Abstract
Among fundamental metaphysical quests, one might wonder: Why is there anything at all rather than just nothing? Many reject that question because they think it is meaningless, trivial, or necessarily unanswerable. But I provide reasons for thinking that the Why question could make sense and one might even expect an answer to it. I begin by asking why the world is not empty of all concrete things. One might regard this question as important if one accepts that it is, in some sense, possible for all concrete things to vanish, one-by-one. I argue finally that possible replies to the Why question concerning concrete things might point to realities that are abstract instead of concrete. Abstract realities might be explanatorily powerful without their power being guaranteed by Logic.

Keywords: Concrete existence, Nothingness, Explanation, Subtraction Argument

Introduction
Leibniz [25] famously asked: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Heidegger [16] called that question “the Fundamental Question of Metaphysics.” The existence of the world also filled Wittgenstein [46] with awe. Surprisingly, however, neither Heidegger nor Wittgenstein dealt with the Why question in order to offer an answer. When taking up this question in his later work, Wittgenstein [47] even called it nonsense that one wonders why there is not nothing. Many reject the Why question because they think that it is meaningless to say “there might have been nothing,” it is impossible that nothing would exist, or there could be no explanation for why there is not nothing.

But the state of “nothing” might be regarded in such a way as to leave the Why question untouched by the latter objections. In the search for

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a “Real Nothing,” or something that remains in a world after removing all removable things, Kuhn [22] provides a taxonomy of different ways one might understand the word “nothing,” ranging from a state simply devoid of visible physical objects to one empty of absolutely everything. By outlining different ways that those who reject the Why question regard the state of “nothing,” I clarify how one might understand the Why question so that it can be meaningful and important, and how one might then provide an answer to that question.

1 “Nothingness” Can Mean an Absence of All Concrete Things

Many of those who reject the Why question object that the assertion “There is nothing” is nonsense. Bradley [4] calls it an “empty thought” to think about the state of “nothing.” He views “nothing” as “a something that is only not something else” [4, p.114]. But it is impossible, for him, that something would only be not-something-else, to have no property of its own. Conforming to this objection, Rundle [39, p.111] argues that to imagine the state of “nothing” is not to imagine anything; it is not to imagine at all. Wittgenstein [47, p.9] also maintains that the world not existing is unimaginable. All these objectors argue that since everything should have a property, the state of “nothing” could not be anything at all; they therefore conclude that to assert “there might have been nothing” is meaningless.

As proposed by Rundle [39] and Shand [41], another line of objection is that one cannot coherently assert something about the state of “nothing.” When one asserts, for example, that “there is no unicorn,” one presupposes that some concrete things exist and denies then that such things have the properties of a unicorn. Moreover, it is a theorem of classical logic that at least one concrete thing exists. Many claim, as a result, that to formulate “there is nothing” in logic or language involves a contradiction: Some concrete things exist that do not exist.

But in at least one respect, most of these criticisms are likely mistaken. One can object that the word “nothing” in the Why question might not refer to “a something” in the sense of an item having a property. To assert something meaningful about concrete things, Bradley and Rundle correctly maintain, one must assign properties to things; it is a mistake, however, to think that the state of “nothing” must, in any sense, have a property as well. In the sense of an absence of every concrete thing, the state of “nothing” is not something that could have a
property. Consequently, one should not expect that the state of “nothing,” in that sense, would be imaginable. If one imagines or assigns a property to a thing, that thing cannot be an absence of every concrete thing; it is rather a concrete thing. We seem to have not enough reason for thinking that every meaningful assertion must attribute properties to concrete things. The presupposition of existence in logical and linguistic analysis is only a convention. As Quine [35] confirms, one should not attach any philosophical dogma to the presupposition that there is at least one concrete thing. He sees the presupposition of existence as only for technical convenience. It is also a mistake, as Heller [17] argues, to expect that big philosophical questions all conform to the rules of language. Many problems in mathematics and theoretical physics, too, cannot be posed in ordinary language. Any contradiction in asserting “There might have been nothing” would arise not because of shortcomings in the notion of “nothing,” but because of the limitations in our logic or language.

