

Dear Colin McGinn:

Your position on consciousness will soon be vindicated—in a way. If I understand it, mysterianism holds that consciousness is an aspect of the material world but denies that it can be explained by beings with our cognitive powers. This is basically true. But the mystery is not as great as you suggest. The cognitive limitation is just a blindness in physics, and it will be overcome when physicists make an empirical discovery that solves the problems in modern physics and triggers a revolution in science, including an explanation of how the brain works. That will show that you are almost right about consciousness being an aspect of the material world. It is an aspect of matter in a world constituted by two substances, matter and space, and together with the explanation of how the brain works, that ontology will explain how consciousness is part of the natural world. It is a reductive scientific explanation as you expect, and since what overcomes the cognitive limitation is a revolution in the basic branch of science, the mystery is deep enough to be considered a vindication of mysterianism. To show what I mean, let me sketch my reasons for predicting an empirical discovery that cures physics of its blindness and triggers a scientific revolution in which consciousness is explained as an aspect of the nature of matter.

The problems of modern physics will be solved by the discovery that space is a substance that interacts with matter. This ontological theory has been hidden from physics for centuries by its assumption that laws of physics are the deepest possible knowledge about the natural world. The secret sauce that has made physics so successful for centuries is the use of mathematics to formulate its laws. But that method has trapped physicists inside a box and caused intractable problems in modern physics, and when physicists give up the assumption that mathematics is known by a faculty of rational intuition and

consider how the truth of mathematics can be explained by its correspondence to the world, they will begin to think outside that box. If the natural world is constituted by substances with powers that enable them to interact with one another as they endure through time, interactions of substances constitute change, and since all the regularities generated by interactions of space and matter are quantitative, scientists will be able to infer that space and matter constitute the natural world because that is the best explanation of the “unreasonable effectiveness” of mathematics in discovering laws of physics. Furthermore, the reduction of physics to ontology will be confirmed when they discover the more specific powers by which interactions of space and matter generate all the regularities described by laws of physics because that will solve the problems of modern physics.

This ontological discovery will reveal that matter exists as many particular bits that coincide with parts of space, and the way that interactions of space and matter generate the regularities described by laws of physics will reveal a kind of efficient cause not recognized by physics. Recognition of this second kind of efficient cause will give biologists a more complete understanding of the cause of evolution that enables them to show that a series of inevitable stages of evolution, caused by a series of levels of natural organization, brings beings like us into existence on suitable planets throughout the universe. The level of organization responsible for the stage at which the mammalian brain evolves will reveal that the function of its basic structure is to serve as a faculty of naturalistic imagination, and that will enable neural scientists to use the homology between the anatomically distinct hindbrain, midbrain, and forebrain of the reptilian brain and three distinct thalamocortical circuits in the mammalian forebrain to determine how the mammalian brain serves as a faculty of imagination.

Neural scientists will need this explanation of the mammalian brain to explain consciousness, but it does not, by itself, explain the phenomenal aspect of experience, for example, the spatial configurations of sensory qualia (such as colors and sounds) that are immediately present when we perceive the natural world. As you point out, these phenomenal properties are so radically different from the properties that science finds in the natural world that it is a mystery how consciousness is part of the natural world. But it can be explained by another consequence of the discovery that matter is a substance that coincides with parts of space.

Since matter is a substance, scientists can assume that a purely phenomenal way of existing in itself is part of its essential nature. That is, the existence of a primitive qualitative property of some kind is what it is like to be every bit of matter in the world, though such “qualia” are presumably rather primitive in the case of the simplest bits of matter. This is a kind of panpsychism that makes it possible to explain how consciousness is part of a world constituted by space as well as matter. Bits of matter coincide with parts of space, and since species of matter can be distinguished by the spatiotemporal structures of their coincidence with space, a single bit of matter can have a kind of spatiotemporal structure that is complex enough to explain the configurations of sensory qualia in phenomenal space that are immediately present when we perceive the natural world. If the faculty of imagination is responsible for their structure, there is one and only one bit of matter helping constitute the mammalian brain that fills this bill. It is the species of field matter that mediates the electromagnetic interactions among ions accelerated in the firings of neurons. Their firings in serving as a faculty of imagination impose a spatiotemporal structure on this field matter (called the electromagnetic field in physics), and since matter has a phenomenal intrinsic property, what it is like to be that particular bit of matter helping constitute the mammalian

brain can explain the immediate presence of configurations of sensory qualia in phenomenal space.

