

Conditional Divorce

Mishnah, Gittin 76b:

A man gives his wife a bill of divorce [known as a get] and tells her, "This is your bill of divorce, and it is effective if I do not return within twelve months." If he dies within the twelve months, there is no divorce.

A man gives his wife a bill of divorce and tells her, "This is your bill of divorce, and it is effective from the present time onward if I do not return within twelve months." If he dies within the twelve months, this is a divorce.

Talmud, *ibid*:

Rabbi Elazar asked a certain elder, "If he dies within the twelve months, is she permitted to marry immediately? Or must she wait for the twelve-month period to end?"³



Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Divorce, Chapter 9, Halachah 11

A man gives his wife a get and tells her, "This is your get and it is effective from the present time onward if I do not return within twelve months." ...if the time period he specified passes without his coming, the divorce is effective.

If he dies within the twelve months, although the divorce will become effective, for there is no way that he can come, if she would have been obligated to perform the rite of yibbum, she should not marry until the twelve months pass and the condition is fulfilled.



Ibid, Chapter 8, Halachah 22

A man gives his wife a get and tells her, "This is your get on condition that you give me 200 zuz," without specifying a time period. He dies before she gives him the money. She cannot give the sum to his heirs—the condition was that it be given to him.

The get, however, is not nullified by the husband's death, since a definite time period was not specified. Therefore, even if the get was lost or ripped before he died, the woman should not marry another man until she performs the rite of chalitzah.

Schrodinger's Cat

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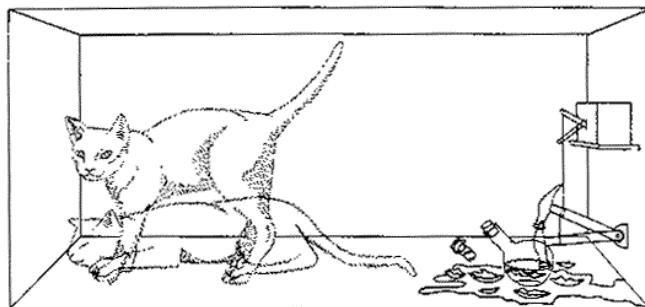
In the early 1930s Erwin Schrödinger published a way of thinking about the circumstance of radioactive decay that is still useful. We imagine an apparatus containing just one Nitrogen-13 atom and a detector that will respond when the atom decays. Connected to the detector is a relay connected to a hammer, and when the atom decays the relay releases the hammer which then falls on a glass vial containing poison gas. We take the entire apparatus and put it in a box. We also place a cat in the box, close the lid, and wait 10 minutes.

We then ask: Is the cat alive or dead?

The answer according to quantum mechanics is that it is 50% dead and 50% alive.

Quantum Mechanics describes the world in terms of a *wave function*. DeWitt wrote about the cat that "at the end of [one half-life] the total wave function for the system will have a form in which the living cat and dead cat are mixed in equal portions." (Reference: B.S.

DeWitt and N. Graham, eds., **The Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics** (Princeton, 1973), pg. 156.)



When we open the box, we "collapse the wave function" or "collapse the state" and have either a live cat or a dead cat.

Of course, this is just a thought experiment. So far as I know nobody has actually ever done this experiment.

In a sense the cat is a "red herring" [sorry!]. The paradox is just an illuminating way of thinking about the consequences of radioactive decay being totally random.

Imagine we have a friend waiting outside when we open the box. For us the wave function collapses and we have, say, a live cat. But our friend's wave function does not collapse until he comes into the room. This leads to a strong solipsism, since our friend can then say that we owe our objective existence to his kind intervention in coming into the room and collapsing our state.

As Heisenberg said, then, "The wave function represents partly a fact and partly our knowledge of a fact."

Our friend needn't have come into the room to collapse his wave function: if we have a cell phone we can call him and tell him the result of the experiment. Of course, this assumes that we don't lie to him and tell him the cat is dead when it is alive.

Unexplained but apparently true is the fact that when a state collapses, it collapses into the same state for everybody. If we see a live cat everybody sees a live cat (unless they or us are hallucinating).

As de Beauregard commented: "Finally, the need for consistency of the whole scheme leads me to think of the world we are living in as a Leibnizian world, where cats are rather high in the hierarchy of monads." Reference: *Foundations of Physics* 6, 539 (1976).

Conditional Water

כז. וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַיָּם וַיִּשָּׁב הַיָּם לְפָנֹת בְּקֶרֶ לְאִיתָנוּ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִיִּם
 לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם:
 לְאִיתָנוּ = לְתַנְאוּ

27. So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and toward morning the sea returned to its strength, as the Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord stirred the Egyptians into the sea.

Talmud, Chulin 7a

When I (Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair) was on my way to perform the mitzvah of redeeming captives, I came to the Ginaii River, which blocked my way.

I commanded "Ginaii, split your waters so I can pass through."

The river replied, "You are going to perform the will of your master and I am going to perform the will of my master [by flowing to the sea, as a river should]. You may not succeed in your task, while I will surely succeed."

I responded, "If you don't split, I will decree that water should not flow in you ever again!"

The river split.

A man was there, carrying wheat to be used for the holiday of Passover. I commanded the river to split for the man for he was performing a mitzvah, and the river complied. Finally, I commanded the river to split one more time for an Arab merchant, so that people should not exclaim, "This is how he treats his escorts?!"

Conditional Creation

Talmud, Avoda Zara 3a

"If not for My covenant with day and with night. I should not have appointed the ordinances of Heaven and Earth."

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: What is meant by the phrase, "And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day?"

It teaches us that God made a condition with the works of creation, saying, "If Israel accept my Torah it will be well, but if not, I shall return all of you to a state of chaos."

This accords with the comment of Rabbi Chizkia on the verse, "From heaven, You let judgment be heard, the earth trembled and was still."

If the earth trembled, how could it be still, and if it was still, how could it tremble?

But at first it trembled, and subsequently it became still.

Liturgy, Rosh Hashanah

This day is the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day.