

Consciousness: Not your problem.

Is consciousness tied to entities or the relationships between them?

Where is 1?

Is the concept of +, 'addition', real? Here, the definition of real for addition is that it exists independently of the minds that perceive addition. If I add 1 liter of water to 1 liter of water, I will have more water- 2 liters, specifically. Is that process addition? Or is the only description of the process addition? If we say addition is the description of the process rather than the process itself, what do we call the process?

Imagine all sentient life vanishes from the universe, and there is a 1-liter water bottle perched on a ledge outside. The bottle dangles over a bucket with 1 liter of water in it. Suddenly, a violent wind blows through and knocks the water in the bottle over into the bucket. What occurred here was it 'addition'? The concept of addition is gone; no minds are left to perceive or analyze what just happened. With no mind, there is no description. But the undeniable fact is that the mass of water in the bottle and the bucket has combined, and the result is as such:

$$1(w)ater + 1(w) = 2(w)$$

Whether some mind is there to describe it or not, the event happened. Causal forces have moved the necessary independent components such that $(1x + 1x = 2x)$. Even in a universe where no mind is left to perceive or describe 'addition' the process/relationship that 'addition' describes exists. As things remain to be combined, cut, divided, and duplicated, the mechanics of math exist and are intertwined with the physical world. Like the laws of physics that describe our universe, pure math is as real as gravity and my hands typing now.

Does math have a causal effect on the cosmos, or does the causality in the cosmos give birth to events describable by mathematics? Did the process of addition affect the water in our imaginary bucket, or does addition describe the change in the mass of water caused by the wind? Are both questions treating addition as an entity? When we talk of mathematics as an idea/description of an event, or an entity in some realm of quanta that affects the physical universe, we treat it as a *thing*. What if mathematics is not a *thing*, mental or otherwise, but the relationship between 2 or more things? Maybe mathematics is the baseline schematic for a universe where $n(x) > 1$.¹

¹ Where x is *any*-thing

The finger and the moon:

The above refers to a Zen aphorism about a man pointing at the moon and everyone else looking at his finger pointing instead of the moon. It is relevant to the discussion of consciousness. We assume that our sense of qualia is related to 'us'. What if our self-awareness is not based on either the biomechanics, soul, or complexity of ourselves? Let us challenge the assumption prevalent in most ideas around the root of consciousness, whether from reductionism, dualism, or panpsychism, that consciousness is related to our bodies, minds, brains, souls, in short, our Us-ness. Consciousness has nothing to do with what we are. We have mistaken the finger for the moon.

I will not spend time disputing the physicalist, dualist, or panpsychist approach because, as evidenced by David Chalmers winning his wine², we still don't know much about anything worth disputing. I am asking you to think of the other category of phenomenon we all agree exists, yet has no presence other than its mechanics in the physical world: Math/Logic. This is the language of relationships between any (x) and any other (x).

Let us imagine another problem similar to the water problem from earlier. I can imagine a Blorble. You probably don't know anything about Blorbles, but that's okay. Try your best. What is the solution to this problem?

$$1(\text{Blorble}) + 1(\text{Blorble}) = X \text{ Blorbles?}$$

You might've guessed 2 Blorbles, and that's true, congrats. Even though I made up the idea of a Blorble, which has no basis in the cosmos outside my imagination, you solved the problem. You did it, yet undoubtedly you don't need to know what a Blorble is to see the answer—that $(1 + 1 = 2)$ even amongst the Blorbles. Despite the Blorbles only existing in my head, they are still governed by the relationships between things we call math/logic.

Why should Blorbles be beholden to such logic? Blorbles and all things are beholden to the rules of logic because they exist in a cosmos where $n(x) > 1$. In a world where more than one entity exists, relationships exist, and thus logic exists. The plural 's' in 'Blorbles' has beholden them to the rules of mathematics.

Logic can apply in a nonphysical world like my Blorble-filled imagination because logic is about the relationships between any (x) and any-*other* (x) where (x) is any-*thing*. We may be looking for consciousness in the wrong place. Self-awareness has nothing to do with *self* but the relationship between *selves*. We have mistaken our bodies, minds, and the souls hidden in our pineal glands³, for the moon. What if the moon is your relationship with all that is not you? Which I will call your Blorble⁴.