In an interview by Robert Lawrence Kuhn not long ago, you admitted that the electrical activity of the brain makes it a better candidate for explaining consciousness than other organs, such as a kidney, so if you knew that the electromagnetic field generated by the mammalian faculty of imagination was a species of matter with a phenomenal intrinsic nature, I believe that you would admit that it solves the mystery about how consciousness is part of the natural world. This view, which might be called spatio-materialist panpsychism, is only the foundation for explaining the belief in mind. Since it implies that everything we know or say is caused by brain states, rather than the immediate presence of phenomenal properties, it implies epiphenomenalism, and that calls for an explanation of how we know we are conscious. That is not impossible. But it is surprising because it means that knowledge of consciousness was a historical discovery. It was discovered by Descartes when he showed that the external world has a divisibility that makes it ontologically incompatible with the unity of mind. That is just one of many implications of the argument that predicts a discovery by physicists that will trigger a scientific revolution in which the problem of mind-body dualism is solved.

The complete argument is presented in detail in a trilogy, *Naturalistic Reason*, that I am self-publishing as I send you this message. The first volume, *Unification of Physics*, describes ontological mechanisms that explain all the laws of physics in quantitative detail. The second volume, *the Unification of Science*, shows how the ontological reduction of physics will reveal a kind of efficient cause, not recognized by physics, that works together with physical causes in a way that enables all the specialized sciences to explain completely the regularities they study. That

reveals that the overall course of evolution on suitable planets includes a series of inevitable stages that brings about the existence of beings like us, and the third volume, the Unification of Science and Philosophy, uses this ontological explanation of how consciousness is part of the natural world to explain Western civilization as a distinct stage in the evolution of life caused by the exchange of metaphysical arguments in which consciousness is discovered and science begins. It shows how solving the mind-body problem turns ontological science into a cognitive power that knows Reality behind Appearance, so I call the trilogy, Naturalistic Reason.

So, my prediction is that the cognitive limitation that makes consciousness a mystery will be overcome by naturalistic reason. Some arguments in the trilogy justifying it may be incomplete or mistaken. But I am confident that the discovery about space will cause a scientific revolution. And since I know this sounds too good to be true, let me say something about its origin and scope. I have been working on this argument, pretty much on my own, for over 45 years, including 30 years teaching philosophy at American University and more than 20 years since retiring from teaching. As a philosopher, I have written my detailed argument with a rigor that justifies expecting it to stand up to scrutiny in the rational pursuit of truth. I am writing to you and a few others because I want to make what I have discovered public. I am about to turn 83, so you needn't worry that I am merely boasting in an attempt to advance my career. Making it public is, I believe, my duty because I have been given the leisure to enjoy a life spent in this exceptionally fulfilling way.

Even those who believe in the rational pursuit of truth will be reluctant to take up a detailed all-inclusive explanation of the natural world in three volumes, so I am offering a simpler way of learning more about it. An executive summary of the argument is

presented in a short (150 page) book titled Sapere Aude that I am also self-publishing now. I am including a free Amazon link to an eBook version of it. (See below.) And there is more information about this argument at natReason.com, including an introduction to the trilogy, a Table of Contents for it, a bookstore, and more information about me. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and very grateful to learn about any problems that you think casts doubt on it. You can reach me personally at philliphscribner@yahoo.com.