

Why is There a World AT ALL, Rather Than Just Nothing?

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Abstract

The titular question here “Why is There A World *AT ALL*, Rather Than Just Nothing?” is a *fusion* of two successive queries posed by Leibniz in 1697 and 1714. He did so to lay the groundwork for his explanatory theistic answer. But the present paper offers (i) A very unfavorable verdict from my critical scrutiny of the explanatory demand made by Leibniz, and (ii) My argument for the complete failure of his interrogative ontological challenge as a *springboard* for his and Richard Swinburne’s creationist theistic answer. I argue under (i) that Leibniz’s explanatory demand is an *ill-conceived non-starter* which poses a *pseudo* issue. Thus, his and Swinburne’s case for divine creation miscarries altogether. My collateral conclusion: The philosophical enterprise need not be burdened *at all* by Leibniz’s ontological query, because it is just a will-o’-the-wisp.

Key words: Leibniz, Failed Primordial Existential Question, Pseudo-Issue, Cosmological Argument..

Resumen. ¿Por qué hay mundo, en lugar de nada?

La pregunta “¿Por qué hay un mundo, en lugar de nada?” Es una fusión de dos preguntas sucesivas planteadas en 1697 y 1714 por Leibniz para sentar las bases de su explicación. El presente documento ofrece (i) un veredicto muy desfavorable de mi examen crítico de los motivos de la reivindicación formulada por Leibniz, y (ii) mi argumentación del fracaso total de su desafío ontológico interrogativo como trampolín para su respuesta teísta, y la creacionista de Richard Swinburne. Yo sostengo en (i) que la demanda de motivos de Leibniz es una idea imposible abocada al fracaso que plantea un pseudo tema. Por lo tanto, su caso y el de Swinburne abortan completamente la tesis de creación divina. Mi conclusión colateral: La empresa filosófica no tiene que cargar con la pregunta ontológica de Leibniz, ya que es sólo una mala concepción.

Palabras clave: Leibniz, error primordial, pregunta existencial, pseudo-cuestión; argumento cosmológico.

1. Introduction

In his 1697 article “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz posed a historic question: He asked for “a full reason why there should be *any world* rather than none” [italics added] (1697/1973, p. 136). In a sequel of 1714, he famously asked *more generally*: “*Why is there something rather than nothing?*” [italics in original] (1714/1973, sec. 7, p. 199). And he construed this question more specifically as “why is there something *contingent*, rather than nothing *contingent?*” Thus, presumably, Leibniz’s two successive interrogative formulations of 1697 and 1714 can legitimately coalesce into the *titular* question here: “Why is there a *World* at all, rather than just nothing?”

In earlier writings (2004, p. 563; 2008b, p. 6), I introduced the locution “the Primordial Existential Question” to denote Leibniz’s more familiar 1714 formulation “Why is there something, rather than nothing?” And there, I used the acronym “PEQ” to abbreviate the phrase “the Primordial Existential Question.” Yet here, I shall *extend* the designation “PEQ” to refer *alternatively* to Leibniz’s somewhat more specific 1697 query: Why should there be any world rather than none?

In this interrogative sentence, his term “none,” as applied to worlds, can best be taken to be an ellipsis for the putative special sort of world containing nothing contingent, the so-called “Null World.” And then his term “any world” can be taken to be elliptical for “any world containing something contingent or other.” With these understandings, the *titular* question of this paper is elliptical for asking “Why is there any world containing something contingent or other, rather than the null world.”

In this Leibnizian context, it would be a serious exegetical mistake to object that the explanatory demand made by his PEQ simply begs the question self-stultifyingly. The charge would be that any premise which might serve to explain the existence of something, such as our universe, would itself have to presuppose just such an existent on pain of vicious circularity. But, in effect, Leibniz parried this complaint of *petitio principii* by pointing out in his 1714 paper that although no *contingent* agency could provide a non-circular answer to PEQ, a necessarily existing one could. Thus, he argued there: “Now this sufficient reason of [i.e., for] the existence of the universe..., which needs no further reason, *must be outside this series of contingent things*, and must lie in a substance which is the cause of this series, or which is a necessary being, bearing the reason of its existence within itself; ...” [italics added] (Leibniz, 1714/1973, sec. 8). In short, for Leibniz, the agency of a necessarily existing divine being provides a *non-circular* answer to a properly construed, articulated version of PEQ.