² <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2023/07/12/a-25-year-old-bet-on-human-consciousness-gets-settled>

³ <https://pn.bmj.com/content/22/2/168>

⁴ This sounded wittier in my head.

One, Two, Me:

It is self-evident that relationships exist between things. The plural in 'things' here implies that any (x) has no relationships until there is another (x) to relate to. Lucky for us, born long after the Big Bang, there exist plenty of (x) to go around.

Avoiding a digression into the interconnectedness of your body to the cosmos, let's assume that you, like me, experience an I. What if your qualia, your I, is far less dependent on your body or physicality than you assumed? Maybe your sense of I is not inherent like a soul, or a self-constructed illusion from logical loops. Your mind and your psyche may lie entrenched in your physical aspects as an organism, but maybe your I, your (B^5) , your sense of being an (x) is not a result of you, but a result of there being other (x) s.

That B is your relationship to all other (x) s. You don't directly experience the qualia of other minds, other (B) s; you intuit them from your interactions with other things, other (x) s. Consciousness seems puzzling because you can't find evidence for the qualia, the B you **know** you experience, the B you are, anywhere you look. This leads you to assume that consciousness is hidden in an unreachable realm, an illusion, or some obsequious process dependent upon neurons in the brain somewhere. And yet everywhere you look, there are just other (x) s, it seems almost as if the (B) you feel can't be real. You have yet to find and experience another unfiltered (B) , other than your own. You are square in Flatland with the soul of a sphere⁶.

And yet why should an (x) in the presence of another (x) give rise to a (B) ? What about this has anything to do with consciousness? Imagine a world of only one thing. In this world, there is no need for (x) to be/do anything. As with a single point, there is no mathematical, physical, or psychological meaning until there is a plane or other point against which to compare our point. In a cosmos where $n(x) = 1$ anything goes. In a cosmos where $n(x) > 1$ there are rules.

The first set of regulations is logic, which means that x^1 and x^2 must interact using the logical-relational system we call mathematics or logic. But in this scenario, I propose there is a hidden clause, that the existence of math is dependent on a 3rd. x^3 , an observer who describes the relationship between x^1 and x^2 . When $n(x) = 2$ there is no quanta yet, only qualia, Quaila is that same logical-relational system viewed from the inside.

Here may lie the crux of the mystery of consciousness: the underlying foundations of consciousness exist in the same manner as logic. Consciousness is logic, logic from the perspective of the logician. What we call logic is how we relate to (x) when we separate ourselves (x) , from the equation, what we call I or (B) is the same logic, but from an equation in which we factor in our own (x) .

⁵ For Blorble, I know, but I needed another symbol for I.

⁶ Flatland, a Romance of Many Dimensions (1884) by Edwin Abbott Abbott

A light inside the sock drawer:

I only own one color of socks and keep all my socks in a single drawer. In the morning, I don't need to inspect the sock drawer to get a matching color pair of socks. I can merely reach in without reflection or pause and get dressed in the dark. If I have two colors of socks in my drawer, now I must look into the drawer to avoid showing up with mismatched socks at the office. I need the light on. You don't have self-awareness and do not self-reflect? You have other-self-awareness. Your (x) gives rise to a (B) because it is not the only (x) .

What is the link between non-uniqueness and subjective experience? Imagine you live in a world where there is only 1 apartment. To make this analogy reasonable, there are many apartments, all of which are indistinguishable from one another. They have the same floor plan, furniture, and rent; these apartments can never change. What kind of feelings does your apartment generate? What level of qualia describes your relationship with the apartment? You can't envy other apartments; your apartment is the same. There is no pride, your apartment can't be changed, it cannot be improved, it isn't way better or worse than any other apartment. You would likely feel nothing about your apartment, no fear, no love, no joy, the apartment is unchangeable, lacks difference, and thus lacks relationships and so fails to generate qualia in you and itself⁷. The apartment is a blank background from which your (B) ignores.

For example, how much subjective feeling does your spleen generate in you? How much of your conscious awareness daily is directed to sensations about your spleen or other spleens? Unless you have issues with your spleen, or are a medical professional educated to know about the differences within spleens, your spleen is not the wellspring of subjective experience and feeling that your spouse, friend, or house is. On some subconscious level, unless you know the differences between spleens, they generate little subjectivity in your mind.

