



Why Does The World Exist?

An Existential Detective Story by Jim Holt

"Everything you've been telling us is rubbish" an old lady replied after a public lecture held by Bernhard Russell - "The world is actually flat, and it's supported by a giant elephant that is standing on the back of a turtle". Russell, humoring her, asked what might support the turtle. "It's turtles all the way down!" the old lady replied.

Where is "all the way down", is one of the basic philosophical questions the book tries to get answers to. Jim Holt investigates very thoroughly the long way of the various ideas mankind has developed since the first recordings (Plato, 428 B.C.) up to the current "big bang" inflation model fulfilling the cosmological standard model parameters. Reading the book saves you at least two years of studying philosophy and five years of physics – and that includes Einstein's relativity theory and quantum physics. For me as an open minded engineer it is good reading and gives answers to all the questions I have been kicking around myself throughout my educational and professional life (and don't misjudge the "old" lady from above – I am an "oldie" myself).

In the end you only can admire the intelligence, tenaciousness and inventiveness of people trying to prove the whereabouts of our existence, or the existence of God one way or the other: "Can there be something from nothing?"

The book emboldens you to formulate your own ideas and to make up your own interpretations, like:

The pansychism with its reference to quantum entanglement "when two distinct particles enter into a state of quantum entanglement, they lose their individual identities and act as a unified system", could be passageway into a deeper understanding of the universe and its coming into being.

My conclusion is like Dr. Faust's:

Faust 1 (J.W. Goethe)

I've studied now Philosophy
And Jurisprudence, Medicine,
And even, alas! Theology
All through and through with ardour
keen!
Here now I stand, poor fool, and see
I'm just as wise as formerly.

Habe nun, ach! Philosophie,
Juristerei und Medizin,
Und leider auch Theologie
Durchaus studiert, mit heißem Bemühn.
Da steh ich nun, ich armer Tor!
Und bin so klug als wie zuvor;

And, if you ask for my opinion – I think our universe / multiverse might not be perfect i.e. following all the clever explanations, rules and models (least complex, beautiful, all-encompassing) but it can't be accidental either. Adopting Jim Holt's sometimes casual quotations – my experience as an engineer and manager is that any bad plan is better than no plan. On the other hand I got the impression that the various definitions of nothingness are incomplete and need "more substance": The "total nothingness" according to Heidegger "nothing noths" ("Das Nichts nichtet"), is defied by our very existence.

Nevertheless, this outstanding philosophical "tour d'horizon" serves as an up-to-date summary of the thoughts and theories of the most recognized philosophers and should become a standard reference for every scientist and/or engineer dealing with space exploration to check his own position once in a while – and to make him proud of having contributed to the partial verification of the cosmological standard model with the COBE, WMAP and PLANK satellites (see also <http://www.opsjournal.org/spaceopsnews.asp>).