Unlike Leibniz, the present-day philosopher Richard Swinburne claims that God exists only contingently. Hence, Swinburne believes that God is *also* absent from a world which is *devoid* of all contingent entities.

Like the philosopher Derek Parfit, I shall speak of the presumed *logical possibility* of there being nothing contingent as “The Null Possibility.” And like him, I use the label “Null World” to refer to a hypothetical world in which there is nothing contingent at all.

My major concern here will be, in due course, to provide a thorough *critical scrutiny* of Leibniz’s time-honored PEQ, which will culminate in *the complete deflation* of PEQ. But to lay the groundwork for this line of argument, several preliminary admonitions will occupy us beforehand.

2. Is it imperative to explain why the Null Possibility is not instantiated?

First I need to comment on the gloss or twist that Parfit and Swinburne have put upon Leibniz’s PEQ. Almost a decade ago, Parfit wrote

[W]hy is there a Universe at all? It might have been true that nothing [contingent] ever existed; no living beings, no stars, no atoms, not even space or time. **When we think about this [“Null”] possibility** (1998a, p. 420), **it can seem astonishing that anything [contingent] exists** [bolding added] (1998b, p. 24).

Thereupon, Parfit enthrones PEQ on a pedestal, saying: “No question is more sublime than why there is a Universe [i.e., some world or other]: why there is anything rather than nothing” (ibid., column 1). Importantly, Parfit’s logical motivation for this cosmic version of PEQ derives largely from the insidious peremptory assumption that the actual existence of a contingent universe in *lieu* of the Null World is *not* to be *expected*, and that the de facto existence of our world is *therefore inescapably amazing and perplexing!*

Swinburne shares Parfit’s astonishment that anything at all exists, declaring: “It remains to me, as to so many who have thought about the matter, a source of *extreme puzzlement* that there should exist anything at all” (Swinburne, 1991, p. 283). And, more recently, Swinburne opined: “It is extraordinary that there should exist anything at all. Surely *the most natural state of affairs* is simply nothing: no universe, no God, nothing” [italics added] (Swinburne, 1996, p. 48) Evidently, Swinburne’s avowed “*extreme puzzlement*” [my italics] that anything contingent exists at all is driven by the same peremptory *mind-set* as Parfit’s astonishment.

The late Paul Edwards, in a 1967 article “Why?” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, chronicled some of the long history of PEQ and of its cognates (Edwards, 1967, pp. 296-301). In 1999, this saga culminated in a tome of over 750 pages by the Swiss philosopher Ludger Lütkehaus, published in German, whose fetching title in English is *Nothing: Farewell to Being, End of Anxiety*. Suffice it just to mention that Lütkehaus deplores the so-called onto-centricity of our culture, the purported paranoid nihilophobia of our supposed ontological greed, and the like.

Turning to Parfit, I challenge his declared astonishment that anything contingent exists at all by asking him: Why should the *mere contemplation* of the Null Possibility reasonably make it “seem astonishing that anything exists” as he claims? I contend that it should not do so. Let me point out why it should indeed not.

If some of us were to consider the logical possibility that a person we see might conceivably metamorphose spontaneously into an elephant, for example, I doubt strongly that we would feel even the *slightest* temptation to ask why that *mere logical possibility is not realized*. Why then, I ask Parfit, should anyone reasonably feel astonished at all that the Null Possibility, if genuine, has remained a *mere* unrealized logical possibility, and that something does exist *instead*? *In short, why **should** there be just nothing, merely because it is **logically possible***? This mere logical possibility of the Null World, I claim, does *not suffice* to legitimate Parfit’s demand for an explanation of why the Null World does *not* obtain, an explanation he seeks as a philosophical anodyne for his misguided astonishment that anything at all exists.

