

What Is Existence?

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The question: What is Existence? What exists? Does the thing that exists begin at some time?

This study reviews these questions from the standpoint of **Madhyasth Darshan** (Co-existentialism), then compares its answer with **Advaita Vedanta** and selected **modern philosophical approaches** to physical reality, consciousness, and selfhood.

Quick Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Existence	In Madhyasth Darshan: beingness and indestructibility, always present as coexistence.
Coexistence (<i>sah-astitva</i>)	Reality as Omnipresence and all units inseparably present together.
Omnipresence / Space / Brahma / Satta	The all-pervasive, formless, non-transforming reality in which all units are saturated. Madhyasth texts use several names for it.
Unit	A countable, bounded entity in nature, whether insentient or sentient.
Jeevan	The sentient self: a real, immortal, constitutionally complete unit that works through the body.
Jada / *Chaitanya*	Insentient and sentient nature.
Atman / *Brahman*	In Advaita Vedanta: the Self and the one ultimate reality, finally identical.
Mithya	In Advaita: the world as dependent appearance, neither absolutely real nor sheer non-being.
Physicalism	The modern view that every real concrete phenomenon is physical.
Panpsychism	The view that experientiality belongs, at least in primitive form, to fundamental physical reality.
Illusionism	The view that phenomenal consciousness, as philosophers usually conceive it, is an illusion or misdescription.

1. The Madhyasth Darshan Answer

The claim in one sentence: Existence is the eternally present coexistence of formless Omnipresence and countless sentient and insentient units saturated in it; what exists never arises from non-existence and is never annihilated, though units undergo motion, transformation, development, and awakening.

1.1 What is Existence?

Madhyasth Darshan does not define existence as an object among objects, nor as a mental category imposed by a knower. It defines existence as the inseparable presence of

Omnipresence and nature.

SB gives the most compressed formulation:

“What is evident is that consciousness and matter are inseparably present. Upon examining their fundamental nature, we learn that all of existence is essentially nature (matter) saturated in Omnipotence (consciousness). Here, ‘seeing’ is intended in the sense of understanding. Since nature saturated in Omnipotence is inseparably present, existence itself is eternally manifest in the form of coexistence.” - SB, p. 48

The same passage immediately rejects two familiar origin stories:

1. Matter does not arise from consciousness.
2. Consciousness does not arise from matter.

Madhyasth Darshan’s alternative is not creation from one into the other, but **inseparable presentness**: sentient and insentient nature are saturated in Omnipresence, and that indivisible presence is existence.

MVD states the same ontology in the language of “Realisation Knowledge”:

“Sentient and insentient nature saturated in Omnipotence. The countless sentient and insentient units are saturated in Omnipotence (Omnipresence).” - MVD, p. 11

“All units saturated in the Omnipresence (permeative and transparent) have form, properties, essential nature & dharma, and have inherent orderliness & participate in overall orderliness.” - MVD, p. 11

So existence has two inseparable aspects:

1. **Omnipresence** - formless, all-pervasive, non-transforming, immeasurable.
2. **Units of nature** - formful, countable, bounded, active, mutually related.

SB makes this distinction explicit:

“Omnipotence is formless, and nature within Omnipotence is formful existence. Existence implies beingness and indestructibility.” - SB, p. 49

This is the key sentence for the present paper. For Madhyasth Darshan, to exist is not merely to appear to a mind, nor merely to be measurable by instruments. To exist is **to be** and **not to be annihilable**.

1.2 What Exists?

Madhyasth Darshan says that what exists is **coexistence itself**: Omnipresence and all units saturated in it. It is neither a pure monism that dissolves the world, nor a materialism that reduces sentience to physicochemical matter.

Its ontology can be stated in four layers.

1. Omnipresence exists. It is formless, all-pervasive, and not confined by dimensions:

“Omnipotence is not confined within any dimension of length or breadth, nor can any measure be established for it; therefore, Omnipotence is all-pervasive.” - SB, p. 49

MVD also identifies this Omnipresence with Space:

“Knowledge itself is the omnipresent Omnipotence. This itself is referred to as Space.” - MVD, p. 35

This does not make Space a personal God or an individual consciousness. It is the all-pervasive, non-transforming reality in which all units are present, conserved, regulated, and energised.

