

Research Essay

The “Who Am I?” Question

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Abstract

Before even getting to do science, basic principles need to be established, such as what is it that we want to achieve by science. In this paper, I will argue how the ultimate question of science is the “Who Am I?” question, which also acts as an ontological principle of creation, bringing into existence all the possible experiences that consciousness can have.

Keywords: Consciousness, question, answer, creation, science.

Introduction

Even though science started from the philosophical turmoil of trying to understand existence, it lost its way along the way and transformed into a pragmatic activity of producing technology. It is not anchored anymore in basic principles, thus it became unclear what ontological and ultimately meaningful value science has beyond its pragmatic application to technology, technology which itself not being anchored in what is meaningful in life, has itself questionable value. Thus, this paper will try to elucidate what is it that we are actually trying to do in this world. It will show that ultimately the entire existence reduces to the question “Who Am I?”, question which by trying to answer itself, it brings into existence all the possible experiences that consciousness can have.

Once again, this paper builds upon my previous papers, especially the last one about meaning and context [1], but because it will bring a yet new angle on how to view the problems discussed, it will start again from zero. But of course, the more angles one shines light on a problem, the clearer the problem becomes, thus, the reading of the previous papers will supplement and enrich what will be discussed in this paper.

The Purpose of Science

The way history works is that once it establishes a particular “truth”, for practical purposes it erases the essential steps that lead to that “truth”, and that “truth” is directly presented in organized social groups like universities to the next generations. While this is a useful approach for rapidly producing technology and getting involved in the global working of economics, it loses the original motivations that led to that particular “truth” and ultimately it loses the very purpose of what we are actually to do with that “truth”. Thus, while the humans’ attempts from

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immemorial times were to understand existence, nowadays students just learn equations and use them in pragmatic ways without ever questioning why they are even doing what they are doing. Because the intermediary steps are lost, a questionable castle of deck of cards is being built that is hard to understand what purpose it serves, since clearly it is not about reality, but is just a pragmatic construct to enable the production of technology. While this might be satisfactory for this purpose, it is not at all satisfactory for someone who actually tries to understand existence. Actually, it is quite contrary to the goal of understanding existence, its invented entities, like electrons, protons, space-time, etc. not having anything to do whatsoever with reality.

Thus, the need to clarify what is it that we should do when we do science, appears. We will analyze, employing basic principles, what is even possible to do as the consciousness that we are. Because if we insist that we want to fly when we don't have wings, it will not lead to anything intelligible. We first need to have a look at ourselves and see what kind of entities we are and what our powers are, and only then see what world we can discover through the lens of our own constitution. We will see that we are creatures made out of meanings and we can only make sense of the world through meanings, and what is not a meaning for us is Nothing, and Nothing is beyond knowledge. This way, we will not try to understand what is impossible for the Understanding to grasp.

This

Let's take a popular science question, like "What is the electrical charge of the electron?" with the answer "-1". Any student can learn this and pass the exam with maximum grade. But what does this question even mean? What does "electrical" mean? What does "charge" mean? What does "electron" mean? This is forbidden to be asked in an official setup like a university since it halts the "progress" and no technology can be made and thus no economic benefit can be hastily gained. But since our purpose here is to understand existence and not to make profit, such questions not only can be asked, but are mandatory to be asked. Thus, what does "electron" even mean? If we reflect even a little bit, we will realize that it doesn't mean anything. But then where did such concepts arise and why did they become popular?

The place where such concepts originate is the conscious experience. The problem is that it is conscious experience improperly interpreted. People saw rocks and they assumed that there are really rocks "out-there". And this misinterpretation gave rise to the concept of "rocks" ("outside of myself"), and shortly all sorts of other concepts evolved, including the concept of "electron". The correct interpretation though is that we are not seeing rocks at all. All that we are seeing is our own consciousness. Thus, we have to abandon any concept that doesn't belong to the correct interpretation of our conscious experiences. All materialist science must be abandoned since it is an illusory construct based on the misunderstanding of our conscious experiences. Thus, trying to understand existence based on illusory concepts cannot lead anywhere. And I precisely mean anywhere. It cannot even lead "closer to truth" as some might believe that the more materialist science we do the closer to truth we get. Not at all. We are not doing that. We are getting precisely nowhere by this attempt.