In order to prevent similar contradictions, new ways of talking about the state of “nothing” need be considered. Logicians have attempted to prevent the presupposition of existence in free logic. Another move is to coin the term “nothingness” as a name that refers to a state empty of every concrete thing. Using that term, one can better distinguish between the two meanings of the statement “There is nothing:” one that uses a negative quantifier and means that there is no concrete thing; another that uses a positive quantifier and means that there is an abstract thing (the state of nothingness). Thus, the statement “There is nothingness” can be meaningful and coherent without referring to concrete things.

Still, more confusion in responding to the Why question arises when one considers the word “nothing” somewhere as a negative quantifier and somewhere else as a name referring to an abstract state of affairs. Holt [19] presents, in jest, an argument that contains this kind of confusion: If there were nothing, there would be no laws at all to forbid anything and everything then would be permitted. In this case, nothing would be forbidden; therefore, there must be some concrete thing. The first use of the word “nothing,” in this argument, operates as a negative quantifier, but the second one is equivocal. Relative to the statements coming before and after it, the statement “Nothing would be forbidden” takes two different meanings: (1) when interpreted as permitting everything, it means that every state of affairs, even the state of nothingness would be permitted; (2) but to conclude that there has to be something concrete, one should interpret the statement “Nothing would be forbidden” as:
The state of nothingness would be forbidden. Since the argument uses those different meanings of the word “nothing,” it cannot be valid.

Nonetheless, McDaniel [28] supports one prevalent instance of such equivocation concerning the word “nothing.” In an argument to show that the Why question is not metaphysically important, he states: “There must be something, for even if there were nothing, nothing would itself be something” [28, p.277]. This line of argument seems, as McDaniel concedes, “teenagerish.” Because, the first “nothing” operates as a negative quantifier, but the second one is a name referring to a state of an absence of every concrete thing. However, he defends this teenagerish argument by an attempt to bring the latter two meanings of the word “nothing” close together. As his starting point, McDaniel suggests that holes, shadows, cracks, and other absences enjoy some sort of concrete existence. He manages to identify absences as things that could cause some events: Because of the lack of water, for example, people die. McDaniel nonetheless acknowledges that absences do not exist in the same way as other concrete things. Absences exist, according to him, at a lower level in a hierarchy of different ways that concrete things could exist. He calls those different ways of existence “modes of being.” McDaniel considers nothingness as, in a sense, the narrowest kind of concrete thing that is possible. Therefore, the line of argument from an absence of all concrete things to nothingness as some kind of concrete thing is, for him, not totally incorrect.

But again, nothingness could be considered as not enjoying any sort of concrete existence. McDaniel maintains that nothingness concretely exists because of the analogy between holes and nothingness: Like nothingness, holes are absences. But he seems to overlook the fact that, unlike other absences, nothingness is a complete absence of concrete things. The hole in a table, for example, appears to exist concretely because, instead of the table’s part that is absent, another concrete thing (such as air) exists. Absences like shadows and droughts also seem to be concrete only because of other concrete things from which the light or the water is absent. The remaining concrete things, in fact, determine the different properties of those absences. In an absence of every concrete thing, in contrast, no concrete thing remains to surround or replace the absence and to attribute a property to nothingness. Nothingness could therefore be totally different from the absences that McDaniel considers.

Another common objection to the Why question arises when one regards nothingness as a narrower kind of absence than holes and shadows. Rundle [39], for example, argues that if concrete things cease to
exist somewhere, there must also be somewhere that they begin to exist. As a result, he interprets the statement “there is nothing” to mean that there is nothing where the Universe came to be. He concludes that, after removing every removable thing, empty space remains. Rundle aims here to show that it is incoherent to think every concrete thing might not have existed. Also in this camp are some of those who reject the idea of quantum creation from nothingness. Some quantum physicists, Vilenkin [44] and Krauss [21] among them, claim that the Universe sprang into existence out of nothingness and that only the laws of quantum physics ruled over this process. But related to Rundle’s response, a well-known objection against the idea of quantum creation from nothingness is as follows: The thing out of which the early Universe is claimed to be produced was not nothingness. That thing contained a minimum amount of energy, the energy of empty space. Some of those who reject the Why question view space, therefore, as some kind of concrete thing that one cannot possibly get rid of in order to reach a state of nothingness.