2. Countless units exist. Units are not illusions in Omnipresence. They have determinate reality:

“Nature, saturated in Omnipotence, exists as countless units. Each unit, being saturated in Omnipotence, remains surrounded, submerged, and soaked in it.” - SB, p. 48

Every unit has form, properties, essential nature, and dharma. This means that to understand a thing is not merely to locate it or quantify it, but to understand what it is, how it behaves, what its orderliness is, and how it participates in the larger order.

3. Sentient and insentient nature both exist. Madhyasth Darshan explicitly refuses the reduction of existence to physicochemical matter:

“Existence is not just physicochemical matter, but all physical, chemical and jeevan entities are inseparably present in Omnipresence.” - MVD, *The Alternative*, point 7

This is why the human being is not treated as body alone. The body is a material organization; *jeevan* is a sentient unit operating through it. MVD states:

“Brahma (Omnipotence) is omnipresent, and jeevan-clouds are many.” -
MVD, p. 13

“The grandeur of humans as a joint form of jeevan and body.” - *MVD, p. 13*

4. Relations and orderliness exist. Units do not exist as isolated lumps. Because existence is coexistence, every unit exists in mutuality:

“Since existence is coexistence, complementarity and mutual recognition are eternally established.” - *SB, p. 49*

This is why Madhyasth Darshan’s ontology immediately becomes ethics, ecology, and social philosophy. If existence itself is coexistence, then right living is not an optional moral overlay; it is the human evidence of understanding existence correctly.

1.3 Does What Exists Begin at Some Time?

Madhyasth Darshan’s answer is: **No, not in the sense of coming from non-existence.** That which exists does not begin as a new reality out of nothing. It is eternally present in existence, though its form, condition, configuration, body, role, and expression may change.

SB states this without ambiguity:

“That which exists continues to be, and that which was not, does not come into existence. Therefore, existence will remain as it is till eternity.” - *SB, p. 49*

JV states the same principle in language closer to ordinary life:

“Nothing arrives at birth nor does anything depart with death. All that is, exists forever.” - *JV, p. 20*

This does not mean that Madhyasth Darshan denies change. It distinguishes **annihilation** from **transformation**, **birth** from **embodiment**, and **death** from **disassociation of body and jeevan**. JV illustrates this with a physical example:

“A piece of charcoal continues to exist in other forms even after burning it.” - JV, p. 20

JV makes the metaphysical rule explicit:

“At the fundamental level, a ‘reality’ never gets annihilated.” - JV, p. 20

The result is a strong conservation ontology:

- 1. Existence as coexistence is beginningless and endless.**
- 2. Omnipresence does not begin, change, or end.**
- 3. Units do not arise from non-being and do not vanish into non-being.**
- 4. Particular bodies, configurations, relations, and states do begin and end.**
- 5. Development and awakening are real, but they are not creation out of nothing.**

1.4 Development Without Creation From Nothing

Madhyasth Darshan’s answer becomes more subtle in its account of *jeevan*. It does say that an atom becomes constitutionally complete and attains sentient status. But this is not “consciousness emerging from dead matter” in the modern emergentist sense. It is a development within already existing coexistence.

SB describes this transition:

“In the course of an atom’s development, there comes a stage when the required number of particles for its constitution are all integrated, and at that point, it becomes constitutionally complete. Constitutional completeness signifies satisfaction within, by, and for that constitution. This is the immortality of the result, and the attainment of sentient status.” - SB, p. 59

And then:

“All types of atoms, including constitutionally complete ones, are eternally present through the natural law of coexistence in existence.” - SB, p. 59

This gives Madhyasth Darshan a distinctive position:

Question	Madhyasth Darshan answer
Did existence begin?	No. Existence is eternally present coexistence.
Did units begin from non-existence?	No. "That which was not, does not come into existence."
Do bodies begin and end?	Yes. Birth and death are events at the level of body and association.
Does <i>jeevan</i> begin at birth?	No. <i>Jeevan</i> is immortal; birth and death are occurrences.
Does sentient status have a developmental account?	Yes. Constitutional completeness is described as attainment of sentient status, but within eternal coexistence, not as creation from nothing.