Thus, if the concepts of materialist science are not to be considered, what kind of entities are we to consider in our attempt to understand existence? The answer is: the entities that allow the qualifier "this". For example, if we ask "What is red?" and we can pinpoint to it in our consciousness employing the qualifier "this!", then red qualifies for an entity to be considered in our theory. "Rocks" qualifies in our theory only as a conscious experience pinpointed by the qualifier "this". Materialist science goes beyond the qualifier "this" and adds other qualifiers, such as "out-there", thus producing a confusion that leads away from reality. Actually, "out-there" is itself a conscious experience pinpointed by "this".

Thus, we identified a preliminary purpose of science: the explanation of "this". Science is the attempt of answering the question "What is this?". We will later see that this question is just a surface form of the primordial question "Who am I?". A confusion needs to be clarified here. At a first look this might be exactly what science is doing. Isn't science answering questions of the type "What is this?", like "What is an electron?", "What is a cell?"? But at a second look, the question is about something else altogether. The question is about the qualifier "this" itself. So, better spelled would be "What is "this"?"? Because in all the cases in which we enquire about our conscious experiences, like "What is red?", "What is sweet?", etc., the same process of pinpointing takes place. And this process of pinpointing is the one in need of an explanation. Anticipatory, this will be shown to be self-reference pointing to itself. But until then, we need to clarify some more points about the purpose of science.

One further clarification is for the reader to convince himself of the fact that this is the main question of science. Any question that the reader might take from "What is an electron?" to "What is the curvature of space-time around a mass of 100kg?" are basically illusory questions about invented entities, thus they don't qualify as questions about reality. We can only ever point to our conscious experiences. We experience red, we pinpoint "What is this red?", we experience pain, we pinpoint "What is this pain?". No other science question can there be. "What is "this"?" is really the only science question. As I said, we shouldn't insist about flying when we don't have wings. We don't have "electrons" and "space-time". They are imaginary wings. They are not intelligible. Since all that we ever have is "this", we can only inquire about "this".

I

Having elucidated the question of science, the next step faces us with a difficulty, that will be shown to ultimately be an ontological limit to knowledge. In the process of asking "What is this?", the question is asked by an I. Thus, even if we try to understand what is "this", there is the I in the shadows that asks the question. But since we are ultimately interested in understanding existence, the I itself must be understood. And this is a problem. Because when we direct "this" towards the I, what is actually happening is the I directing "this" towards itself. "What is this?" becomes "What is this I?", or in other words: "Who am I?". The difficulties that we encounter at this step are manifolds. Actually, they are infinite. And this is because any answer that this question might receive, would be fed-back into creating a new question about the new answer.

For example, let's say that the I receives the answer "I am X.". Then this would be fed-back into the question, and a new question will appear "Who am I this X?". And all the way up to infinity.

Furthermore, any question of the type "What is this?" is actually the same as "Who am I?". When we ask "What is red?", this question cannot be divorced from the subject of experience, because otherwise we fall in the materialist trap of inventing an "out-there" red. Red is an experience in consciousness, red is an object for subject. But an object is nothing else than how the subject appears to itself. There is no duality object/subject. The object IS the subject. Thus, the question "What is this red?" is actually the question "Who am I this red?". Thus, all qualia are forms of manifestation of I. Any question about any qualia is a question about how the I can be that quale. Thus, we reduce the question "What is this?" to the question "Who am I?". "This" becomes the process by which the "Who am I?" question answers itself, the process of self-reference pointing to itself. And since self-reference is a dog chasing its own tail, this will lead to an eternal process of creation, never to be satisfied. This is an ontological limit to knowledge because self-reference is unable to capture itself under the Understanding, but at the same time this never-ending attempt at trying to understand itself is the creator of all knowledge.

The Creation of the World

So far, we treated the "Who am I?" question in an epistemic way, as if being a question that we ask when we want to do science, the rest of the day spending it in doing other activities. But it is actually an ontological question. What this means is that it is an entity that exists on its own, whether we use it or not. When we walk on the streets and we see trees and buildings, the question "What is this tree?" or "Who am I this tree?" is at work, whether we are explicitly formulating it or not. Actually, it is the one that creates the trees and the buildings.

