

UNDERSTANDING EXISTENCE

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Abstract

The subject of Existence has been a source for contention among philosophers, religious scholars, and scientists alike. There have been many theses and treatises written in this regard. In this article, we discuss existence and its different forms using metaphysics and ontological explanations.

Keywords – Existence, Sensory Existence, Notional Existence, Cosmos, Religion.

Existence: A morphological perspective

A word can be defined as a meaningful element of speech or writing. When we use a word, we are describing a single meaningful element which together combined with other such elements, forms a meaningful sentence. It is also possible for words to hold no meaning. For instance, filler words such as 'hmm', 'umm', or 'ah' don't have any inherent linguistic meaning although they do have a functional utility (i.e., filling the gaps taken between sentences).

When we say the word 'human,' we are describing a rational being. A word or a statement whose evidence can either be perceived i.e., can be sensed by our sensory organs, or be rationalized by our mind, is said to be a meaningful word or statement which is as per the fact of the matter.

For instance, if Jack is the name of a human being and we say, "*Jack is a human*", then our statement is truthful, as per the fact of the matter. However, if we say, "*Jack is a horse*", then our statement will be a lie, not as per the fact of the matter.

Therefore, from a morphological perspective, when we call something as *existent*, what we are saying is that the object in question can be perceived and/or rationalized by our mind.

Perceiving existence

(i) Sensory perception of existence

When we sense an entity through (a) vision, (b) hearing, (c) smelling, (d) taste and (e) touch; then our brain restructures and rationalizes it as an entity which is then saved in our memory, and we conclude that the entity is existent.

(ii) Notional perception of existence

Forming a notion is an innate ability of a human being. Not only can a human perceive existence via the sense but also by forming abstract and/or detailed notions.

A notion can be defined as a conception or belief about a certain entity. For instance, Jack may have never visited China. But Jack knows that China exists. This is because Jack has formed a notion in his mind regarding the existence of China.

It is possible that Jack may have used sensory evidence to form such a notion. For instance, Jack may have seen pictures of China or spoken to people who live in China. Therefore, Jack has formed a conception or a belief that China exists.

It is important to note that sensory evidence is optional to forming notions. For instance, Jack can form a notion that the fictional Island of Atlantis exists. The evidence to create such a notion may come purely from Jack's imagination. Simply put, Jack can choose to believe in something based on sensory evidence or Jack can believe in something just for the sake of believing in it.

Individual and its relationship with the Cosmos

An individual is that which exists as a distinct entity. It is unique, has a lifespan and has certain

necessary characteristics. These characteristics or attributes are associated with his essence that may manifest in his being simultaneously or in some cases occasionally. When we say, “*Jack is a human being*”, *Human* is Jack’s essence, and *being* is Jack’s existence. We call Jack as a *human being* because Jack can be perceived and/or rationalized meaningfully by looking at his being, which is his body. It is important to note that *essence* cannot be viewed separated from *being*, as having *essence* is integral to *being* and not an attribute of ‘*the being*.’

All animals live in a physical body which mostly share common characteristics. But it is the essence that goes hand in hand with this commonality to form an individuality.

Hierarchies of existence

There are various hierarchies of existence. Existence can be granular and individual. At the same time, collective and grouped. When we refer to a Galaxy, we refer to all the stars, planets, moons, asteroids, and other entities that exist within it. There are unlimited Galaxies containing unknown number of stars, planets, and other smaller entities within them. Together, we call it cosmos or universe.

Therefore, existence can be rationalized in terms of hierarchies. Jack exists as an individual. Jack also exists as a part of a larger human race. Jack also exists as an inhabitant of earth. Jack also exists as a part of the galaxy and the universe.

Classification of existence

Existence can be broadly classified into two major types i.e., (i) Independent existence or independent being, (ii) dependent existence or dependent being.

The existence of an animal on earth is dependent on many factors such as food, environment, oxygen, water etc.

Same is the case with Galaxies, and planets within them which are dependent upon each other. They need to follow a definite route and maintain a distance with each other and abide by mutual coherence for their survival. Planets

themselves, and the life contained in them is dependent upon their star’s heat generated by its burning continuously.

The philosophers who claim that existence is transcendental, meaning a divine state that exists on its own perpetually, make the mistake of not differentiating between independent existence and a dependent existence. For every dependent existence in the Cosmos, there is a life cycle. It comes into being in a specific way, grows to the peak of its life, then fades away after certain period. Denying these facts does not help them in finding the true meanings of existence.

When we look at individual existences within a larger sample space, be it a star, a planet or an animal, every individual has an exclusive life within its group/species which is different from each other in its characteristics.

Take the example of human beings, there are about 8 billion of them on this planet, but everyone has their own mind and different characteristics. Even their specific bodies, lines of their thumbs or shapes of their eyes are different from each other. Since they have different minds and follow their own way of thinking, they are not expected to lead their lives as robots. Meaning, their intentions behind their actions cannot remain the same. They will surely have differences of opinions in their functioning. If they are given independent authority, they will function differently, and because of their differences of opinions, they may also fight and kill each other.

With the above discussion, it becomes obvious that all forms of existence have been provided with specific environment required for their survival during their lifespan in which they need to live in a certain way. To ensure these provisions and requirements, there must be a single independent existence which has all the resources to create this Cosmos.

The visible dependent existences in the cosmos are the evidence that there is an independent existence.

When we say that there is an independent existence on which all that is there in the Cosmos

is dependent, it is natural that it has an essence of its own. Its essence has the capacity to create different dependent essences known as creatures. Similarly, its existence is real, and is apparent that can be perceived by our 5 sensory organs. How can we perceive it? By looking at the dependent existence in the Cosmos which are a proof that there is an independent existence of this Cosmos.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed existence from a morphological standpoint. Then we discussed the ways in which existence is perceived by the human mind. We further elaborated the concept of existence by describing its various hierarchies and major classifications. The universe is a dependent existence, for it to *exist*, there must be an independent existence.

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About the author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.