**Can a rock be happy?**  
 This is easy to spot as an absurd question. That might not be enough to deter us from thinking about it. Such is the power of words. Sentences of that type, which are linguistically absurd, are abundant, more abundant than sensible sentences. They are often harder to spot than my index case. Why is that? There are many explanations. A given linguistic mistake may have been taken seriously previously by others, even for centuries. We tend to have blind faith in language, not cognizant that, like any tool, words have rules of operation. Those rules are largely determined by common usage, and grounded in common experience, but the words can be easily ripped from their moorings, and when this happens I refer to the “tyranny of words”. Our desire to fool ourselves is powerful, and because logic can be complex, it is easy to do this with words. When these errors are taken seriously, most times no harm befalls, but such errors cannot be the basis for discussions.

**“Why?”**

“Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?” This “question” illustrates what I call the tyranny of words. One can juxtapose words so they seem to say something, when in fact they do not.

Let’s start with “why”. The two common uses of the word “why” are exemplified in the two questions: “Why do a thing?” and “Why did a (physical) thing happen?” The first has to do with intent, typically human, and the second has to do with physical causality. Both uses of “why”, posed in a question, request what an “explanation.” There is a natural conflation of “intent” and “causality” which has plagued human discourse for centuries.

There is a third less common use of the word “why”, which is the divine “why”. This “why” is used when a question has no explanation. When the mother cries, “Why has my baby died?” she does not seek a medical explanation. This is the divine “why” to which the root answer is always “god willed it.” Unless the poser and the responder are both desperate, that answer does not satisfy. The “why” of this question is of the third type.

There are other defects to the question posed, further violations of language, in particular the use of the word “instead” which implies an either/or for “being” on the one hand and “nothing” on the other, as though they could not co-exist. In fact “nothing” if it can be said to exist at all cannot exist without beings.