But we seem to have no evidence or reason to admit that space is a necessary part of a world. Vilenkin [45, p.180], defines nothingness as space with a radius of zero. Note that such a zero value is not like the value that some physicists attribute to the total mass-energy of the Universe. A physical Universe can exist even when the total mass-energy is zero: The negative gravitational energy can cancel all the positive energy of matter in the world. But no physical entity can exist when the radius of space has the value zero. To reach a zero-radius space is considered as gradually removing every concrete thing (space and what it contains) from the Universe until there remains nothing concrete, not even empty space (Refer to the Subtraction Argument in Section.2). Vilenkin’s mathematical description shows that one can conceive of removing physical space to reach nothingness. Furthermore, Krauss [21, p.161-164] himself acknowledges that empty space possesses an amount of energy and, therefore, the thing out of which the Universe emerged is not nothingness. He suggests, however, that just as the laws of quantum physics allow particles to pop into existence in space, so too could space itself, in accordance with those laws, pop into existence. Although physicists are far from discovering that space (or spaces) and The Universe (or universes) are produced in this way, nothing in contemporary science seems, as Krauss observes, to refute that possibility. According to the laws of quantum physics, matter could be created in empty space without borrowing any energy from empty space. The negative gravitational energy of new matter cancels its positive energy. As a result, although
created matter originates in empty space, it is not produced from the energy of empty space. Space itself and the whole Universe might likewise have been produced not from a pre-existing concrete thing but from nothingness. Therefore, Krauss could be correct in viewing physical space, like every other physical thing, as something that has been produced.¹

Nevertheless, the idea of quantum creation from nothingness could be problematic in another way: If natural laws are, as many physicists observe, merely describing regularities, how can these laws force anything to exist? If laws of nature are not distinct from existing concrete things, there can be no creative law when nothing concrete exists. One might, in response, view natural laws as concrete things that exist prior to other existing concrete things, as pre-existing concrete things. Kuhn [22] maintains that view of natural laws in his taxonomy that presents levels of nothing. But a problem in this response is that if there might have been a state devoid of all concrete things, then laws which enjoyed some type of concrete existence could not have been present in that state, so as to be able to act creatively. In order to arrive at “Real Nothing[ness],” as Kuhn insists, pre-existing concrete laws must also be removed after removing other existing concrete things. Natural laws are, for Kuhn, far from things whose existence is logically necessary. To preserve creative power for natural laws, one might instead consider them as realities distinct from all concrete things. An alternative viewpoint is, thus, to see natural laws as abstract realities that force the world to exist. These abstract laws operate in the same way as abstract Platonic Forms that, according to some philosophers, create a (good) world. In this regard, Rescher [36] argues that fundamental laws of nature are abstract realities that are metaphysically necessary to create a good world. Hawking and Mlodinow [15] also advocate a theory of quantum laws of gravity as metaphysically necessary. Abstract laws of nature might have been the force, in an absence of every concrete thing, that created the Universe. As a result, either by removing pre-existing concrete laws or by keeping abstract laws, one can conceive of a state which might be called nothingness.