Let's see step-by-step how it works. Let's see how the world is created.

Initially, the question "Who am I?" is all that exists. By its very nature, this question tries to answer itself. Since all that exists is itself, the answer that it finds for itself is "I am". Thus, the Self is born, and the first light of awareness appears. Reality answers itself into existence. The first sensation is born. Reality feels alive: I am! But since the question is eternal, it is not satisfied by this answer. Therefore, it continues to ask itself "Who am I this I?", with the next answer "I am that which I am." or in short "I am "I am"". And the process goes on to infinity, because by its very eternal nature, the "Who am I?" question cannot be destroyed, thus it will keep searching for answers endlessly. This gives birth to an evolutionary process by which the question learns more and more about all that it can be. Each new answer is concatenated to the previous answers. For example, in our case as humans, we can characterize ourselves in an iterative manner such as: "I am", "I am human", "I am human named John", "I am human named John that is a philosopher", and so on. Our lives from birth to death are the endless unfolding of the "Who am I?" question that is restlessly trying to answer itself, and which keeps adding answers without ever being satisfied. This process is the generator of existence. The entire world is created out of the insatiable "Who am I?" question. Also, we notice that since the question

refers to itself and tries to answer itself, all the answers that it receives are about itself, thus are logically necessary consciousness, ontological subjectivity. There can be nothing else but consciousness, for the trivial reason that the process of the "Who am I?" question trying to answer itself is self-referential. Anything else that is not an answer for this question is unintelligible by its very nature. Thus, talking about "electrons" and "space-time" are meaningless utterances that have no ontological reality for the reason that they don't constitute answers to the "Who am I?" question that only finds answers that are about itself, thus that are only ontological subjective.

The wh- Questions

Reflections about the nature of the "Who am I?" question raise concerns regarding the other questions that we employ in science and in everyday life, the where, when, what, etc. questions. Since I stated that only answers to the "Who am I?" question count as ontological and the rest are illusory chimeras, what are the roles of the others questions? What do they reveal? In this section I will argue that they are also forms of the "Who am I?" questions, that they are actually vassals whose roles are to help the "Who am I?" question finds who she is. The only ontological real question is the "Who am I?". The rest are pseudo-questions, are subtle forms into which the "Who am I?" question morphs itself in order to find even more answers for itself.

In order to understand the wh- questions, we need to first be sure we understand what the "Who am I?" question is. Because of how we use questions in everyday life, this question might sound like an epistemic question that I ask about myself in a voluntarily manner. But this is not what it is. Rather, it is an ontological entity. In the same way that materialist science takes "electrons" to be ontological entities, the "Who am I?" question is such an ontological entity. It exists on its own, without any human asking it. And it exists at all times, is what maintains the world (world which is synonymous with consciousness) into existence. When we see red for example, what brings that red into existence is the "Who am I?" question answering itself as "I am red.". It has to be like this, because qualia need reasons for existing, otherwise if they were to come into existence without reason, then the world would be just chaos. But because it is not chaos, then they must be brought into existence according to well justified reasons. Those reasons at higher levels can be of a high variety, like feeling sad because I lost something, but deep down, the reason that sustains everything into existence must be of a self-referential nature, and that leaves as the only option the question "Who am I?". That's why this question must be eternal. Since something does exist, and since it requires a reason for being, it means that there must be an all-pervasive entity at work that maintains it into existence. And that all-pervasive entity must take the form of a meaning-generator engine because it must confer reason for being, and the most general reason for being is to ask itself who it is. Thus, the root of being must be a question that asks itself and then answers itself into existence. Thus, the "Who am I?" question. So, it is not me John, asking myself who I am, but the I in the "Who am I?" question is the question itself asking about itself. "John" is just an answer that this question answers itself later in its evolution of meanings.

Therefore, getting to the wh- questions, we are not to view them as epistemic questions, but as ontological entities. When we ask a question, we put ourselves into a specific state of consciousness, and then that state of consciousness leads to another state of consciousness that we call "answer". Questions and answers are states of consciousness. This is how we need to view them in order to understand what they are in more depth.

