

Ask A Genius 30 - Informational Cosmology 6

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Scott: What about information rather than nothing?

Rick: The idea of information being in charge rather than nothing is more hopeful. If everything is part of information contained in some consciousness, if consciousness is the containing framework of information, then that's not as bleak as there being no overall consciousness, nothing in charge, basically nothingness with life and consciousness being accidental.

It is less bleak, but it has some bleak aspects. If everything is structured, if every consciousness is subject to the same constraints of our consciousness, then, perhaps every conscious being comes to an end. No matter how vast, which means we are subject to the universe coming to an end in the vast future. We are still stuck with no absolute permanence. Only the permanence embodied in vastness.

The bigger something is, the more likely it is to persist given its high level of self-organization.

Scott: We talked about a narrative structure to the universe.

Rick: If consciousness is the vessel containing information, if largely self-consistent information systems can't exist without a ride-along consciousness – which is the experience of information

being shared in a large system among all of the sub-systems in a real-time manner, then you have a narrative. Generally, each consciousness or systems of consciousness – in fact, we're probably moving towards something like that with budding and moving of consciousness unlike unitary consciousness for decades like human consciousness; we grow up in our skulls. We stay in our skulls our entire lives with limited melding of minds our entire lives.

The best we could do for most of human history was talking and writing. We are getting more and more intimate ways of communicating. In the next couple of decades, as we get less islandy, as we get to move consciousness around and share it, there are narratives for isolated consciousnesses such as ourselves moving through the world. There are more complicated narratives you can imagine related to budding and collapsing consciousnesses moving through the world.

Scott: There is a beginning, middle, and end.

Rick: Narrative is going to be attached to all of that stuff. Narrative is attached to cause-and-effect worlds of linear time. Plus, if consciousness is unavoidable as an aspect of information, then that makes narrative more unavoidable. A cold universe with nothing in charge is a shitty narrative. It blew up from a point, then it's going to keep expanding forever, get cold, then inert. Or, it is going to run out of expansive energy and collapse back into a point, losing all information as it collapses, then will expand again.

There aren't that many narratives. They aren't that exciting. They are only exciting insofar as they explain the dynamics of the entire universe. They are pretty bleak.

Scott: Information, as you're positing it, as we're positing it, implies both gradual increase in complexity dependent on the amount of time, amount of space, and amount of stuff in the universe with the eventuality of consciousness. Is there a bias towards increasing complexity? If you take three variable: space, time, and stuff.

Rick: Is there a bias in the universe towards the unfolding of a narrative with the idea of a narrative being increasing complexity and the universe's increasing ability to support beings that understand it or the universe? Are there processes that resolve non-information to information?

Scott: Yea, a negentropic bias.

Rick: Yea, it is slightly off it. I have been thinking about it. Time is seen as one-dimensional. It is obvious because we move from moment to moment to moment along the timelines. However, it is reasonable to imagine that as we get more complicated or whatever we become in combination with artificial intelligence. That one major function of consciousness is to provide safety by creating and weighing alternate futures and choosing the best future among them. That is one way of saying it. A more natural way of saying it is one function or the function of consciousness is to make choices moment to moment.

Scott: By analogy, if you're reading a book, as you're going through the story, you're taking relevant information, more or less, into account as you read the text, but you're also putting up hypotheticals about what the next section or chapter will bring.

To me, you're putting up hypotheticals about the probable paths, but then you read the next section or chapter and then you collapse the probabilities into certainties.

Rick: It is collapsing possibilities into a single present moment, but the present moment still contains a lot of possibilities. Your immediate circumstances have been collapsed into definiteness. The idea that we'll have quantum computers riding on our bodies helping us simulate a range of possible futures and then help us choose what next steps to take for the more favorable moments. We already do that without seeing it as that kind of thing.

It is a little less than 2 miles for me to drive to the closest gym in Ventura Boulevard in Studio City. There are so many asshole drivers along this stretch. Not as many if I go the other way because I have a cycle I go through. I go on the counter-clockwise cycle. It is a less than 2-mile trip going East 2 miles on Ventura Boulevard. You encounter a bunch of A-hole drivers. If you go left to the West, it is a short drive along douche alley. It is only a few blocks. In douche alley, you've got people walking about with yoga mats, stopping in the middle of the street for no reason.

Either way, whether you go down douche alley or 2 miles down Ventura, it is like a video game of asshole driving. Yet, you're constantly forced to anticipate what stupid shit people are going

to do around you, and to figure out what stupid shit you're going to do to win at driving versus the people around you. But then I thought about when the constant process of avoiding accidents on Ventura Boulevard suddenly locks into an inevitable accident. I have had some. There's a time when it is probably like half of a second, but it seems like longer. Once you're locked into this thing, all of your attention is locked into this thing that is going to happen.

You spend a significant amount of time locked into inevitability. That is a weird feeling because you're used to not inevitability. You're used to having to run a perception plus thought framework about possibilities to choose from. Those possibilities can be seen as incompletely sketched future worlds or future sets of circumstances. They are all nebulous and smeared out. They are all based on risks and possible rewards.

But when your breaks are locked and you're skidding inevitably into the front of another car or the back, the loss of possibility is usually dreadful because you're about to get into a wreck. It is weird. I don't know if it dreadful because you know it will suck when you hit the car, or if it partially dreadful because the loss of the possibility or the resolution before the actual future hits is inherently dreadful.

But regardless of where the dread comes from, it is weird not to be in a position of having a smeary, vague realm of different possible futures. Even in the middle of a wreck, you're don't know exactly what will happen – but that pins everything down.

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