1.5 The Counter-Slogan to Advaita

Madhyasth Darshan sharply differs from Advaita Vedanta on the status of the world. MVD gives the counter-slogan:

“**Brahma is truth, the world is perpetual.**” - *MVD*, p. 13

This is not a minor difference in wording. It changes the whole direction of philosophy.

If the world is perpetual, then:

1. Matter is not ultimately negated.
2. Relations are not merely provisional.
3. Human conduct is not merely preparatory to escape from the world.
4. Nature, society, production, justice, prosperity, and ecological balance are all real domains of evidence.

Madhyasth Darshan therefore rejects both:

1. **Material reductionism:** only physicochemical matter exists.
2. **World-negating spiritualism:** only Brahman is real and the world is *mithya*.

Its middle claim is: **Brahma is real, the world is real, and their inseparable presentness is coexistence.**

2. The Advaita Vedanta Answer

The claim in one sentence: Existence in the strictest sense is Brahman alone, one without a second; the world of names, forms, bodies, and relations is *mithya*, a dependent appearance, and the true Self is not born or destroyed because it is identical with Brahman.

2.1 Existence Alone, One Without a Second

The Chandogya Upanishad gives the classical Advaita starting point:

“In the beginning this was Existence alone, One only, without a second.”
- *CU 6.2.1*

Shankara’s commentary glosses *sat* as:

“mere Existence, a thing that is subtle, without distinction, all pervasive, one, taintless, partless, consciousness” - *CU 6.2.1, Shankara commentary*

The text also rejects the idea that existence comes from non-existence:

“By what logic can existence verily come out of non-existence? But surely, o good looking one, in the beginning all this was Existence, One only, without a second.” - *CU 6.2.2*

So Advaita and Madhyasth Darshan agree on one major point: **existence does not arise out of non-existence.**

But they diverge immediately on what the many things of the world amount to.

2.2 What Exists in Advaita?

Advaita’s strict answer is: **Brahman alone exists absolutely.** The world is not sheer nothing, but it is not absolutely real either. It is *mithya*: dependent appearance.

Brahma Jnanavali Mala states the famous formula:

“Brahman is real, the universe is mithya (it cannot be categorized as either real or unreal). The jiva is Brahman itself and not different.” - *BJM, v. 20*

It also gives the clay-pot analogy:

“The pot, wall, etc., are all nothing but clay. Likewise, the entire universe is nothing but Brahman.” - *BJM, v. 19*

For Advaita, then, the question “what exists?” has two levels:

Level	What exists?	Status of world
Empirical (<i>vyavahara</i>)	Bodies, minds, causes, effects, duties, scriptures, practices	Operationally valid
Absolute (<i>paramartha</i>)	Brahman alone	World is <i>mithya</i> , dependent appearance

Madhyasth Darshan considers this insufficient because it demotes the world. It accepts Brahma/Omnipresence, but insists that the world is **perpetual**, not *mithya*.

2.3 Does What Exists Begin?

For Advaita, Brahman does not begin. It is beginningless, partless, actionless, and non-dual. The universe as name-form appearance has origination at the empirical level, but its material and ultimate truth is Brahman. Creation is therefore not absolute production out of nothing; it is manifestation or appearance of names and forms on the basis of Brahman.

BJM expresses the Self's changelessness repeatedly:

“I am eternal, I am pure (free from the control of mAyA). I am ever liberated. I am formless, indestructible and changeless.” - BJM, v. 3

“I am devoid of parts. I am actionless. I am the self of all. I am the primordial one. I am the ancient, eternal one.” - BJM, v. 12

The contrast with Madhyasth Darshan is precise:

1. Advaita: Brahman alone is absolutely real; the world is *mithya*.
2. Madhyasth Darshan: Brahma is real and the world is perpetual.
3. Advaita: the individual *jiva* is finally Brahman, not different.
4. Madhyasth Darshan: many *jeevan* units are real and immortal.
5. Advaita: liberation is recognition of non-duality.
6. Madhyasth Darshan: awakening is realization of coexistence and evidence in humane conduct.