3. Christian doctrine as an inspiration of PEQ

It now behooves me to explicate the implicit and explicit *presuppositions* of Leibniz’s PEQ. This articulation is vital for a fundamental reason: If one or more of these presuppositions of PEQ is either ill-founded or presumably false, then PEQ is *aborted* as a *non-starter*, because it would be posing an *ill-conceived* issue or a pseudo-problem. And, in that case, the very existence of something contingent, instead of nothing contingent, does not require explanation. For example, if a Mr. X presumably never committed a murder, it is ill-conceived to ask him just when he did it, and it is fatuous to blame him for not answering this question.

In earlier writings (Grünbaum, 1998, p. 16; 2000, pp. 5, 19), I have used the rather pejorative term “pseudo-problem” to reject “a question that rests on an ill-founded or demonstrably false presupposition” (2000, p. 19). But, since the German term “*Scheinproblem*” for “pseudo-problem” was given currency by the Vienna Circle, I now reiterate my caveat that, in my own use of that label to denote an ill-conceived question, “I definitely do *not* intend to hark back to early positivist indictments of ‘meaninglessness’” (ibid.).

Yet the notion that a question is ill-conceived or a non-starter, because it rests on substantive quicksand, surely *ante-dates* the logical positivist disparagement of certain traditional philosophical problems as pseudo-questions. Thus, in medieval debates, some issues were dismissed as clearly unproblematic under the Latin rubric of *cadit quaestio*. Despite this venerable ancestry, the 20th century challenge from the Vienna Circle was timely after all, I believe, because sometimes a *seemingly* well-conceived, plausible

question may not be warranted after all. Thus, a question may be misguided, because it is inappropriately generated by an assumption that was previously unrecognized to be very **misleading** indeed.

One of the main tasks that I have set for myself here is to show precisely how Leibniz's **PEQ is vitiated** by implicitly presupposing an altogether dubious corollary of an old Christian doctrine. Elsewhere (Grünbaum, 2004, pp. 561, 571), I have formulated that unacceptable corollary as follows: Spontaneously, the world *should* feature nothing contingent at all, and indeed there *would* be nothing contingent in the absence of an overriding external cause (or reason), a *null* state of affairs which is ontologically the "most natural" of all!

For brevity, I say that this tribute to the Null World asserts "**the ontological spontaneity of nothingness**" (Grünbaum, 2000, p. 5). And I have introduced the acronym "SoN" to designate the doctrine which avows this ontological spontaneity of the Null World. In this acronym, the "S" stands for "Spontaneity," the "o" for "of," and the "N" for the word "Nothingness." And my reason for having articulated SoN is precisely that its claim will turn out to be a completely unwarranted presupposition of PEQ. Bear in mind that, in a nutshell, SoN is the thesis that a null state of affairs is categorically the most natural or normal.

The traditional Christian doctrine which unilaterally entails SoN as a corollary makes the following avowal axiomatically: The *very existence* of any and every *contingent* entity, apart from God himself, is *utterly dependent* on God at any and all times. Clearly, this tenet of total ontological dependency yields SoN as an immediate corollary, because SoN tells us that, in the absence of an external supernatural cause, the ontologically spontaneous, natural or normal state of affairs is one in which nothing contingent exists at all.

A further corollary of the Christian dependency axiom is that, without constant divine *creative* support —"so-called" perpetual creation— the world would instantly lapse into nothingness, as claimed by Aquinas, Descartes and many others.

Thus, according to SoN, the actual existence of something contingent or other is a *deviation* from the supposedly spontaneous and natural state of nothingness. And, qua such a deviation, contingently existing objects would clearly require a *creative external cause ex nihilo*, a so-called *ratio essendi*, a reason for existing *at all*.

Yet, such a supposed creative cause must be distinguished, as Aquinas rightly emphasized, from a merely *transformative* cause: Transformative causes, which are familiar from science and daily life, produce changes of state in contingent things that *already exist in some form*.