One might go to the extreme of insisting that abstract things, such as abstract laws or principles, mathematical objects and facts, and even possibilities, must also be considered as removable in order for one to conceive of a state of nothingness. Instead of asking only about concrete things, one might consider the Why question as meaning to ask: Why is there anything concrete or abstract? But Leibniz himself, who
formulated the Why question in the way in which it is usually understood nowadays, seeks an explanation only for the existence of concrete things. Some prominent philosophers even contend that explaining abstract things like mathematical truths is beyond what we are capable of [34, p.10-12]. Some others think that it is nonsense to demand an explanation for some abstract facts. About abstract analytic truths, for example, Della Rocca [7, p.77] argues: To ask why bachelors are unmarried shows that we have not grasped the concepts of “bachelor” and “unmarried.” For some others who support Aristotelian Realism, which maintains that Universals as abstract things must be instantiated by Particulars, the question of why there is anything (concrete or abstract) might be reduced to a question concerning concrete things. In a world that contains only abstract things, as Lowe [26] argues, the mutual dependence of abstract things on each other might be unacceptably circular; therefore, to instantiate the necessary abstract things (such as numbers or mathematical truths), according to him, there must be concrete things in every possible world.

Furthermore, even if all concrete things could be removed from a world, other realities might still remain. Leslie and Kuhn [23, p.3-4], for example, argue that some sort of time beyond physical time would have to pass, in a blank world, to mark the possible occurrence of events. Nothingness and physical time reside, they argue, in higher level non-physical time. One might not find it rational at all to ask why there is something rather than absolutely nothing, not even a single fact. One intuition is that if there were nothing (in any useful sense of the word “nothing”), abstract facts would still obtain, for instance, the fact that there was nothing. For Lowe himself, it is not sensible to ask why there are any facts because a world without facts would not be a possible world at all. To further support the intuition that absolute nothingness is impossible, Sommers [42] uses an old but important doctrine from Plato, i.e. Categorical Possibility. If a predicate cannot possibly satisfy or fail to satisfy a subject, that predicate is categorically impossible for its subject (for example, redness for a word). Furthermore, what is categorically impossible is logically impossible as well (a word being red is logically impossible). Next, Sommers argues: If there were absolutely nothing, nothing could satisfy or fail to satisfy any subject; therefore, every state of affairs would be categorically and logically impossible. There then obviously cannot be a state devoid of absolutely everything, this making it incoherent to ask why such a state has not been realized. And it might be judged equally mistaken to ask why there are any abstract
things, such as the fact that two and two make four. But the question “Why does any concrete thing exist?” might still make sense and be metaphysically important.

2 Nothingness is Possible

Just as it seems impossible that there would be absolutely nothing, one might suspect that an absence of all concrete things might be impossible as well. After all, nothingness not being imaginable and having no property of its own, even grasping the concept of nothingness is challenging. But there is one way, the only way according to Shand [41, p.104], of reaching the concept of nothingness: to subtract concrete things, one-by-one, until no concrete things are left. If it is conceivable to subtract all concrete things from a world, a state of nothingness (an absence of all concrete things) seems to be logically possible. To argue that the Why question is a metaphysically important one, it is not enough to show that assertions about nothingness could be meaningful. It must also be, in some sense, possible that there would be no concrete things. One can then wonder why the possibility of nothingness has not been realized.

To argue that nothingness is metaphysically possible, Baldwin [2] uses repeated subtractions. The premises of the so-called “Subtraction Argument” are as follows:

(A1) There might be a world with a finite domain of “concrete” objects.

(A2) These concrete objects are, each of them, things which might not exist.

(A3) The non-existence of any one of these things does not necessitate the existence of any other such thing [2, p. 232].

Baldwin then explains the argumentation carried out with those premises: First, take one of the concrete objects in premise (A1). According to premise (A2), there is a possible world in which that object does not exist but all other objects are the same. In the latter world, as premise (A3) maintains, the absence of an object does not entail that a new object must exist. Next, generalize the previous process to the worlds that contain fewer concrete objects. Apply the final subtraction to a world that contains one concrete object, and the result is an empty world.

Most early objections and counter-objections to the Subtraction Argument (for example, in [37, 27]) point to the first premise. But those
objections are remote from the possibility of repeated subtractions. Most of those who oppose the first premise consider concrete objects in our world to be composed of infinitely many parts. However, even if they are correct, to imagine a world that contains several indivisible concrete objects does not seem to be that challenging. It appears conceivable that there would be a world that contains a finite domain of concrete objects.