3. Modern Philosophical Approaches

The claim in one sentence: Modern philosophy has no single answer to existence; it usually begins from the physical universe and public evidence, but contemporary debates about consciousness, selfhood, and experience show that “what exists” remains contested.

The references available here are mainly modern philosophy of mind and cognitive science, not cosmology. Therefore this section does not claim to settle whether the physical universe

began in a Big Bang, or whether spacetime is fundamental. It compares Madhyasth Darshan with modern approaches to **what kinds of things must be admitted as real**.

3.1 Standard Physicalism: Concrete Reality is Physical

Physicalism is the dominant modern background view. Strawson defines it plainly:

“I take physicalism to be the view that every real, concrete phenomenon in the universe is...physical.” - Strawson 2006, p. 2

On this approach, what exists are physical things, events, fields, organisms, brains, bodies, and their processes. Minds and selves are not separate substances. They are functions, organizations, models, or processes of physical systems.

Modern self-model theories follow this line. Limanowski and Blankenburg describe minimal selfhood as emerging from embodied self-modeling:

“minimal selfhood emerges as the result” - Limanowski and Blankenburg 2013, p. 1

They further summarize free-energy accounts as explaining selfhood through embodied predictive models:

“In one sentence, these accounts propose to ‘understand the elusive sense of minimal self in terms of having internal models that successfully predict or match the sensory consequences of our own movement, our intentions in action, and our sensory input.’” - Limanowski and Blankenburg 2013, p. 3

This is almost the opposite of Madhyasth Darshan’s *jeevan* ontology. For Madhyasth Darshan, the self is a real sentient unit using the body. For the self-model approach, the self is a model generated by embodied prediction and integration.

3.2 The Hard Problem: Experience Resists Reduction

Physicalism faces the problem of experience. Chalmers formulates it as the “hard problem”:

“The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience. When we think and perceive, there is a whirl of information-processing, but there is also a subjective aspect.” - Chalmers 1995, p. 3

He adds:

“It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all?” - Chalmers 1995, p.

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Nagel makes the same difficulty vivid through the bat example:

“We believe that these experiences also have in each case a specific subjective character, which it is beyond our ability to conceive.” - Nagel

1974, p. 3

For Madhyasth Darshan, this is not merely a gap in explanation. It is evidence that the ontology of body alone is incomplete. The modern physicalist may reply that an explanatory gap is not proof of *jeevan*. This is the central disagreement.

3.3 Panpsychist Physicalism: Experience as Fundamental

Strawson accepts physicalism but argues that a realistic physicalism cannot deny experience.

He writes:

“Full recognition of the reality of experience, then, is the obligatory starting point for any remotely realistic version of physicalism.” -

Strawson 2006, p. 2

He then argues that experience cannot emerge from the wholly non-experiential:

“Experiential phenomena cannot be emergent from wholly non-experiential phenomena.” - Strawson 2006, p. 12

And concludes:

“Real physicalism, realistic physicalism, entails panpsychism.” -

Strawson 2006, p. 12

This comes closer to Madhyasth Darshan than reductive physicalism does, because both refuse the idea that sentience simply appears from wholly non-sentient being. But the agreement is limited.

Madhyasth Darshan does **not** say every particle is a subject of experience. It says sentience is the status of constitutionally complete atoms, while other atoms remain engaged in physical and chemical activity. Strawson's panpsychism and Madhyasth Darshan both challenge dead-matter reductionism, but they do so with different metaphysical structures.

