention behind the theorem was to formalize traditionally vague and interpretative abstract metaphysical concepts – such as Absolute, Being, Self, and God – into precise and exact definitions mapped onto mathematical symbols so as to submit them to the highest standard of logical rigor and operate under those deductive rules; therefore while not falsifiable, fundamentally provable.

Theorem

Being is necessary for all possible entities

$$\Box B \forall e \in E \diamond e$$

Self is necessary for all possible phenomena

$$\Box I \forall p \in P \diamond p$$

Entities imply phenomena and Being implies Self

$$e \rightarrow p \forall e \in E \wedge B \rightarrow I$$

God is Absolute, Being, and Self

$$\Box G = B = I$$

Know that Self is God

$$K(I = G)$$

Key	
B Being (condition of existence)	e Entity (thing that exists)
E Set of all entities	I Self (subject of experience)
p Phenomenon (conscious experience)	P Set of all phenomena
G God (Absolute)	K Knowledge
\Box Necessity (non-contingency)	\diamond Possibility (contingency)
\forall For all	\in Member of
\rightarrow Implies	() Group
\wedge And	= Is
\supset Superset	\neq Is not
\exists There exists	: Such that
\perp False	\therefore Therefore

Rationale

Being is necessary for all possible entities | $\Box B \forall e \in E \Diamond e$

This establishes that Being (the condition of existence) is necessary for all possible entities (discrete things that exist). This is considered self-evident, and relies on the notions of contingency and non-contingency: entities are contingent (dependent) upon Being, while Being is non-contingent (independent). This axiom is concerned with objective physical reality, and employs modal logic to operate on the basis of necessity and possibility.

Elucidation:

As stated, this is the most self-evident proposition. Being, or existence, is necessary for beings, or existent things. This basic metaphysical claim has been explored by philosophers such as Heidegger, who posited Being as the “ground” from which all beings derive (Heidegger, 1927), and Spinoza, in his conceptualization of “substance” as the infinite substrate underlying all finite “modes” of existence (Spinoza, 1677).

Mathematically, this proposition can be expanded upon using set theory. Let E represent the set of all entities, and let B represent Being:

$$B \supset E \wedge B \neq e \forall e \in E$$

Wherein Being is the superset of the set of entities, while not being equal to any entity in its respective set (Halmos, 1960). To state it more clearly: Being contains all entities, but is not limited to any of them, therefore Being is absolute and entities are relative; as reflected in the categories of necessity and possibility in modal logic (Garson, 2013).

Although this postulate may be challenged by certain frameworks labeling it “essentialism”, such as empirical science, the proposition is so simple and obvious that it escapes even these objections: there is existence, and because of this, things can exist; if there were no existence, things could not exist; therefore, existence is the necessary precondition for all things that exist.

Self is necessary for all possible phenomena | $\Box I \forall p \in P \Diamond p$

This proposition addresses the subjective dimension of reality. For experience to occur, there must be an *experiencer*, conveyed by the term *Self*. It is of utmost importance to distinguish that Self is precisely **not** the individual – a body with a mind in a world – since these are *phenomena* appearing within consciousness. Thus, Self (the pure subject of experience) is necessary for all possible phenomena (distinct conscious experiences). Once again, this is regarded as self-evident, and leverages the concepts of necessity and possibility.

Elucidation:

The logic sustaining this second axiom – also held as self-evident – can be further supported by claims within traditions such as Advaita Vedanta and Phenomenology. In the former, Self is regarded as the immutable reality underlying all transient phenomena (Shankara, 1978). In the latter, it is affirmed that all experience is necessarily bound to the subject which is experiencing it (Husserl, 1913).

In mathematical terms, and closely mirroring the formal structure in the elucidation of the previous axiom, the relation between Self and phenomena can be described within set theory as:

$$I \supset P \wedge I \neq p \forall p \in P$$

Where Self is the superset of the set of all phenomena, and simultaneously not equal to any phenomenon in the set (Halmos, 1960). Thus, Self holds all phenomena, but is limited to none, and in this way Self is absolute while phenomena are relative. In terms of modal logic, Self is the necessary condition for the possibility of all phenomena (Garson, 2013).