Furthermore, according to the traditional Christian commitment to SoN, creation *ex nihilo* is required anew at *every* instant at which the world exists, even if it has existed forever. Therefore, traditional Christian theism makes a *major* claim as follows: If any contingent entity exists, but does so *without* having a *transformative* cause, then its existence must have a creative cause *ex nihilo*, **rather than being externally UNCAUSED**.

However, very importantly, *SoN can be strongly challenged ontologically* by confronting it with the **counter-question**: “But why should there be nothing contingent, rather than something contingent?” And, indeed, why *would* there be just *nothing contingent*, rather than something contingent? Moreover, why *would* there be nothing contingent in the absence of an overriding *external cause*?

Unfortunately, in the Christian culture of the Occident, both philosophers and ordinary people have inveterately imbibed SoN with their mother’s milk. And it is deeply ingrained even among a good many of those who altogether reject its received theological underpinning. But before Christianity molded the philosophical intuitions of our culture, neither Greek philosophy nor most other world cultures featured SoN (Eliade, 1992). No wonder that Aristotle regarded the material universe as both uncreated and eternal.

Yet, as we shall see, to Leibniz’s credit, when *he* espoused SoN, he tried to *give* a legitimating *ontological argument* to support it as part of a *two-fold a priori* justification of his PEQ. I shall soon contend, however, that his valiant effort miscarries altogether.

In 1935, the French philosopher Henri Bergson aptly, though incompletely, sketched SoN, when he rightly deplored its beguiling role in the misguided posing of PEQ. As Bergson put it:

. . . [P]art of metaphysics moves, consciously or not, around the question of knowing why anything exists – why matter, or spirit, or God, rather than nothing at all? But the question presupposes that reality fills a void, that underneath Being lies nothingness, that ***de jure there should be nothing, that we must therefore explain why there is de facto something*** [bolding added] (Bergson, 1974, pp. 239-240).

How then have the defenders of SoN tried to *justify* it in its own right, rather than just as a logically weaker corollary of the aforestated Christian dogma of the world’s total ontological dependence on the Deity?

4. *A priori* justifications of SoN by Leibniz, Swinburne and others

Some philosophers, notably Leibniz Leibniz and Richard Swinburne, have appealed to the presumed *a priori* simplicity of the Null World to argue that *de jure* there should be nothing contingent, so that the *de facto* existence of our world would make an answer to PEQ imperative. However, as I shall contend, the recourse to simplicity to defend SoN *a priori* is very unsuccessful, and moreover, significantly, there is no empirical support for SoN either. Therefore, this two-fold ill-foundedness of SoN will undermine PEQ precisely because PEQ presupposes SoN.

To mount an *a priori* defense of SoN, Leibniz and Swinburne maintained that the Null World is *simpler*, both ontologically and conceptually, than a world containing something

contingent or other. As Leibniz put it in 1714 “For ‘nothing’ [the Null World] is simpler and easier than ‘something’ ” (1714/1973, sec. 7, p. 199). This dual assertion of greater simplicity poses a fundamental question: Even assuming that the Null World is thus doubly simpler than any contingent something, does its supposed maximum dual simplicity *mandate ontologically* that there *should* be just nothing *de jure*, and that, furthermore, there *would* be just nothing in the absence of an overriding cause (reason), as claimed by SoN? My answer is emphatically negative.

I contend that the supposed *a priori* simplicity of the Null World is *not ontologically legislative* (Grünbaum, 2004, p. 573; 2008b, p. 11), because such simplicity would *not* mandate the claim of SoN that *de jure* the thus simplest world *must be* spontaneously realized ontologically by the Null World in the absence of an overriding cause! After all, having the simplest ontological constitution, which is presumably a feature of the Null World, does not itself make for the *actualization* or *instantiation* of the world featuring that constitution. Yet neither Leibniz nor his followers (e.g. Richard Swinburne) have offered any cogent reason at all to posit such an ontological imperative (Grünbaum, 2008a).