3.4 Illusionism: Phenomenal Consciousness as Misdescription

Illusionism goes in the opposite direction. Frankish writes:

“Another approach, which holds that phenomenal consciousness is an illusion and aims to explain why it seems to exist.” - Frankish 2016, p. 1

He clarifies that illusionists deny phenomenal properties, not all consciousness-talk:

“illusionists deny the existence of phenomenal consciousness properly so-called, but do not deny the existence of a form of consciousness” - Frankish 2016, p. 8

Madhyasth Darshan would regard this as another form of reductionism. It treats lived experience, valuation, aspiration, and realization as activities of *jeevan*, not as illusions produced by a brain-model. But illusionism is philosophically important because it shows how far modern naturalism may go to preserve a physicalist ontology.

3.5 Does What Exists Begin in Modern Philosophy?

The modern references used here do not supply a single answer. A cautious comparison is:

1. **Physicalism:** particular organisms, brains, stars, and bodies begin and end; the question of whether the total physical universe begins belongs to cosmology and fundamental physics, not to the philosophy-of-mind sources used here.
2. **Self-model theories:** the self begins developmentally as embodied modeling capacities arise; there is no eternal individual self.
3. **Panpsychism:** experientiality may belong to fundamental physical reality; particular minds still depend on organization.
4. **Illusionism:** phenomenal consciousness never begins, because phenomenal consciousness in the realist sense does not exist; what begins are quasi-phenomenal representational and cognitive states.

Compared with all of these, Madhyasth Darshan makes a stronger metaphysical claim: existence as coexistence is eternal, units are not annihilated, and *jeevan* is immortal.

4. Comparison

Question	Madhyasth Darshan	Advaita Vedanta	Modern physicalist approaches
What is existence?	Eternally present coexistence: Omnipresence plus all units saturated in it.	Brahman / Existence alone, one without a second.	Concrete physical reality, usually treated through empirical inquiry and theory.
What exists absolutely?	Omnipresence and real units of nature, sentient and insentient.	Brahman alone.	Usually the physical; disputed whether experience is reducible, fundamental, or illusory.
Is the world real?	Yes. "Brahma is truth, the world is perpetual."	Empirically valid but ultimately <i>mithya</i> .	Yes, as physical reality.
Does existence begin?	No. That which exists continues to be; what was not does not come into existence.	Brahman does not begin; creation is not production from absolute non-being.	No single answer in philosophy of mind; particular physical systems begin and end.
Does the individual self begin?	<i>Jeevan</i> does not begin at birth and does not die with the body.	The individual <i>jiva</i> is ultimately Brahman; individuality is due to ignorance.	The self is typically a biological, cognitive, or social process that develops and ends.
What changes?	Forms, bodies, configurations, states, development, awakening.	Names and forms appear and are sublated; Brahman is changeless.	Physical configurations, organisms, representational states, social practices.
Method of knowing	Study, realization, behavior, experiment.	Scripture, reasoning, contemplative discrimination.	Observation, modelling, argument, experiment, public evidence.
Ethical consequence	Since existence is coexistence, humane conduct is evidence of understanding.	Ethics prepares the mind for knowledge and liberation.	Ethics is usually developed separately through naturalism, social theory, or normative philosophy.

The deepest agreement

All three traditions resist crude nihilism. Madhyasth Darshan says "that which was not, does not come into existence." Advaita asks how existence could come from non-existence. Modern physicalism generally avoids creation from nothing in philosophy of mind by

treating mental and self phenomena as arising within physical processes, not from absolute non-being.

The deepest disagreement

The disagreement is over the status of plurality.

1. **Advaita** gives final reality to the One and demotes plurality to *mithya*.
2. **Physicalism** gives final reality to the physical domain and typically demotes self and consciousness to functions, models, or illusions.
3. **Madhyasth Darshan** gives reality to both Omnipresence and plurality: the world is perpetual, units are real, and relationships are ontologically significant.

This is why Madhyasth Darshan is not simply “another non-dualism.” It affirms a kind of indivisibility, but not by dissolving the world into Brahman. It affirms coexistence: inseparable togetherness without erasing the many.