On the other hand, Grünbaum [12] objects that the procedure of repeated subtractions contains a flaw in its last iteration. One who thinks that each individual concrete object might not have existed, he argues, should not conclude that the whole of those objects might as well not have existed. This objection might be regarded in terms of Russell’s problem of part-whole relation. Because the components of the Universe are contingent, Russell [40] argues, one should not conclude that the Universe itself is contingent. In an inference from individual objects to the whole of them, Russell finds the Fallacy of Composition: to suppose that a whole has the same properties that all its individual parts share. But the problem of part-whole relation need not enter the Subtraction Argument. The relationship between the whole and the collection of its parts does not influence the possibility of repeated subtractions. If we subtract individual concrete things, the relations between them are removed consequently. Especially when one reaches the last subtraction, the part-whole relation proves to be irrelevant to the Subtraction Argument. When only one object remains in a world, there is no difference between the whole and its individual part. Supposing that the third premise is true, then all individual concrete objects and relations between them, all that constitute a whole, might not have existed.

Nevertheless, one thing that would refute the second premise is the existence of a logically necessary being. The Ontological Argument attempts to argue for one such being. But first of all, even Plantinga [32], who considerably modifies the old versions of the Ontological Argument, concedes that such an argument could not prove that a logically necessary being exists. Plantinga maintains that if one initially considers God (defined as possessing maximal greatness) as possible, then one must regard God as necessarily actual; but not everyone agrees that such a being is possible. Something is lacking in those arguments to convince us that God is initially (really) possible. One finds an analogy here to the case of nothingness: As mentioned before, if one argues that the Why question makes sense, one must initially show that nothingness is somehow possible. Similarly, one must argue that God is initially possible before
attempting to prove that God necessarily exists. Second, there is a significant difference between realizing whether a logically necessary being exists and knowing that some truths are logically necessary. The explicit necessity involved in the fact that, for example, bachelors are unmarried might make it nonsense to ask why that fact is real. But because it is not obvious that a necessary being exists, the question makes sense of why something concrete exists rather than nothing concrete. The Why question concerning concrete things only requires nothingness to be prima facie possible.

More severe objections to the Subtraction Argument are directed to the third premise and to the last inductive step. The Subtraction Argument succeeds, according to Shand [41, p.105-106], only if more amounts of nothingness remain by removing concrete things in each step; this gradual process results, at last, in complete nothingness. But Shand objects, first, that the Subtraction Argument is redundant. He thinks that we have amounts of nothingness after the very first step of the induction and that there is no need then for the argument to proceed to the last step. Second and more importantly, to argue that nothingness is impossible, Shand [41, p.108] introduces a principle, the Conservation of Existence. This principle is the same as Bergson’s view of “the absence of one [concrete] thing being always the presence of another” [3, p.215]. Both Bergson and Shand object that, in removing concrete things, we are never left with nothingness but with other concrete things. Grünbaum might have intended the same when he denies that the contingency of every existing concrete thing could justify one in thinking that nothing concrete might have existed. There might be some law or principle that restricts the actual world to contain at least one contingent concrete thing (Refer to Lowe’s argument mentioned in Section.1). Holt [19, p.53] also presents this objection by using the laws of conservation in physics: If a single electron or positron is removed in a subtraction, it violates the law of charge conservation; and if an electron-positron pair is removed to conserve the charge, it violates the conservation of mass-energy. Holt then concludes that, on the disappearance of an entity, a new entity must come into existence. This would deny premise (A3).

