Creation Philosophy

John 1:1–4

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Note: This is a reference document that needs to be published so as to make it available. It may be a more cumbersome read than the DEEPs that are crafted as daily devotionals.

Example 1: If I have two apples and someone gives me two more apples, how many apples do I have?

Four.

Why?

Because two plus two equals four.[1]

What if I don't have any apples? Does two plus two still equal four?

Of course. Two plus two equals four whether or not you have any apples, or anything else for that matter.

OK, hold that thought. We'll get back to it later.

The Question of Existence

One of the fundamental questions of philosophy is, "Why does the universe exist? Why isn't there just nothing?"

There are three basic possibilities for the origin of the universe:

1) The universe always existed; it's "self-existent."
2) The universe created itself (or sprang from nothing).
3) Something else that's self-existent (AKA the creator) created the universe.

Possibility 2 has a severe problem. Aristotle famously said, "From nothing, nothing comes." He's implying that the universe cannot create itself. This is the normal philosophical view.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_comes_from_nothing

Lately, there have been some physicists (e.g., Stephen Hawking) advocating possibility 2. This is a sharp debate between those physicists and philosophers. They don't even agree on the definition of nothing, so a resolution is not at hand. We'll get back to this later.

Unfortunately, possibilities 1 & 3 also have a severe problem. How can anything be self-existent? What does self-existent even mean?

If the reader has never wrestled with the problem with the concept of self-existence, I recommend taking the time to consider it. Something self-existent is something that exists because it *cannot not* exist. Take away everything and it's still there. You can't get rid of it. It *must* exist.

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[1] This is referring to normal arithmetic. The field of mathematics includes other types of arithmetic, which sometimes use the same words to mean different things. For example, angles generally use modulo arithmetic. In trigonometry and many other applications, 180° plus 180° equals 0° because angles don't add normally, they're modulo 360. However, the formula for the sum of the internal angles of a polygon with n sides is $(n-2)\cdot 180°$, which tacitly assumes normal arithmetic, even though it involves angles.

That's where two plus two equals four comes in. Might that qualify as self-existent? The line used above was, "Two plus two equals four whether or not you have any apples, or anything else for that matter." Might it be able to stand on its own? Might it belong to the class of things that cannot not exist?

The reader is encouraged to stop for a while to let this settle. Can abstract (i.e., immaterial) concepts such as two plus two equals four be self-existent? Don't get bogged down in how insignificant our example is. We just want to break through the "I can't conceive of *anything* being self-existent" barrier.

If, after thinking this through, the idea of something being self-existent is still a non-starter, then the rest of this write-up will be boring. It might not even make sense. From here on, we will assume that the reader accepts that two plus two equals four can be self-existent.

The Possibilities

If two plus two equals four can be self-existent, all the rules of arithmetic could also be self-existent. In fact, why not all of mathematics? All the rules and theorems of mathematics are just as apt to be self-existent as two plus two equals four, as are the proofs of those theorems, and anything else immaterial.

Thus, the concept of self-existence is established, and we see many possible self-existent things. This allows for a self-existent creator. Unlike two plus two equals four, the creator is beyond our comprehension, but the concept of self-existence isn't.[2]

So, we've opened the door to possibility 3. We've also opened the door to possibility 1, but the second law of thermodynamics closes it. The universe can't be infinitely old because everything always runs down thermodynamically (entropy always increases). It would already be dead. That rules out a self-existent universe.

Let's now revisit the case for possibility 2 as advocated by some physicists.

http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141106-why-does-anything-exist-at-all

Those physicists use a definition of nothing that includes many important behaviors. They explain the origin of our universe as resulting from those behaviors. That's a curious definition of nothing.

The Grand Design by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow is one of the key references for this point of view. It posits a state from which our universe sprang. This state has no time dimension, but still has many physical properties—and thus qualifies as a universe. The authors ignore the question of how this universe could be self-existent. They seem to think that a universe without a time dimension (and/or zero net energy) would automatically be self-existent. Its self-existence is far from obvious, and the authors fail to address the issue.

The linked BBC article takes a different tack. It emphasizes, "Nothing is an unstable state." But that instability is a behavior, which makes the label "nothing" rather dubious. It's a thing, which can give birth to our universe. If such a thing (or state, or "mother universe," or whatever one wishes to call it) can be self-existent, the proponents of this theory need to explain that. Labeling it nothing, when one must spend many words describing its characteristics, is just a dodge. Such a thing is much more than nothing. Its self-existence cannot be just assumed.[3]

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[2] There's a misunderstanding that we must preclude here. If we can conceive of two plus two equals four being self-existent—meaning it *must* exist—the word *must* in the definition of self-existent doesn't mean it must be self-existent. It *can* be the case that it *must* exist; not it *must* be the case that it *must* exist. Two plus two equals four might be self-existent or it might not. We can conceive of both possibilities. Arithmetic might be part of what was created by the creator. We'll get back to this.

[3] Note that if it were indeed nothing, then it would automatically be self-existent.

So, while we can explain how an immaterial equation can be self-existent, the pre-existent thing posited by the physicists lacks a similar explanation. The problem is that it *acts*, to wit:

Two apples plus two apples equal four apples. *If only we had some apples*. The equation cannot create the apples. When it exists only in the abstract, it isn't *in action*. If apples exist, the equation can apply to something and be *in action*. The problem with the creation theory posited by the physicists is the definition of unstable—prone to change over time. *If only we had some time.* The equations of physics that have *t* in them (e.g., Schrodinger's Equation) are in the abstract. They're powerless to create the time (or the state function—Ψ). Where did we get the time? Or the Ψ for that matter? Thus, this starting thing posited by the physicists is not nothing.

To put it simply, the universe cannot spring from nothing. Aristotle was right. The very act of giving birth to the universe contradicts the concept of nothingness. The source of the universe must be a "thing." It can't be nothing.

The Result

Having eliminated possibilities one and two, we're left with only possibility number three—the self-existent creator.

But consider the mathematician Leopold Kronecker's famous bon mot:

"*God created the integers. All else in the work of man.*"

Could Kronecker be right? Could even the concept of numbers be created? Our second footnote explains that arithmetic might be self-existent, or it might not. Arithmetic not being self-existent is hard to picture, but that's our human limitation. We shouldn't rule it out.

But consider the alternative. What if immaterial things like arithmetic are self-existent? The mathematical formulas theorems and proofs we used as examples are things that we might call "truths" and the whole collection of abstract self-existent things, "truth."

If only this "truth" had the power to create the universe! Then all the dots would connect.

This turns out to be remarkably similar to the Jesus presented in the gospel of John. John 1:1–4 describes Him as the Word. The Greek word is *logos,* from which we get the word logic. The connection to self-existent abstract truths (especially formulas and proofs) is obvious.

And then there's John 14:6a.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Notice that Jesus doesn't merely claim to be truthful, or true, or even a truth.

He is the truth.

Question for reflection or discussion

1. Christians refer to Jesus as "the incarnate word of God. What is your mental image of that?