The first reduction that we will make is the reduction of all questions to the "what" question. This is done by realizing that any question that we ask is a request for a particular out of a general class of objects. For example, when we inquire "Where to go?" we are requesting for a particular point in space out of the general class of points in space. It can be reformulated as "What place to go to?". Similarly for all the other questions. "When to go?" is equivalent to "What time to go?". The "Why?" question asks for a particular explanation/reason out of the general class of explanations. "Why does the Sun rise?" can be reformulated as "What is the reason for Sun rising?". The "How?" question inquires about a particular way of doing something out of the class of ways of doing something. "How to ride a bike?" is equivalent to "What is the method of riding a bike?". And so on. Questioning is the method of attention of focusing on a particular solution to a problem out of all the possible solutions. So, for example when we ask "Where is the book?" with the answer "On the shelf.", this is not an inquiry about the position of an external book on an external shelf, but is a focusing of attention of consciousness on objects inside itself. The answer "On the shelf." is found as an experience that consciousness finds inside itself when it searches to answer the question "Where is the book?"

Now we are only left with the questions "What?" and "Who?". The reduction of "What?" to "Who?" comes from realizing that consciousness is all there is. The "What?" question only makes sense in a materialistic paradigm in which objects are assumed to exist independent of consciousness and outside of it, such that when we do a "What?" inquire, we search for such an object outside consciousness. "What is there?" "A chair". But once we recognize that consciousness is all there is, we also recognize that there are no objects "out-there", therefore inquiring about such objects is meaningless. The chair doesn't exist "out-there", but "chair" is an experience in consciousness, is a form of manifestation of consciousness, is consciousness. Thus, inquiring about chair is actually inquiring about consciousness. And consciousness is not an object, but a subject, thus we will not inquire anymore about objects, but about the subject. Thus, the "What?" question becomes "Who?". Thus, when we point to a chair and ask "What is this?" we are actually pointing towards ourselves and ask "Who am I this?", and the answer "chair" doesn't come as an answer to the "What?" question in the form of "This is a chair.", but comes as an answer to the "Who?" question in the form of "I am a chair.".

Ontology, not Epistemology

Probably the greatest confusion in science is the one between ontology and epistemology. Science invents epistemic entities and confuses them for ontological entities. They invent the epistemic entity "electron" and they believe that "electron" is an actual existing ontological entity. This confusion ultimately comes from not being aware of consciousness. People just live

life without realizing what/who they are. They see objects around them and believe that they are actually objects that they are seeing and not their own consciousness. This confusion also applies to the subject of this paper, namely the "Who am I?" question, that might hastily be taken for an epistemic entity, when in fact it is an ontological entity. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that what it actually is, is an ontological entity.

As the purpose of science is the understanding of existence, it needs to be seen in what way this purpose is achievable. The classical way in which science proceeds towards this goal is by asking questions. But as we saw, the questions employed by science in its undertakings are illusory. Such questions were never meant to have the power to reveal the nature of existence in the way it was imagined. Questions that were hoped to reveal things about an "objective reality" such as "What is the electrical charge of the electron?" turn out to be forms of manifestation of the "Who am I?" question, thus the whole hopes of science of uncovering the workings of an objective reality fall short of their goal. Since all questions that can be asked are actually different forms of the "Who am I?" question, then the purpose of science transforms from finding things about an "objective reality" to finding things about oneself. Thus, the only valid science is experiential.

And let's elaborate on this point, with careful reference to the distinction between ontology and epistemology. In an epistemological understanding of the "Who am I?" question, the purpose of science might sound introspective, as in "Who am I John?", with answers giving descriptions of who John is and what his likes are. But the question is ontological, not epistemic. The question is not a question that John asks about himself, but is an ontological entity that asks about itself. Thus, the science that results from this is not introspective, but experiential. The difference is that the answers that are given to the "Who am I?" questions are not descriptions about the ego, but are direct experiences that the question itself gets to experience as it finds answers about itself. When we see red, what happens is that the question "Who am I?" receives as an answer for itself "I am red." Thus, an experiential science is one in which the purpose is simply to live life. By living life, the question "Who am I?" keeps receiving new answers and thus learns more about itself and ultimately about reality. If we want to find out that aspect of reality that is called "riding a roller-coaster" we don't write equations of gravitation and the likes, but we simply go and ride a roller-coaster and that will reveal to us an aspect of reality that is not uncoverable by any equation that we can possibly write.