5. Critical Review

5.1 Strengths of the Madhyasth Darshan Position

1. **It answers the three questions directly.** Existence is beingness and indestructibility in the form of coexistence. What exists is Omnipresence and all units. What exists does not begin from non-being.
2. **It avoids world-negation.** By saying “Brahma is truth, the world is perpetual,” it preserves the reality of nature, society, relationship, production, and ethical responsibility.
3. **It avoids simple material reductionism.** It refuses to treat consciousness, value, and selfhood as mere byproducts of body-chemistry.
4. **It links ontology and conduct.** If existence is coexistence, then human fulfillment must be evidenced as coexistence in behavior, not merely claimed as belief.
5. **It gives a conservation-based metaphysics.** The principle that nothing existent is annihilated gives internal coherence to its account of body, *jeevan*, death, transformation, and development.

5.2 Open Problems for Madhyasth Darshan

1. **The leap from indestructibility to *jeevan* is not publicly established.** The general claim that reality is not annihilated does not by itself prove that a distinct sentient unit survives bodily death.
2. **Constitutional completeness is not yet scientifically operational.** The claim that an atom becomes constitutionally complete and thereby attains sentient status is central to the darshan, but it is not presently measurable in physics or chemistry.

3. The interaction between *jeevan* and body needs clearer articulation. If *jeevan* drives the body, modern readers will ask how intention becomes neural and muscular activity.

4. The vocabulary of Omnipresence risks ambiguity. MVD and SB use names such as Space, Knowledge, Consciousness, Omnipotence, Brahma, God, and Absolute Energy. A rigorous presentation must prevent readers from collapsing these into Advaita Brahman, theistic God, physical energy, or psychological consciousness.

5. The evidence standard differs from modern science. Madhyasth Darshan cites realization, behavior, and experiment. Modern science will accept public behavioral evidence but will not accept private realization as establishing ontology without independent testability.

5.3 Strengths and Limits of Advaita

Advaita has a powerful answer to non-being: existence cannot arise from non-existence. It also gives a rigorous first-person method of discriminating the seer from the seen. Its weakness, from the Madhyasth perspective, is that it makes the world dependent appearance. That makes it harder to ground the ultimate reality of relationships, nature, society, and humane conduct.

Advaita may reply that ethics and compassion remain valid at the empirical level, and that realization of non-duality deepens rather than weakens them. Madhyasth Darshan's counter-reply is that an ontology which makes the world *mithya* cannot give the world the same final weight as coexistence gives it.

5.4 Strengths and Limits of Modern Approaches

Modern approaches are strongest where Madhyasth Darshan is weakest: public evidence, empirical correction, cognitive modelling, and precise mechanisms. Self-model theory can explain many features of embodied selfhood without positing an eternal *jeevan*. Illusionism shows how a naturalist can reinterpret even the seeming obviousness of phenomenal consciousness.

But modern philosophy is not unified. Chalmers and Nagel show that subjective experience remains difficult to reduce. Strawson shows that some physicalists move toward panpsychism rather than eliminativism. These debates make it inaccurate to say "modern philosophy has proved the self is only the brain." It has not. It has, however, set a high evidential burden for any claim of an immortal sentient unit.

6. Conclusion

Madhyasth Darshan's answer to the paper's three questions is exact:

1. **What is Existence?** Existence is eternally present coexistence: formless Omnipresence and formful units inseparably present.
2. **What exists?** Omnipresence exists; countless sentient and insentient units exist; their form, properties, nature, dharma, mutuality, and orderliness exist.
3. **Does the thing that exists begin at some time?** No. That which exists does not come from non-existence and is not annihilated. Bodies and configurations begin and end; existence and existent realities persist through transformation.

Its most distinctive formulation is:

“Brahma is truth, the world is perpetual.” - *MVD*, p. 13

This single line marks the difference from Advaita and modern physicalism at once. Against Advaita, it says the world is not *mithya*. Against physicalism, it says existence is not merely physicochemical matter. Against both, it says reality is neither world-negation nor matter-only, but coexistence.

The philosophical strength of this view is that it makes the world, relationships, conduct, and ecological responsibility fully real. Its unresolved challenge is evidential: to persuade readers outside the tradition, it must clarify how claims such as *jeevan*, constitutional completeness, and post-death continuity can be studied, tested, or at least responsibly distinguished from metaphysical assertion.

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