5. Are the philosophical fortunes of Occam’s Razor helpful?

Nor can SoN be vindicated ontologically by recourse to the kind of simplicity demanded by Occam’s Razor in the 14th century, the so-called “Principle of Parsimony.” For, as John Stuart Mill rightly emphasized, the Occamite demand for parsimony is a *methodological* rule requiring that we have *evidence* for our beliefs. Occam’s injunction is *not*—as William Hamilton claimed in the 19th century—an ontological truth avowing that the world has a simple constitution. Nor does Occam’s Razor license Jack Smart’s hope that “simple theories are objectively more likely to be true than are complex ones” (Smart, 1984).

After all, the ancient Greek Thales’ monistic hydrochemistry of the chemical universality of water is overwhelmingly *simpler* than Mendeleev’s 19th century polychemistry, yet the Russian’s polychemistry is enormously more likely to be true. Similarly, the ordinary second-order differential equations in Newton’s inverse square law of universal gravitation are clearly far simpler than the awesomely complex non-linear partial differential field equations in Einstein’s theory of gravitation. Yet, we may presume that Einstein’s theory is more likely to be true (Grünbaum, 2008a).

6. The demise of Leibniz's 1714 justification for PEQ

Now, let us come to grips with the specific 1714 *context* in which Leibniz formulated his PEQ, and then tried to *justify* it at once, by relying carefully on *both* of the following two premises: (1) His well-known Principle of Sufficient Reason, to which I shall refer by the acronym "PSR," and (2) his aforesaid *a priori* argument from simplicity for the presupposition SoN, *a presupposition which is implicit in PEQ's contrasting clause "rather than nothing"* (Leibniz, 1714/1973, secs. 7 and 8). Leibniz declared:

. . . the great principle of sufficient reason [PSR] . . . holds that *nothing takes place without sufficient reason*, that is . . . a reason sufficient to determine why it is thus and not otherwise. This principle having been laid down, the first question we are entitled to ask will be: *Why is there something [contingent] rather than nothing [contingent]?* For "nothing" [i.e., the Null World] is simpler and easier than "something." [italics in original] (Leibniz, 1714/1973, sec. 7, p. 199).

These avowals by Leibniz invite the following set of comments:

1. Right after enunciating his Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), he poses PEQ "*Why is there something rather than nothing?*" as "the first question we are entitled to ask." Precisely by containing the contrasting clause "rather than nothing," PEQ implicitly avows SoN. However, immediately after thus raising PEQ, Leibniz relies on the supposed *simplicity* of the Null World to *justify* PEQ's presupposition SoN, claiming, in effect, that the Null World would be **spontaneously realized ontologically** in the absence of an overriding external cause. As he puts it concisely: "For 'nothing' [i.e., the Null World] is simpler and easier than 'something' " [bolding added]. And clearly, there is *either* something or nothing.
2. To justify his PEQ, Leibniz is evidently concerned to motivate not only its first component "Why is there something?" but also its further contrasting interrogative clause "rather than nothing." But decidedly, the point of this contrasting clause is *not* to express the tautology that there is *either* something or nothing. Instead, the contrasting clause is an *ampliative major addition* to the first clause in Charles S. Peirce's sense; it is a crucial *extension* of the first clause by serving Leibniz to assert SoN. In short, PSR *by itself* would have justified only the *truncated* question "Why is there something contingent?" without warranting PEQ's *further* contrasting clause as a vital ampliative addendum to it.

Thus Leibniz is evidently *not* content to rely on his PSR *alone* to ask *merely* the *truncated* question "Why is there something contingent?" *without* the extending contrasting clause "rather than nothing." Instead, in effect, he uses SoN as presupposed in this contrasting clause to assert a *dual* thesis: (i) the existence of something contingent

is not to be expected at all, and (ii) *its actual existence therefore cries out for causal explanation*. As will be recalled, just this dual thesis was Parfit's rationale for embracing Leibniz's PEQ.