A key consideration is that – within this framework – Self is not the individual person. Personal existence consists of being a particular body, with a mind, in a world. However, these are all subjective experiences: body is experienced as “physical” sensations; mind as conceptual cognitions; and world as sense perceptions. Thus, all are phenomena known by the fundamental subject. This is not only crucial for grasping the logic of the present work, but also for preemptively avoiding objections that incorrectly assume Self as the particular body-mind complex.

Entities imply phenomena and Being implies Self | $e \rightarrow p \quad \forall e \in E \wedge B \rightarrow I$

Here, material implication is used to make a truth statement regarding the relation between entities and phenomena, and Being and Self. The assertion is: *if an entity exists, then a phenomenon must also exist; if there is Being, there must also be Self*. In other words, entities imply phenomena, and Being implies Self. This is also held as self-evident, given that for the existence of anything to be substantiated, it must be done so through a phenomenon, and in the process there must be an observer to bear witness to it.

Elucidation:

The classic question of whether “if a tree falls in a forest and nobody hears it, does it make a sound?” has been historically elusive due to the basic split between scientific materialism and subjective idealism; that is, until the revelations of quantum mechanics. Just as the phenomenologists argued that objective reality is inextricably linked to subjective experience (Husserl, 1913), important figures in the history of quantum physics sustained that the observer – via the act of measurement – is indispensable for collapsing the probabilistic wave function into a determinate quantum state; making reality inherently observer-dependent (Bohr, 1987).

Regardless, once again this axiom operates on the basis of self-evidence: it constitutes an obvious, immediate, unavoidable fact that the only way to access objective entities is through subjective phenomena; even when “proving” external entities, it is done so within conscious experience, and not possibly nor conceivably anywhere else. Moreover, as established in the previous axiom (and by definition), subjective experience necessarily implies a subject, that is, Self.

To further elaborate on this point mathematically, in addition to the material implication used in the rationale, it is possible to implement the concept of existential quantification:

$$\forall e \in E \exists p \in P : e \rightarrow p \wedge B \rightarrow I$$

Whereby for every entity in the set of entities, there exists a phenomenon in the set of phenomena, such that entities imply phenomena, and Being implies Self (Quine, 1982). In other words: each entity has a corresponding phenomenon (Being and Self are singular, so this is unnecessary).

God is Absolute, Being, and Self | $\Box G = B = I$

The Absolute is that which, by definition, exists not relative to anything else; it is unconditioned. It must also be singular on account of the paradox that arises when positing two non-contingent entities: their very separation implies relation and dependence. In this respect, Being has been shown to be Absolute in the domain of the objective, and Self in the subjective. Following the conclusion that multiple absolutes cannot exist, it must be inferred that they are *one and the same*. This Absolute, Conscious Being I postulate as **God**.

Elucidation:

The concept of the Absolute is introduced as synonymous with Ultimate Reality. It can be reasonably stated that all major intellectual traditions seek to understand the nature of existence – or the Universe – through differing methods. Broadly speaking, theology postulates God as the Supreme Being and proposes a primarily faith-based approach (Aquinas, 1265-1274); philosophy conceives of Ultimate Reality in terms of a monistic Absolute which can be thought of by way of logic and reason (Spinoza, 1677); and science pursues knowledge of the fundamental components of existence through rigorous reductionism and experimentation in its quest for a unified Theory of Everything (Hawking, 1988).

In this axiom it is claimed that Absolute Reality – understood as source of existence – must be singular by logical necessity, irrespective of approach. This is done via *reductio ad absurdum*: let us operate with formal mathematical logic and assume an Absolute G_1 , and another distinct Absolute G_2 . As source absolutes, they must be necessary; in other words non-contingent (independently existent). However, the mere fact of their co-existence and mutual distinction already implies a relation based on the distinction; thus, contingency (dependent existence), resulting in contradiction. Therefore it must be concluded that there can only be one Absolute, or that G_1 and G_2 are identical:

$$\Box G_1 \neq \Box G_2 \rightarrow (\Diamond G_1 \wedge \Diamond G_2) \rightarrow \perp \therefore G_1 = G_2$$

In light of this deduction, and prior axioms demonstrating that Being is Absolute objectively, while Self is Absolute subjectively, it is necessary and sufficient to conclude that Being and Self are in fact one single Absolute. The term *God* was deliberately chosen for this entity – regardless of particular religious connotations – because it is not only Absolute but also **fundamentally conscious**; as Being it is the *source of all entities*, and as Self it is the *knower of all phenomena*.