To refute Holt’s objection to the Subtraction argument is easier than refuting what Bergson and Shand (and perhaps Grünbaum) object. This is because if specific amounts of physical objects are removed through a subtraction, no physical law of conservation would be violated. For example, to remove a specific amount of a field with negative energy at the same time as removing an electron-positron pair can satisfy the con-
servation both of charge and of mass-energy. Other laws of conservation might be satisfied in the same way. Moreover, the physical laws of conservation seem to be far away from being logically necessary. There can be a possible world without there being any physical laws of conservation. The same can be said about the Conservation of Existence: That principle, too, does not seem to be necessary for every possible world. Bergson and Shand assume, without providing any reason, that concrete things cannot be removed from a possible world without replacing the same amount of concrete things. But even if one accepts the Conservation of Existence, a substantial problem remains for the opponents of the subtraction argument. Many objections to the subtraction process are founded upon an enormous misunderstanding. Baldwin does not view the world as a container from which concrete objects, one-by-one, could be brought out until nothing concrete remains. He does not argue that an actual subtracting of concrete objects from a world is possible. He argues, instead, that worlds containing fewer and fewer concrete objects are really possible and that this inductive process proves that there might have been no concrete things. The whole amount of concrete things, so Bergson contends, may not be removed from our world, but there is nothing, at least so far, that prevents us from conceiving of possible worlds with less concrete things and, finally, with no concrete things at all. Thus, each subtraction does not leave us, as Shand thinks, with more nothingness in addition to less concrete things. In each subtraction except the last one, a possible world is conceived that contains less concrete things without resulting in nothingness. Only in the last subtraction does the mind conceive of a possible world devoid of all concrete things (complete nothingness). To support the view that nothingness is possible, therefore, the process of repeated subtraction is not redundant; neither is it flawed.

Some others who oppose the last subtraction and the possibility of nothingness define a possible world in such a way that it would contain at least one concrete thing. Lewis [24], for example, defines a possible world as a maximal sum of things that are spatio-temporally related. As another example, Armstrong [1] considers possible worlds as maximal states of affairs constituted by concrete things. But there is an alternative view of possible worlds: The Representational or Ersatz view. One of the founders of the Ersatz view, Plantinga [33], treats possible worlds as maximally consistent ways things could have been. Since the non-existence of all concrete things seems to be consistent, the Ersatz view is compatible with the idea of nothingness (see [6, chpt.2] for an extensive
discussion). After all, unless one has a reason for supposing that possible worlds are (or are not) necessarily constituted by concrete things, one better attaches no metaphysical implications about nothingness to definitions of possible worlds. To dismiss a fundamental metaphysical question simply by pointing to such definitions would not be a viable response.

3 The Existence of Concrete Things Instead of Nothingness Might Be Explained

Even if nothingness is really possible, Edwards [9] and Hempel [18] claim, there cannot possibly be a reason for why there is something concrete rather than nothing concrete. In accordance with Parmenides’ dictum ex nihilo nihil fit (nothing comes from nothing[ness]), many philosophers maintain that concrete things can only originate from concrete things. Every possible explanation for the existence of concrete things, Hempel further argues, would be part of the whole world; that explanation thus needs another explanation that would itself be part of the whole world again, ad infinitum. The problem, here, is not that the number (or amount) of concrete things in the whole would get too large to constitute a set. The problem is, instead, that there must be some concrete things, according to Hempel, since it is a presupposition of every causal explanation that some concrete thing exists. He concludes, therefore, that the Why question cannot have an answer.

But an alternative response might be available for one to explain the existence of our world. If explaining, for example, the age, volume, structure, and laws of the whole phenomenal Universe is legitimate, Rescher [36] asks, why should one not expect that the world’s existence be explicable as well? He sees Parmenides’ dictum as having its source in an ancient Greek principle: that a cause must be homogeneous with its effect. But, as Rescher argues, some developments in modern science refute the principle of causal homogeneity along with the doctrine that results from it. Just as matter can turn into energy, as Rescher argues, so too might concrete realities originate from non-concrete realities. We seem to have not enough reason to be confident in claiming: All explanations of concrete things need to point to earlier concrete things that are their causes. The source of the whole existing world might, as Nozick [29, p.152] observes, fall outside the category of concrete existence. According to him, one cannot then go so far as to ask why that source concretely exists because it does not. One who finds no convincing rea-
son for thinking that the existence of some or other concrete thing could be an analytic or a logically necessary truth seems to have no alternative other than to admit this: To explain the existence of the world is possible only through pointing to abstract realities.

