

SOMETHING AND NOTHING

Daltún Ó Ceallaigh

Why is there something rather than nothing? That is the stirring question posed by, among others, the Catholic theologian Hans Küng. It is supposed to be the ultimate and challenging query put to Humanists. Obviously, it is regarded as pointing towards a divinity as the answer.

That there is something - all around us and including ourselves - is generally agreed on, apart from the few who look upon the world and beyond as an illusion. Most accept the noumenal-phenomenal distinction of Kant that the things we see are constructed in our minds following sensory encounter with reality. But they are thus still based on actuality.

So, in what way do we react to that perceived reality? To ask the question as to why it is all cosmically there is in fact tendentious. This 'why' is intended to imply intent or purpose.

The more legitimate questions that can be tabled are about 'why is there something' within the cosmos in particular instances at any juncture in time rather than nothing. Such a 'why' implies cause and effect, but it does not necessarily imply intent or purpose.

Although, it does prompt some to entertain the notion of a 'first cause' for the cosmos. But, if everything is held to have a cause and an effect, that logically means an endless regression of causes and, similarly, an endless succession of effects - in other words, infinity. The religious are accustomed to the idea of infinity; they believe there is a god who is, always was and always will be. Thus, by definition, their

god cannot be said to have a cause. Yet, while they therefore endorse supernatural infinity, they seem unable to conceive of natural infinity.

While there are certainly lots of first causes and final effects in life and in the cosmos, that does not mean that there is a first cause for the cosmos itself. In other words, there does not have to be a 'why' about the cosmos rather than simply acceptance of 'what is, is'? Or put another way, the cosmos may be viewed as self-constituting. And we can then concentrate on the business of how matters function within that given.

The cosmic 'why' may thus be perceived as a superfluous question. To seek meaning where there is no inherent meaning is pointless. Is it not just presumptuous and somewhat fatuous to think there ought to be such a 'why'? In fact, the question involves an alienation of where meaning actually lies - within ourselves,

insofar as we create it. To imagine that meaning has to be originated externally to be authentic displays a lack of self-understanding and self-assuredness in the context of subscribing to a fanciful cosmological mystery.

So, Mr Küng, instead of there having been nothing and then something as Christians believe, what if there is never nothing and always something? Of course, one could still ask 'why is *that* so?'. However, the answer is simple: "There is no such 'why'; the cosmos (inclusive of our perhaps finite universe) just was, is and ever will be."

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