

Platonic Supremacy and Unorthodox Takes on Reality

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A short speculative philosophical essay presenting some unique or unorthodox descriptions of the nature of reality. A few example interpretations of reality are discussed, extending arguments from scientists including Julian Barbour, Donald D. Hoffman, and Roger Penrose involving the nature of time, consciousness, and fundamental reality. The idea of Platonic Supremacy is proposed where our reality coexists in a single universe with Platonic ideals. A universe without time is considered as well as one where Platonic ideals actually drive all conscious actions - instead of free will - as they interact with our minds.

"The wand chooses the wizard. That much has always been clear..."
-- Ollivander, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows Part 2* [1]

"Why is human communication embedded in the silence of material objects?"
-- Monica L. Smith, *The Last Unknowns*. [2]

"All the possible instantaneous configurations of the universe are equally real. Unlike in a Block Universe theory, objects in time cannot be equated with trajectories in a block. And unlike in presentist theories, there is not just one real now. All the nows are equally real, existing once and for all in some abstract, atemporal realm. We have the impression of living in a world with a past because certain structures in the now we inhabit can be interpreted as traces of previous nows that have preceded our own. It contains features that can be interpreted as mutually consistent records of processes that happened in the past in accordance with specific laws of nature. ... Dinosaurs do exist, the now they inhabit is just not the temporal predecessor of the now we are in. In this version of hyper-presentism, time is not real in any of the fundamental senses of "real" mentioned earlier. At the most fundamental level, the world is completely static." [3]

Might it be that human experimental observations of fundamental particles - isolated photons, electrons, protons, etc. - are our only actual glimpses or physical interactions with the Platonic world? Might those observations or interactions, thus, be fundamentally (no pun intended) different than those of our day-to-day lives? Might this explain the "strange" quantum mechanics effects we see with wave-particle duality in the famous dual slit experiment with interferometers and beam splitters? Roger Penrose describes the importance of the Platonic world in his 2021 book *The Road to Reality*:

Plato made it clear that mathematical propositions - the things that could be regarded as unassailably true - referred not to actual physical objects (like the approximate squares, triangles, circles, spheres, and cubes that might be constructed from marks in the sand, or from wood or stone) but to certain idealized entities. He envisaged that these ideal entities inhabited a different world, distinct from the physical world. Today we might refer to this world as the Platonic world of mathematical forms. [4] [5]

Humans have historically considered a Platonic world as accessible only by conscious minds and existing in another universe, higher dimension, heaven-like "location," or only in human conscious minds. Perhaps this is wrong and that our reality actually coexists in the same realm as Platonic forms. Scientists searching for extremely small deviations in the roundness of the electron have, so far, not found any. As noted in the journal *Nature* in 2011:

The latest study... looked for the effect of this asymmetry on the spins of electrons exposed to strong electric and magnetic fields - but found nothing. Indeed, the researchers say that any deviations from perfect roundness within electrons must measure less than a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a centimeter across. [6]

Are experimental observations of isolated fundamental particles, and quantum entangled states, revealing aspects of the Platonic world thus producing many of the counterintuitive effects of quantum mechanics? Note all objects in our reality have wave functions, including humans, but if no deviation of roundness is every found in an electron, then, perhaps, we have another key metric to consider and that this may indicate the electron is a Platonic ideal form and already existing in our reality. [7]

Another perspective is that the quantity of electrons in our reality and their exact similarity, even if each can be considered as a fluctuation of a quantum field, may imply reality is a digital or computer simulation with each electron an instantiation of an encoded program definition of "an electron." In essence, perfect reproducibility and perfect roundness are, by definition, ideals only possible in a Platonic reality of perfect forms. [8]

Our standard understanding of reality is an existence of conscious beings in a matrix of space and time (one or the other as most fundamental) with a beginning at the Big Bang some 13.8 billion years ago and all changes in matter and energy as causally linked to this tiny primordial beginning. But some philosophers and physicists have proposed that time, and thus causality, does not exist. Julian Barbour in his 1999 book *The End of Time* describes "moments" as unique universe-sized slices. Physicist Lee Smolin describes the theory:

Julian Barbour proposed a quantum theory of cosmology that has many moments rather than many worlds. ... A moment is a configuration of the universe as a whole. These configurations... are relational configurations, which code all the relations that can be captured in a moment, such as relative distances and relative sizes. ... Barbour insists that the passage of time is an illusion and that reality consists of nothing but a vast pile of moments, each a configuration of the whole universe. ...moments exist eternally and timelessly, in the pile of moments. Reality is nothing but a frozen collection of moments. Each experience of a moment also exists timelessly - as part of its moment. The fleeting aspect of a moment is in reality just an aspect of the moment, a feature it has eternally. ... All the memories, records, and relics we have that give the impression that there was a past are, in fact, aspects of a present moment. ... To elucidate our world, Barbour has to explain what determines which configurations are common, have many copies in the pile, and which are less common, or altogether absent. This is dictated by an equation, which is the only law that acts to structure the pile. This is a version of Schrodinger's equation but one with no explicit reference to time. ... Causality is also an illusion. [9] [10]