Nevertheless, Grünbaum [13] rejects the Why question because he thinks that it needs no answer. He thinks that the Why question presupposes a strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR): that everything must have an explanation. Next, he rejects the PSR because, together with many physicists, he accepts quantum indeterminism. Like many quantum phenomena, he concludes, the Universe exists without any reason. But this is another misunderstanding: to think that the Why question presupposes the truth of the PSR. It might be true that an object or a whole world exists without having any cause or reason. As Hume [20] and Russell [40] argue, there is no contradiction in thinking that the world exists as a brute fact. But a problem arises when one claims, without compelling evidence, that the world does not have a reason for its existence. As Rescher [36] argues, a proponent of the Why question is committed to accept the PSR only as a methodological principle: that one must search for an explanation unless one finds a reason that there cannot be such an explanation. Otherwise, one could claim arbitrarily that other facts are without explanation as well; the result then would be epistemological anarchy. Therefore, unless one finds a good reason for thinking that the whole concrete world cannot possibly have an explanation, one is not justified in claiming that the world exists as a brute, inexplicable fact. Moreover, even if the Universe has been produced in accordance with indeterministic laws of quantum physics, it might still be explained by the force of those laws. As argued before, natural laws might be regarded as abstract principles that force the Universe to exist. Grünbaum’s reasoning therefore seems insufficient for rejecting every possible explanation for the whole concrete world. As a result, it seems not irrational to ask why something concrete exists instead of nothing concrete. It seems not irrational as well to expect that such a meaningful question can be answered by using abstract realities.

Grünbaum [12] also attacks a second presupposition that is commonly assigned to the Why question: that it is important to ask why any concrete thing exists only because the simplest state of affairs (the state of nothingness) has not obtained. In fact, Grünbaum thinks that, in asking the Why question, one views Simplicity as a principle that forces things to be actual: that the simplest and most natural state of affairs must obtain when an external cause is absent. Grünbaum then asks why
we should maintain such a presupposition. He further objects to the idea that nothingness is the most natural state of affairs. Instead, he asks: What is more natural than the natural world in which we are living? On the grounds of these objections, Grünbaum calls the Why question a pseudo-problem and claims that it is not rational to expect an answer to it.

But Grünbaum here seems to misunderstand the role that the criterion of simplicity plays in asking the Why question. Since nothingness has not been realized, Leibniz finds the existence of our world puzzling. But that does not entail that if nothingness obtained, such a state would need no explanation. To demand no explanation for a state of nothingness would be against the PSR, which Leibniz himself adopts in a strong form. What Leibniz implies is, instead, that if no concrete things existed, the puzzle would be solved by the simplicity of that state: The simplicity of nothingness would explain why there was nothing concrete. But now that nothingness has not been realized, Leibniz asks for a cause or reason other than Simplicity alone to explain why anything concrete exists. Simplicity may or may not be among the features that help to explain why our world exists, but it is certainly not the only one (because the simplest state would be a state of nothingness). Yet one can regard the criterion of simplicity as a methodological principle for explanation. For a long time, philosophers and scientists have used this principle, known as Ockham’s Razor. A useful methodological principle in seeking knowledge is that simpler explanations are preferable to more complex ones. Grünbaum might be correct to object when one uses the methodological principle of Simplicity as a principle that determines what must be actual. But he has not provided enough reason to stop us from using a methodological principle of Simplicity, upon which our reasoning is founded.

