



If A Tree Falls In The Forest, Do I Exist?

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Part 1: Dipping a Toe

“If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?”

It’s a classic. If you ask a room full of people, you’ll get as many saying yes as saying no. But this question isn’t *really* about falling trees, it’s about something (and I say this loving trees) more profound.

At first, the answer you’ll get often originates in the definition of sound. If we define sound as the vibration of a medium, then if the world were deaf, we can be sure that when something as large as a tree falls to Earth, vibration takes place. Vibration of the ground, of the air and anything else nearby. Therefore, we could conclude in the affirmative: When a tree falls there is a sound regardless of the presence of an observer.

Then, naturally, the counter argument arrives. Sound is an experience *of* vibration, they might say. What we call ‘sound’ is the translation of vibrations by the nerve centres of the body, into an experience. Therefore, although there would most certainly be vibration when the tree falls, we cannot claim the existence of ‘sound’ as such. Sound is a subjective *interpretation* of vibration, which necessitates the presence of an observer. Now we conclude in the negative: When a tree falls in the absence of an observer, there is vibration, but no sound.

Surely though, no one would argue that dog whistles don’t make any sound simply because we can’t interpret the vibration. Of course, the dog is the observer in that instance, and those vibrations imperceptible to the human are translated into sound right there in the dog. Then the question of a tree in the forest could equally be phrased as “If a dog whistle is blown and no dogs are around to hear it, does it make a sound?” From the human perspective, the

answer is, of course, no. Here we can more clearly see our key omission, and where we need to pivot to answer this question more comprehensively. We know that if a dog were present, it would respond to the whistle *as if* it made a sound. Therefore we have to assume that the whistle *does* make a sound, even though we cannot verify that with our own sense organs. Now we're moving toward a deeper grasp of the question. We're leaving the human-centred world and entering the observer-centred world.

Part 2: Waist Deep

Perhaps then, if I can neatly and precisely define what 'an observer' is, I might be able to swiftly evade being tagged with the belief that the moon only exists when someone's looking at it, for example. My definition is as follows:

- I. Anything whatsoever that interacts with or receives in any way at all, anything else.

This is not, I'll admit, the ordinary definition of an observer, though I think it is the most comprehensive and complete. To widen the aperture on this, we can consider the role of the tree in the event of its own prostration. As far as I've read, no one has asked anything about the tree's observation of its own fall. We know trees are observers; we know this because they grow into the light, they reabsorb the chlorophyll in autumn (hence the yellowing leaves) to store for the winter, and they send messages to one another [1][2].

If there is no observation, no engagement, receptivity or interaction with anything else, none of these activities could take place. Trees must be - and I would argue this to my last breath - aware of their environment. If this is the case, then they must also be aware of their own processes as a requirement to produce a sensible response to a stimulus. If you aren't aware of yourself, or at least aware *as a* self, you could not conceive of the idea to run away from danger, for example; or in this case, send off a chemical signal to alert other trees to the presence of an insect attack.

If we can accept that a tree is aware, which really is not as radical as it sounds, we can accept that what happens when the human or dog is not present is not a

mystery to the universe, but merely to the absentee. If you were the only human left on the planet and the chimps began to ask whether or not you made a sound when you fell over without them watching, you would, I presume, say yes... (and it hurt a little actually because I banged my knee on that rock on the way down). The well respected and not at all funny event of you falling down, is self-perceived, it's auto-conscious. You are the falling event itself, and you are the consciousness with which it is known.

So actually, the question isn't about sound at all, but about what happens in the inevitable blindspots of our conscious attention. More precisely, the question asks whether or not an event happens in the absence of an observer. Further, even, does *anything* happen if there is no observation at all?

Now we're out of the shallows!

Part 3: Deep Waters

At this point it may *seem* as though I planted the earlier definition of an observer because I knew where this was going, as if I'd thought about this before. And yes, that is exactly what I did. I did that because, despite earnest attempts, I cannot reason, demonstrate, or otherwise conceive of any way to prove or disprove any possibility in which it could be declared that an event took place without an observer. Granted, my inability to conceive of something does not provide evidence for anything whatsoever, and that's precisely why this essay doesn't conclude here. That would be ridiculous.