We must start looking for consciousness in relationships. The relations between things may be firmer ground for studying consciousness than the things themselves. Relationships may be of even greater importance, for they hold just as true in fables, hallucinations, and even the constructions of evil demons⁸.

In any world where $n(x) > 1$ there are rules, also known as relationships, math, or consciousness. Every (x) in a world where $n(x) > 1$, has a (B) . Though it may sound like it, this is not panpsychism in the traditional sense. I am not postulating that all matter is just awareness, but as counter-intuitive as it is, it may feel like something to be a sock in your sock drawer. Good news for you: the complexity of the relationships between your brown-sock and white-sock is far less nuanced than those between you and another human or between you and your socks. Even though complexity is essential, we must not get hung up on it. Our level of consciousness isn't based on our complexity but on our relationship to other (x) s. The complexity of our physical components does, in many ways, define the complexity of our relationships, but it is those relationships that give rise to (B) .

⁷ Don't worry we will get there...

⁸ Meditations on First Philosophy, Rene Descartes

Protons, Socks, & France:

The quest for the soul has been fraught with intellectual and theological turmoil through the ages. With motivations of religion and science, we have brutalized each other over millennia in search of and at the behest of our righteous I's. Little did we know, as we burned the witches, we burned away part of ourselves. Your I, your precious Blorble, may have nothing to do with you and everything to do with everything else. It may seem like a crazy idea to think that your sock is conscious of not being other socks, and that's a good thing because it shows how much more complex you are than your sock. You have this advantage in complexity over protons, socks, and your cells, not because of your beautiful and magnificently complex brain but because of how that brain lets you develop nuanced and layered relationships with other brains, with the ideas of protons, the universe itself. So yes, even a proton may be aware, but that level of awareness is so simple it isn't worthy of the definition we call consciousness. As our relationships between us and the world and us and ourselves grow, our (*B*) grows. Our holy Blorbles blossom into something so complex that most of us find the idea that their seed could be in something so simple abhorrent.

Every (*x*) feels like a unique (*x*), every big (*x*) feels alive, and at the risk of another heresy, even bigger (*x*)s exist than us. A city like New York, a Nation like France, a species like ours, these things, these (*x*) with their roots in the minutiae of the physical world, just like us. They also have relationships. They exist in relationships with other larger things, such as nations, cities, and species. They all have more complex relationships than their already complexly related components.

I lay no claim of truth upon these ideas, but regardless of their veracity, this essay competition asked for new thinking and innovative concepts. I may not have convinced you that *you* are a (Blorble) of a human instead of a human. However, I hope all this talk of Blorbles, liters of water, and basic math has opened you up to thinking about consciousness not inherently being tied to *what* we are, but also *how* we are.

Old Qfwfq Remembers⁹

As you might have guessed from the informal tone of this essay and my utter lack of knowledge about how to use footnotes properly, I am not a scientist. I am just some dude from his apartment, thinking about what it means that it feels like something to be in this apartment. I'm just another (*B*) who can't help but wonder how crazy it is to be a (*B*).

I understand if these ideas sound outrageous, but I ask you to look past the informality here. As anyone who reads good fiction knows, a lighthearted and informal discourse can hold pearls of profundity hidden within. Take this essay and look into the deeper concepts at its heart, that your 'you' might have nothing to do with what you are, but everything to do with what you are not. Your physical form might only be the soil in which the seed of your sense of I takes root.

⁹*The Complete Cosmicomics*, Italo Calvino

This web of relationships you build to the world, people, and things around you, as well as the relationships to the ideas, memories, and feelings within you, is *you*. You are not the soil but the flower born of its roots. Roots that connect it to everything it is not.

As Sartre explores in *Being and Nothingness*, we are defined in some ways by what we are not, we are born in the gaze of the 'other', and we birth them in return. The mystery of consciousness and self-awareness might not have to be a puzzle. Let's stop dissecting the socks and look at the light distinguishing them. In a world where $n(x) > 1$, and x is anything, there are relationships, dynamics, differences, that I can call math, or can I call Me.