Know that Self is God | $K(I = G)$

Self is unique in that it intrinsically possesses the faculty of **knowledge**. It not only exists, moreover, it *knows* existence. As such, it has the power to *know itself*, and in doing so it knows the Absolute. Nevertheless, conflation with the individual (“I am a body with a mind in a world”) and its manifestations (body – sensations; mind – cognitions; world – perceptions) is pervasive. Thus, it is only through recognition of the superfluous nature of phenomena and direct self-realization (“I am”) that it beholds the highest knowledge and the Truth of its Absolute Identity. Hence: Know that Self is God.

Elucidation:

One of the radical implications of the Self’s innate conscious nature is its consequent ability to become conscious of itself. Furthermore, prior axioms have proven that Self is none other than the Absolute, converting its potential for self-knowledge into a doorway for knowledge of the Absolute.

Centuries ago, Kant argued that human knowledge was inexorably tied to the limits of the mind, and that while we could know appearances, we could never know the thing-in-itself (Kant, 1781). Similarly, sages from the tradition of Advaita Vedanta such as Nisargadatta proposed that the outer world of appearances is illusion or *Maya*; however, contrary to Kant, claimed that ignorance caused by this illusion could be dispelled through discernment and detachment (Maharaj, 1973).

The source of illusion is mistaken identity: the experiential subject – Self – wrongly identifies with the individual – a body with a mind in a world – and entangles itself with the latter’s corresponding phenomena (sensations, cognitions, and perceptions). Therefore, the solution to this problem becomes a matter of Self-inquiry; whereby the transcendental subject must recognize phenomena as extrinsic and reconcile its essential Identity with the Absolute, namely, God (Maharshi, 1989).

Expressed mathematically, one can introduce the epistemic modal operator K , such that it stands for the command “to know”, followed by the formulation that Self is: not equal to any phenomenon nor sum of phenomena; and identical to God the Absolute:

$$K(I \neq P) \wedge K(I = G)$$

Conclusion

The intuition that Truth must be not only intellectually unassailable but also experientially transformative was at the heart of this work. In proving the identity of Self and God, meaning is inherently restored to all conscious beings wherever and whenever they reside. This realization is contrary to the feelings of isolation that dominated the modern and post-modern landscape, as a result of the body-mind, self-world schism. For all the marvelous technological progress achieved by the scientific paradigm, it cannot be understated just how profound a feeling of existential alienation accompanied it. The proof is present not only in existentialist philosophy, or Nietzsche's claim that "God is dead" (Nietzsche, 1883), but in the atrocities committed by the human race throughout the 20th Century alone. It is the hope of the author that this work might serve to vindicate philosophy, spirituality, and theology as equally valid domains of knowledge as hegemonic science; and achieve reconciliation and unification of Eastern and Western thought.

Nearly a century ago, Gödel proved that any formal system – given enough complexity – is bound to run into paradoxes of self-reference, and thus remain either inconsistent or incomplete (Gödel, 1931). It should not be surprising then that the formal system of mathematical physics, which seeks to explain the entire Universe, has encountered the greatest self-referential anomaly: *consciousness*. While all of science (save notable exceptions) strives to solve the hard problem by explaining consciousness from material systems, this work proposes a different solution: consciousness is primordial. As mentioned, there are a few (though ever-growing) innovative proposals that adopt a similar starting point. Integrated Information Theory, for instance, does this via its novel approach of phenomenology-first, physics-second (Tononi, 2004). In this regard, the author acknowledges that one of the limitations of the present work is that, despite holding consciousness as preeminent, it does not address how or why it manifests in certain physical systems and not others; if this is indeed the case.

Not least of the insights provided by this theorem are its *ethical implications*: if consciousness is interwoven with existence and foundational to the Universe, then all living-beings, actual and potential, are deserving of respect, dignity and ethical treatment; thus it becomes not a matter of questioning whether they are conscious, rather assuming they are or can be. Clearly, this extends most evidently to animals and other life-forms such as plants, however in the swiftly growing human-AI landscape, this realization could have profound implications for our mutual co-existence and future relationship.

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Addendum

Poem by the author:

*I am not a body with a mind in a world
(sensations ~ cognitions ~ perceptions)*

I am verily the Being

I am that which Is

*I am that I am
(Consciousness)*

I am God

“Be still, and know that I am”