In sum, the soundness of Leibniz's justification of his PEQ evidently turns on the **cogency** of his PSR *as well as of his a priori argument from simplicity for SoN*. But we have already discounted his *a priori* argument for SoN in Section 4. Thus, we can concentrate on appraising his Principle of Sufficient Reason.

Consider within our universe, the grounds for the demise in 20th century quantum theory of the universal causation familiar from Newton's physics, as codified by Laplace's "determinism." This *empirically* well-founded quantum theory features merely probabilistic rather than universal causal laws governing such phenomena as the spontaneous radioactive disintegration of atomic nuclei, yielding emissions of alpha or beta particles, and/or gamma rays.

In this domain of phenomena, there are physically possible particular events that *could* but do *not* actually occur at given times under specified initial conditions. Yet it is *impermissibly legislative* ontologically to insist that merely because these unrealized events are thus physically *possible*, there *must* be an explanation entailing their specific *non*-occurrence, and similarly, a deductive explanation of probabilistically governed actually occurring events, as demanded by Leibniz's PSR.

This admonition against PSR was not heeded by Swinburne, who avowed entitlement to *pan*-explainability, declaring: "We expect all things to have explanations" (1991, p. 287). In just this vein Leibniz had demanded, for every event, an *explanatory* "reason [cause] sufficient to determine **why it is thus and not otherwise**" [bolding added]. Hence the history of modern quantum physics teaches that PSR, which Leibniz avowedly saw as metaphysical, cannot be warranted *a priori* and indeed is untenable on *empirical* grounds.

Thus, to discover that the universe does not accommodate rigid prescriptions for deterministic explanatory understanding is not tantamount to scientific failure; instead, it is to discover *positive* reasons for identifying certain coveted explanations as phantom.

As we saw, Leibniz had *generated* PEQ by conjoining his PSR with SoN. Yet since his *a priori* defense of SoN via simplicity has failed, it remains to inquire whether his avowed ontological spontaneity of the Null World might possibly be warranted *empirically*. My answer is emphatically *negative* for the following reason: *It turns out, as an induction from various episodes in the history of science, that SoN is altogether ill-founded empirically.*

To *examine* the **empirical status** of SoN, it will be useful to *reformulate* it in Richard Swinburne's *aforecited* words as follows: "Surely *the most natural* state of affairs is simply *nothing*: no universe, no God, nothing" [italics added]. But since our empirical evidence comes, of course, from our own universe **U**, consider the corollary of SoN which pertains to our **U**. This corollary asserts that it is *natural* or *spontaneous* for **U** *not* to exist, rather than

to exist. As against any *a priori* dictum on what is the “*natural*” ontological behavior of **U**, the verdict on that behavior will now be seen to *depend crucially on empirical evidence*, and indeed to provide no empirical support for SoN at all.

Two specific cosmological examples spell this empirical moral:

1. The first example is furnished by the *natural evolution* of one of the big bang models of the universe countenanced by general relativistic cosmology, the dust-filled so-called “Friedmann universe.” This universe has the following features (Wald, 1984, pp. 100-101):
 - (a) It is a spatially closed, 3-dimensional spherical universe (a “3- sphere”), which *expands* from a point-like big bang to a *maximum finite* size, and then *contracts* into a point-like crunch,
 - (b) That universe exists *altogether* for *only a finite* span of time, such that no instants of time existed *prior* to its finite duration *or* exists *afterward*,
 - (c) As a matter of *natural law*, its total rest-mass is *conserved* for the entire time-period of its existence, so that, *during that entire time, there is no need for a supernatural agency to generate it ex nihilo and/or to prevent it from lapsing into nothingness*, contrary to SoN and to Aquinas and Descartes. Evidently, the “*natural*” dynamical evolution of the Friedmann big bang universe as a whole is specified by Einstein’s *empirically supported* cosmology. Thus, the “*natural*” or spontaneous ontological behavior of big bang worlds is *not* vouchsafed *a priori*.