Finally, one might deem the Why question to be unanswerable, or even unimportant, because of thinking that the existence of the concrete world cannot be ultimately explained. Carroll [5] concludes the same after he argues as follows: An attempt to explain the existence of the world and then to explain every subsequent explanation ends with considering some principle as a brute fact. Parfit [31], too, defends the idea of an ultimate brute fact, but he insists that the Why question concerning concrete things asks, first, whether some factor or factors can explain why there is any concrete thing instead of a blank and next whether there would be any further Selector or Selectors that helped to explain how the actual world operates (he gives Simplicity as an exam-
ple of a possible Selector). A series of why questions about the existing concrete world, that is, to ask why the world exists, then why the fact that explains the existing world obtains, then why the fact explaining the fact that explains the existing world obtains, *ad infinitum*, might lead eventually to the answer that there is a world instead of a blank as an ultimate brute fact: a fact which has no explanation beyond realization that, as a matter of Logic, there had to be either a world or else a blank, whether or not some factor had selected which of these alternatives would be actualized. Even if our world’s existence is *ultimately* inexplicable, however, one should try to justify one’s choice of specific explanations for facts about the world’s nature. One might still say, for instance, that Simplicity is a Selector that seems to have been greatly influential for the existence of our world, and that the world would be simpler if it obeyed physical laws.

**Conclusion**

If one thinks about removing all concrete things, one-by-one, from a world and about remaining with a world that contains unremovable realties, it makes sense, and may well be considered important, to ask why such an empty world has not been realized. To deal with that question without considering the existence of some or other concrete thing as logically necessary, only two viable responses seem to remain: (1) The whole existing concrete world might be explained by abstract realities that do not owe their explanatory power to mere Logic; (2) it might be a brute, inexplicable fact that anything concrete exists. One who accepts the PSR must initially suppose that the brute fact view is not the answer; one might not be justified, however, in claiming that the existence of the concrete world cannot possibly be a brute fact. Although the existence of the concrete world might have an explanation and one should perhaps, as a methodological rule, suppose that it has an explanation, we seem to have not enough reason to think that the concrete world *certainly* has an explanation for its existence.

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Notes

1 All of these contentions of Rundle and quantum physicists are relevant only if one views space as a concrete thing that exists besides other things. But for one who advocates a relational view of space, the above-mentioned problem of space never arises. Because, space then is considered as only a relation between concrete things, and it does not remain after all concrete things vanish.

2 Some philosophers reject the Why question because they think it asks why the Universe began in physical time. Grünbaum [11], for example, sides with Hawking [14] in arguing that time is internal to the Universe and that there cannot have been a time when the Universe did not exist. Grünbaum and Hawking seem to be correct in claiming that the actual physical time of our Universe does not exist outside the Universe and might not even have a single beginning point. But if there is non-physical time, in which physical time or nothingness can reside, the question makes sense of why the physical time is actual instead of nothingness. Therefore, one could still meaningfully ask why the Universe exists, regardless of whether it had a single beginning point or an indeterministic beginning in time, or of whether it caused itself in time that is circular [10], or even of whether if it is eternal in time.

3 If one aims to reach a world devoid of all concrete things, one cannot certainly view the world itself as a concrete thing that contains or conserves other concrete things. To speak of a world containing concrete things or conserving concrete things is only metaphorical. A world, here, is considered as a set of facts (Refer to the final paragraph in Section 2).

4 Ross [38], for example, attempts to oppose Hempel’s objection to the Why question by arguing that there cannot be a dynamic, growing, infinite set.

5 Many other philosophers support the same principle. Della Rocca [8], for example, argues that there is no obvious line of difference, with respect to needing an explanation, between the existence of a whole concrete world and other phenomena; he concludes, therefore, that unless one finds some such difference, one should accept the PSR and expect that the world has an explanation for its existence. O’Connor [30, p.84] suggests a similar restriction for the PSR: One must expect an explanation for the existence of the world unless one finds a reason that there is no such explanation. Both Della Rocca and O’Connor, however, treat the PSR as a principle that must be viewed as fundamental to all ontology, instead of just as one to be accepted provisionally as a methodological principle.

6 Tillich [43] admits that the Why question is meaningful and important to ask; he insists, however, that one cannot answer that question because of our limited capacity of reasoning. But this approach should also be abandoned according to what was argued before. The question of why the whole concrete world exists is definitely an unsolved mystery for some, but we need a compelling reason if we are to accept that no answer to that question can possibly conform to our reasoning.
7 Even if the world in fact has no reason for its existence, this does not mean, as
many claim, that the Why question is meaningless. To say that the world exists
without reason is itself an answer.

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