

ALL OR NOTHING – AN ESSAY

*In all the endless road you tread
There's nothing but the night.
Alfred Edward Houseman*

*Nothing comes from nothing,
The darkness from the darkness.
Randall Jarrell*

*The great mystery is not that we should have been thrown down here at random between the profusion of matter and that of the stars; it is that from our very prison we should draw, from our own selves, images powerful enough to deny our nothingness.
Andre Malraux – Man's Fate (La Condition Humaine – 1933)*

PREFACE

To a very large extent, the writing of this essay has been inspired by my wife Nikki. Her interests, especially those of an intellectual nature, are very broad and are characterized by an astonishing profundity. She has taken it upon herself to write out her thoughts as a "Theory of Everything – T.O.E.". In this effort she includes her views that encompass her philosophy, her socio/political/economic opinions often based on her knowledge of both individual and social psychology and her acquaintance with science. I must admit that in many of these areas, I do not share her views but I respect them. She is totally unaware that she has inspired me to write my T.O.E. except I do not view it as such. That is why this essay is labeled "All or Nothing". Essentially, it consists of my reflections on 'existence'. While I have agonized over a reason for existence I do not pretend to have an answer. This essay will not be an exercise in futility or perhaps it will be.

ESSAY

Before getting into the meat of my topic there is a conundrum that must be acknowledged and one that is impossible to avoid. I am referring to the problem associated with linguistics. With the exception of 'visual art', all our forms of communication use language. Mathematics is simply another language, misunderstood by most of us. However the words we use and the sentences we construct from them are replete with examples that appear to make no sense. One of the most famous of these is, "All Cretans are liars. I am a Cretan." It is easy to see that these two statements cannot logically follow each other. However for my purpose I wish to use the following apparent dilemma. If nothing exists than nothing is something. How can something be nothing? These linguistic contradictions are embedded in our languages. Language, as we understand it, is a human invention. In other words it is nothing more than extension of our rather limited nervous system which includes all our sensory perceptions. They frequently provide us with an illusory view of so-called reality. If one extends this to an absurd degree, everything we say or write is flawed and our language consists of the bricks that are the components of the 'Tower of Babel'. Ironically, this essay adds to that Tower so that anything suggested here is probably more background human noise.

To further complicate matters, Science has now provided us with a number of notions that appear to make matters more difficult to comprehend. One is Heisenberg's

'Uncertainty Principle'. Another is Godel's Theorem, and another still is Chaos Theory. The first simply states that we can never measure anything with 100% accuracy because the measurer is inextricably linked to the object being measured and changes it during the measurement. The second asserts that, 'Within any given branch of mathematics (logic), there would always be some propositions that could not be proven true or false using the rules and axioms of that mathematical branch. In other words, mathematics, which has nearly always been thought to be perfect is just not so. It, too, has feet of clay. Finally, Chaos theory basically declares that it is nearly impossible to predict the result of a change in one of the factors in a complex system with many variables. Because of these theories, the 'Tower of Babel' has become even more so. We have reached a point where we cannot measure anything with total accuracy; our linguistic ability leaves much to be desired; and our logic is not all that logical and predictions are nearly always impossible. Can we really know anything?

There are two other theories that may provide us with a new vision that raising all sorts of emotional problems. The first is Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The relationship between 'time' and 'velocity' is of interest. The greater one's velocity through space the slower is 'time'. Thus accordingly, at a certain velocity, (that of electromagnetic energy) time may simply cease to flow. It has been suggested that if one goes even faster, it may be possible to travel backwards in time. In other words 'time' is a variable quantity which is a function of velocity.

The second is the 'Quantum Theory'. Again what is of interest is the idea that all electromagnetic energy is quantized. Simply put it means that this energy is not continuous but consists of tiny discrete packets (quanta) of energy that Einstein later labeled as photons. If this is so and it is commonly accepted as such, then there must be space between these quanta.

As previously mentioned, there is a functional relationship between time and energy. Thus, time also is quantized so that there must be space between the quanta of time. Does anything exist in these spaces? If it is nothing then what characteristics does nothing have? This is the nub of my deliberation.

Two possibilities that might be linked come to mind. The first, one that has been suggested by many, is that these spaces contain an infinite number of parallel universes, each different from all the others. One of them might be a universe replete with nothing – a non-existing universe.

The second is that there is absolutely nothing within these spaces, no parallel universes, just an emptiness devoid of anything.

To try to deal with this possibility, I think that one would have to deprive oneself of all thought and sensory stimuli. 'Transcendental meditation', as practiced by some oriental gurus, might be such an attempt. However it appears to me that the total deprivation of thought and sensory perception is an impossible task. Can we ever reach such a condition? The answer may be in the affirmative. When do we humans reach a state when all perceptions and thoughts are totally gone and we are as one with nature? The answer is simple: when we die. It may very well be that the only ultimate reality, one where existence is equated with nothingness is death.

Shakespeare may have sensed this truism when he wrote in his famous 'To Be, Or Not To Be' soliloquy the following. "To die; to sleep; No more; and, by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Postscript

I certainly do not wish to die. The preceding is just a hypothetical supposition that bears contemplation. What I feel is one thing. What I think is quite another.

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