2. The same epistemic moral concerning the empirical status of *cosmological naturalness* is spelled by the illuminating case of the now largely defunct Bondi and Gold so-called steady-state cosmology of 1948 (Bondi, 1960).
 Their 1948 steady-state theory features a *spatially* and *temporally infinite* universe in which the following cosmological principle holds: As a matter of *natural law*, there is large-scale conservation of **matter-density**. Note that this conservation is *not of matter*, but of the **density of matter over time**. The conjunction of this constancy of the density with Hubble’s mutual recession of the galaxies from one another then entails a *counter-intuitive* consequence: Throughout space-time, and *without any matter-generating agency, new matter (in the form of hydrogen) pops into existence completely naturally in violation of matter-energy conservation*.

Hence the Bondi and Gold world features the **accretion** or formation of new matter as its natural, normal, spontaneous behavior, yet terrestrially at a very slow rate. And although this accretive formation *is indeed out of nothing*, it is clearly not “creation” by an *external* agency. Apparently, if the steady-state world **were** actual, it would *discredit* the doctrine of

the medieval Latin epigram “*Ex nihilo, nihil fit*,” which means “from nothing, you *cannot* get *anything*,” or more familiarly, “you cannot get blood out of a stone.”

The steady-state theory owes its demise to the failure of its predictions and retrodictions to pass *observational* muster in its competition with the Big Bang cosmology. This episode again teaches us that *empirically-based scientific theories are our sole epistemic avenue to the “natural” behavior of the universe at large*, though of course only fallibly so.

What then is the *empirical cosmological verdict on the corollary of SoN* which asserts that “It is natural for our universe *not* to exist, rather than to exist”? Apparently, *there is no empirical evidence at all for this corollary from cosmology, let alone for SoN itself*. Its proponents surely have not even tried to offer any such evidence for SoN, believing mistakenly, as we saw, that it can be vouchsafed *a priori* à la Leibniz.

7. PEQ as a failed springboard for creationist theism: The collapse of Leibniz’s and Swinburne’s theistic cosmological arguments

Probably every one of us from the Occident has wondered at some time in our lives: “Where did everything come from?” As we know, typically this question is *not* a demand for a statement of the earlier *physical history of our existing universe*. Instead, the question is driven by the *largely unconscious assumption of SoN*, and is thus simply another version of Leibniz’s query PEQ. Yet as I have argued painstakingly, PEQ rests on the *ill-founded* premise SoN, as well as on Leibniz’s very questionable PSR. **Therefore, PEQ is an ill-conceived non-starter, which poses a pseudo-issue based on quicksand.**

But, as we know, both Leibniz and Swinburne raised PEQ as an *imperative* question, and thence they concluded misguidedly that the *answer* to it mandates *divine creation ex nihilo*.

However, **PEQ evidently cannot serve as a viable springboard for creationist theism, because the demise of its premises PSR and SoN undermine it beyond redemption!** By the same token, *Leibniz’s and Swinburne’s cosmological arguments for divine creation are fundamentally unsuccessful.*

Hence I say to you: Whatever philosophical problems you have brought to this congress, it is my plea today that answering Leibniz’s PEQ should not engage your curiosity.

8. Coda on the failure to heed this plea

Two widely read atheistic authors, Richard Dawkins (2006, p. 155) and Sam Harris (2006, p. 73-74) have succumbed to the guiles of Leibniz's PEQ by countenancing it misguidedly as a searching question that rightly calls for an explanatory answer. Thus, Dawkins allowed a "first cause, the great unknown which is responsible for something existing rather than nothing" (ibid.). And Harris capitulates to PEQ, declaring with very misplaced intellectual humility: "Any intellectually honest person will admit that *he does not know* why the universe exists. Scientists, of course, readily admit their ignorance on this point" [italics in original] (ibid. p. 74).

But surely the failure to answer a pseudo-question does not bespeak ignorance on the part of scientists, philosophers or even the man in the street. Thus, Dawkins and Harris very *misguidedly* took PEQ as legitimate grounds for watering down their atheism.

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