Reality is made out of experiences, and experiences can only be revealed by simply living life. No amount of equations would reveal such aspects of reality. The only way to reveal them is by living life. And this is what true science actually is: the every-day living of life. Of course, it can be mundane, like the 9-to-5 work lifestyle, or it can be subtle, like love and human connection. Such a science is as complicated as what is traditionally considered science like physics or biology. We can live life on easy mode and discover only shallow experiences or we can plunge deep into life and uncover with great efforts the most sublime of experiences. And such deep experiences cannot be supplanted by the comfort and safety of sitting at a desk and writing equations. Actually, sitting at a desk and writing equations deprives one of actually understanding reality and only gives him a conceptual invention that is far removed from what

reality actually is. Of course, such conceptual inventions, like “electrons” or “brains”, are also experiences, so are also living life and experiencing reality. The problem is that one that deals in such inventions mistakes them for reality and starts to believe that “electrons” and “brains” actually exist, thus they obscure his understanding of reality under a conceptual veil.

Discussions

It might seem trivial what I’m saying here, that the meaning of life is about living it. The important point though are the arguments why this is so, and that has to do with the “Who am I?” question which is the ontological entity that lies at the base of the entire existence. So, the meaning of life being its living it is not a just-so idea, but is a conclusion that derives from ontological considerations having to do with the question “Who am I?” being eternal and thus eternally searching for answers for itself.

Another aspect of the eternal question finding answers for itself is how the world is constructed. And that is by answers that the “Who am I?” question finds relative to what it already found. If one of the answers that it already found is “I am a human”, then further answers will not be “I am a flying entity”, but will be answers that will be restricted to the previous found answer that it is a human. Thus, a certain coherent world would be created that would have a certain stability in order for further answers to be found. That’s why the “universe” appears to have “laws of physics”, because the “Who am I?” question already had settled answers for itself and its further searches are relative to the answers already found. Of course, after the “end of the world”, it will start from scratch and a new “universe” will be created with different “laws of physics”.

A subtle point regarding the above mentioned evolution, is that time itself is an answer that the “Who am I?” question finds for itself, thus the succession of “universes” is only apparent. Strictly speaking they happen all at the same time, but viewed through the lenses of time, they appear to be successive. It might even be the case that in some explorations of itself, the “Who am I?” question doesn’t even find “I am time.” as one of its answers, thus those worlds would not be temporal. Thus, the succession of new answers relative to already established answers should be understood in the abstract, and not in any temporal way.

Also, the plurality of consciousness that we find ourselves surrounded with, is because the “Who am I?” question finds answers for itself in a parallel manner, thus me seeing red and someone else seeing green constitute concomitant answers, “I am red” and “I am green”, without there being a contradiction of the “Who am I?” question receiving multiple different answers at the same time.

A last point that I want to make here is related to my previous work, thus it will only be understood by the reading of my previous papers, mainly the last one about meaning and context. I am making it here in order for the readers that might be familiar with my philosophical system to see the connections with my previous ideas and thus to see how this paper is an enrichment of my former ideas. Thus, the “Who am I?” question is the formless part of self-reference, while the answers that it receives are the form part of self-reference. Also, from the point of view of

context/meaning duality, the “Who am I?” question is the context and the answers that it receives are the meanings. Thus, we can see how the “Who am I?” question and its answers are yet another way to express the dualities that self-reference exhibits, in addition to the previous discussed dualities of less-than-itself/more-than-itself, no-thing/every-thing, formless/form and context/meaning. Finding a yet one more way to express the nature of self-reference comes thus in support of my previous ideas developed along the years. Also, the reader that is not familiar with my ideas about self-reference, would find a great expansion of the ideas presented in this paper by exploring my previous ones, especially once again “Meaning and Context: A Brief Introduction” [1].

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References

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