Is reality a quantum hocus pocus?

Quantum physics’ bizarre implications can be applied to create new technologies

By Viktoria Vedral

HUMANS have a deeply rooted desire to understand the world around them. This drive defines us as small-minded creatures with the driving force behind our civilization’s development. Genetic engineering, telecommunication and pharmaceuticals are all testament to how far we have progressed in our understanding of nature.

The most accurate description of nature is currently in quantum physics, which is the science of things at the tiniest level at which they exist. It has been developed over the last 100 years.

Over the last 100 years, we have found quantum physics to be a completely accurate explanation of the behaviour of tiny subatomic particles and processes as well as the behaviour of all large systems, such as neutron stars.

While the theory has been extremely successful, we are still grappling with its implications and counter-intuitive implications.

The main bizarre consequence is that although we seem to perceive ourselves as unique individuals within an universe, quantum physics suggests that there is no such thing. Is reality a single reality in the universe independent of us — and that our reality is actually only one reality around you. This is because there is no underlying reality. Quantum physics suggests that the photon takes both alternatives: It goes through the glass and is reflected. If it is a photon, both realities exist in two different realities.

But how can you see only one reality around you? You never see the same person existing in two different places at the same time. So how does the act of observation allow one reality to emerge out of two or more realities?

Quantum physics seems to imply that reality somehow emerges through interactions between observers and the observed. This is reminiscent of a magician’s trick, where the magic takes place outside the scope of our everyday experience.

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