Firstly, if absolutely nothing interacted with *anything else*, not only is structure an impossibility, but clearly 'events' can no longer take place, as an event is an interaction, a happening. So we must accept interaction. If we accept interaction, we simultaneously have to accept relationships, and therefore responsiveness. Nothing new here, this is simply the philosophical pipeline that supplies relativity, at least in part. But as soon as we've accepted responsiveness, we have accepted an observer.

Let's say a rock is gliding through outer-space. As it does so it is offering the appearance of a moving contortion of spacetime. But, and let's be clear about

this, there is no difference between energy/matter and spacetime[3]. Mass is equivalent to energy, and energy is simply the localisation of warped spacetime. And vice-versa: warped spacetime is essentially an energy gradient. So the moving rock is mass, which is energy, which is spacetime itself, which means that the movement of mass 'through space' is actually more like a wave on the ocean. The wave (mass) *looks* like it's a separate object doing an action called 'moving', but it's purely a very complex oscillation of the medium. You put a bowling ball on a sheet of fabric and the sheet bends, but as you move the bowling ball, the sheet itself doesn't move, only the depression of the medium 'changes position'.

The most expansive canyon in contemporary thought is found in the assertion of materialists that consciousness is an arbitrary emergent property of matter and bears no relation to the functioning of the rest of the universe. In the face of the scientific inquiry reaching the bedrock of not only the current mathematical formulas but of observation itself (thinking of the uncertainty principle here), and after being led to the inescapable conclusion that matter is merely an illusion of a particular behaviour of a unitary infinite field more or less made of uncertainty itself, *unless* it is interacted with (i.e. observed), there somehow remains among the materialists the pretence that consciousness as fundamental to the **unified** field, is nonsense.

Events are interactions; interactions are the responsiveness of the unified unitary infinite field to itself (as there is no *other* field or reality). This is self-awareness in its most rudimentary form, it is a pure form of consciousness. When these excitations or depressions (however you're feeling today I suppose) of this unitary, unified, infinite reality are structured in such a way so as to produce a human, it produces the awareness of itself that knows pains in certain parts of itself, that knows memory, joy, friendship, love, kindness, beauty, order, chaos, sight, sound, challenge, insecurity, desperation, hunger, laughter, forgiveness, compassion, and perhaps one of the most significant moments in the universe: the arising of awareness as to its own non-objective nature - consciousness itself.

Humans are already there mathematically within the discipline of physics. Now we must accept what we have discovered of the physical world for ourselves. We **are** that fluctuating, undulating field of union. We are the infinite, modulating as this utterly astonishing animal form. We, the lone reality itself, can look upon the

dream we have crafted over unimaginable time through response and reaction, and say, 'I am this, and I am not a single thing'. For there is no actual object in existence, there is only the self-aware totality, fluctuating in its infinite majesty.

So does anything happen if there is no observation at all? Not a chance. There is nothing that happens that is not self-known. There are no unobserved 'events'. The fabric of every event includes consciousness of it. It needn't be human, it needn't even be complex; it doesn't need to decide the best course of action or have any thought process whatsoever, it is simply awareness, appearing to be localised, just for a moment. And we are *all* this. I lay before you in earnest, the idea that each body is made of a self-aware flashing in and out of form. Each moment in form, some awareness of something is communicated, interacting with other moments of awareness, and then out of form again. And all the way up from the smallest possible curvature of the field to what we consider a human body, these moments combine and relate and interact and produce an awareness of the resplendence we experience and name, 'life'.

The mystery of why we focus on matter so much as some kind of 'maker' of things when it *is* the thing made, has begun to escape me, and quite frankly, I don't mind one bit. As I sit in this indescribable meditation writing this, I hope I have communicated clearly enough that you really *feel* that there is no end to the pursuit of an external other as a means to validate yourself as a living, breathing, miracle. Something and nothing as one, defying all logic, defying all reason, just being exactly what it is without excuse or guilt. Enjoy the miracle of yourself. It is the nature of reality to be this miraculous peace.

In love and kindness,

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References

[1]

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[84/#:~:text=Trees%20share%20water%20and%20nutrients,Scientists%20call%20these%20mycorrhizal%20networks.](#)

[2] Wohlleben, P. (2016) The Hidden Life of Trees, ISBN: 9781771642484

[3] “We may therefore regard matter as being constituted by the regions of space in which the field is extremely intense... There is no place in this new kind of physics both for the field and matter, for the field is the only reality.” - Albert Einstein, quoted in The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics by Capek, M. (1961) p. 319