University of California Irvine cognitive psychologist Donald D. Hoffman notes in his Fitness Beats Truth (FBT) theory that our brains are fundamentally designed not to understand the truth of reality but rather to promote fitness of an organism in an ecosystem with competition and evolution:

Suppose there is an objective reality of some kind. Then the FBT Theorem says that natural selection does not shape us to perceive the structure of that reality. It shapes us to perceive fitness points, and how to get them. The FBT Theorem has been tested and confirmed in many simulations. They reveal that TRUTH often goes extinct even if FITNESS is far less complex. ... The key insight of the theorem is simple: the probability that fitness payoffs reflect any structure in the world plummets to zero as the complexity of the world and perception soars. Chaotic effects prevent precise prediction of the specific perceptual systems that will prevail. But the laws of probability dictate that TRUTH has less chance than your lottery ticket. Does this mean that our perceptions lie to us? Not really. I wouldn't say that our senses lie, any more than the desktop of my computer lies when it portrays an email as a blue, rectangular icon. Our senses, like the desktop interface, are simply doing their job, which is not to reveal the truth, but to guide useful actions. The FBT Theorem reveals that as the senses grow more complex, they have less chance to disclose any truths about objective reality. [11]

Donald D. Hoffman also believes that the fundamental component of reality is actually conscious experiences. As Hoffman states in an interview with Quanta Magazine in 2016:

Physics tells us that there are no public physical objects. “Look, quantum mechanics is telling us that we have to question the very notions of ‘physical things’ sitting in ‘space.’” I’m emphasizing the larger lesson of quantum mechanics: Neurons, brains, space ... these are just symbols we use, they’re not real. It’s not that there’s a classical brain that does some quantum magic. It’s that there’s no brain! Quantum mechanics says that classical objects - including brains - don’t exist. The formal theory of conscious agents I’ve been developing is computationally universal - in that sense, it’s a machine theory. I am postulating conscious experiences as ontological primitives, the most basic ingredients of the world. I’m claiming that experiences are the real coin of the realm. The experiences of everyday life - my real feeling of a headache, my real taste of chocolate - that really is the ultimate nature of reality.” [12] [13]

All psychology students are familiar with famous visual experiments and optical illusions where participants view various images or images with motion, for example when a green dot forms that does not exist. Our minds create a fake reality here to “fill in the blank” with a logical history. [14] [15] [16]

These experiments are profound and possibly as significant as the dual slit physics experiment. Extending this idea, what if all of reality then, as suggested by Julian Barbour, is actually timeless slices and our conscious minds, considered so fundamental to historical interpretations of quantum mechanics as the critical observer, actually just “fills in the gaps” of, well, everything? Is “change” then actually all and only in our conscious minds?

Or we can invert our approach even further. We believe that we consciously decide to head to the next room to sit in a chair by our own free will. What if the “event” or interaction of a conscious mind and that chair is a form of instantiation like a computer program? Or what if, in what to us would appear to be the near future, the chair itself is instantiated and, like a pebble in a pond with ripples moving outward in waves, the chair “event” creates waves or messages to the future and the past similar to those described by the transactional interpretation of quantum mechanics. [17]

In this situation, we can imagine conscious minds afloat in a vast pool of random potential interactions with platonic ideas or forms even forms as colloquial as say “a chair.” A platonic “chair” exists or “approaches” and, as if we were a moon caught in a gravitational well, we only then “decide” to go sit in it. By this description of reality, the instantiation of the chair (before we even decided to use it) has primacy, even if our action validates its existence to us. Here, human free will vanishes in a world of these random interactions that create or inspire conscious actions. We try then, with much difficulty, to imagine a reality akin to a universe of “Platonic Supremacy.” In this model, no longer is there a causal link to all actions and change and free will ceases to exist.

As fantastic as these proposals seem, they may solve some major philosophical problems. Suddenly the Platonic world is one in which we exist (a single universe instead of many), the mind-body problem may be solved, quantum decoherence becomes no longer driven by a special observer. All reality becomes derivative not of a Big Bang singularity but, rather, from relationships, or orders of interaction with, Platonic forms. There is no separate Platonic realm as we are in it and consciousness is inherent.

Is all reality actually then a composite of these moments noted by Donald D. Hoffman? Do we exist in a reality where a consciousness interacts with a Platonic idea, meme, object to form any “experience” or moment? We see how our brains create fake stories with objects and motion, so maybe this is the model for all of reality also with our minds believing we take actions via free will when in actuality they are driven by future Platonic ideals that we have not even experienced yet? We likely also will see more theories with analogies of minds to our universe given our universe, in many ways, already resembles a neural network or brain. [18]

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