

Dear Jordan Peterson,

In your 10 July 2022 video, *Russia Vs. Ukraine Or Civil War in The West*, you conclude that, setting Russia aside, the “civil war of ideas can be won only by an intellectual or even spiritual fight” that defeats the “radical Marxist inheritance,” such as the demand for “diversity, inclusion, and equity.” It is currently destabilizing our society, and you say that it is the “job of classical liberals, small-c conservatives, and adherents of the Abrahamic tradition to bring about that defeat in the realm of ideas where the true battles most truly rage.” I believe that job can be accomplished, and the weapon lies in a way of resolving your disagreement with Sam Harris about the nature of the good aired in a series of debates nearly four years ago. They gave me hope for the rational pursuit of truth, and spurred me to make my own work public. It is a discovery about Western civilization that I believe will interest you. Though it depends on the prediction of a discovery that physicists will make, the discovery will enable science to explain the origin of life in a way that reveals the nature of the good, implies the inevitability of the evolution of beings like us, and restores Enlightenment confidence in reason. Admittedly, this sounds too good to be true. But consider my reasons for predicting it.

You are an individual psychologist who uses a Jungian appreciation of the wisdom in religion and myths to point to something about goodness that seem to transcend the natural world, but since Sam Harris is a naturalist who believes that the natural world is all that exists, he insists that goodness can be explained by what physics has discovered. Neither of you claims to have knowledge of something that exists outside space and time, and there is an explanation of goodness as an aspect of the world that science can discover that would draw you into agreement about morality and why we ought to be moral, if both of you

knew about it. It also explains free will in a way that both of you could accept. I believe that we are on the brink of that discovery, and unlikely as it may sound, it would do the job of defending the Enlightenment.

This explanation of the nature of the good depends on a scientific revolution that will be triggered when physicists make a discovery that solves all the problems of modern physics. That is not as unlikely as it may seem, because it is a discovery about space and we know that it exists. It is the discovery that space is a substance that interacts with matter, and that fact is hidden from physics 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 it also causes all the seemingly intractable problems in modern physics, so physicists are trapped inside a box. They will begin to think outside that mathematical box when they abandon the assumption that mathematics is known by a faculty of rational intuition and recognize that its truth can be explained by its correspondence to a world constituted by two substances, space and matter enduring through time. Since interactions of substances with their essential natures can generate only quantitatively precise regularities, scientists can infer spatio-materialism as the best explanation of the "unreasonable effectiveness" of mathematics in discovering laws of physics. This discovery will be confirmed by discovering powers that enable interactions of space and matter to generate all the regularities described by laws of physics, because that will solve the problems of modern physics.

*Ontology* is the study of existence, and since substances are the cause of what exists, this discovery will reduce physics to ontology. These *ontological causes* entail a kind of efficient

cause, not recognized by physics, called *geometrical causes*. Since they work together with physical causes, their discovery will trigger a scientific revolution, and by filling all the explanatory gaps in specialized sciences, it will explain the nature of the good. Geometrical causes are at work in nature because space gives the matter that helps it constitute atoms (and bodies composed of them) the power to impose their unchanging geometrical structures on what happens by physical causes, the kind of efficient causes that *is* recognized by physics. That will clear up puzzles about the nature of entropy in thermodynamics in a way that gives the life sciences a deeper and more complete explanation of evolution than Darwinism. Biologists will be able to explain why life evolves on suitable planets throughout the universe, and they will discover a series of inevitable stages of evolution that bring beings like us into existence.

This discovery about evolution will explain the origin of life, and since that reveals its nature, it will show that goodness is an essential aspect of the nature of life. Life begins when geometrical causes acquire the power to go through reproductive cycles on their own by choosing between incompatible goals, such as growth and reproduction. Life is basically a *choosing machine*, so what matters to living organisms is choosing goals that are good over those that are bad. This explanation of the nature of life also implies that there are four forms of life. As each form of life evolves, it gives rise to a new form of life in basically the same way that the first form evolves from nonlife, except that it is a choosing machine on a higher level of geometrical organization. First, there are prokaryotic cells, then eukaryotic cells, followed by multicellular organisms, and finally there are spiritual organisms. By *spiritual organisms*, I mean groups of language-using mammals whose only body is all the multicellular animal bodies of its members. Members of spiritual organisms have a spiritual nature because they

are parts of the highest form of life that this cause of evolution can produce on suitable planets. They are *subjective animals* because they have a faculty of imagination, and they become *reflective subjects* when the use of language enables them to represent the causes of their behavior as part of the very process of causing it. That enables them to see into the minds of others and understand the causes of their behavior, so recognition of the equality of all reflective subjects is part of their spiritual nature. Since cooperation is essential to the way that spiritual organisms survive, obeying rules about how they treat one another that promote conditions under which they can cooperate is basic to their spiritual nature—as basic as cells following a genetic plan is to the development of a fertilized egg cell into a multicellular animal. In short, morality is an essential aspect of the spiritual form of life. Choosing good over evil is good for beings like us because that is what we must choose to live the form of life we have. Science will explain why we ought to be moral.

Let me also mention that this naturalistic explanation of the origin of beings like us explains our moral nature in a way that reconciles free will and determinism. Though every event in a world constituted by space and matter is completely determined, reflective subjects have a free will because their behavior is guided by a geometrical cause. As a choosing machine, its function is choosing between goals, including the basic function of choosing good over evil. And reflective subjects are responsible for what they choose because the ability to represent the causes of their behavior as part of the process of guiding it means that they can choose the desires on which they in particular situations, and they have a spiritual desire that enables them to do what is required by moral rules (or some other parts of culture) even when it is contrary to self-interest or opposed by strong animal desires. Since they can always have acted otherwise

when they do wrong, they are justly held responsible for what they do. And since the spiritual desire derives from the desires constituting the dominance hierarchy in pack animals, public punishment for wrongdoing can be justified in some cases because it strengthens the spiritual desire in much the same way that young alpha males that are defeated in challenging the leader of their pack acquire a new desire to be a follower. By strengthening the spiritual desire, punishment, like tough love, makes it easier to choose good over evil—and increases the power to defer gratification in doing what is in one's self-interest.

As far as I can tell from your debates, when science explains human nature in this way, you and Sam Harris will be able to agree about the nature of the good. Moral goodness is normally a necessary condition for the goodness of other goals, so the way that members of spiritual organisms are responsible for what they do is the foundation, at least, for explaining the meanings of folk stories, myths, and religion. It seems to transcend the natural world because as science explains it, it is just a physical world in which the existence of beings like us is just an evolutionary accident and we have no spiritual nature. But since ontological science will be based on interactions of substances, rather than mathematically formulated laws of physics, Sam Harris will accept the same explanation of the nature of what is good for beings with a spiritual nature. What is more, it will show that his denial that beings like us have a free will is a mistake caused by assuming that the basic nature of what exists in the natural world is described by physics.

My argument predicting this scientific revolution is presented in a trilogy that I am self-publishing, called *Naturalistic Reason*. The first volume, the *Unification of Physics*, gives my reasons for believing that the problems of modern physics will soon be solved, and the second volume, the *Unification of*

*Science*, gives my reasons for predicting that a revolution in the life sciences, caused by the recognition of geometrical efficient causes, will enable naturalists to explain the difference between good and evil in a way that resolves disagreements about the nature of the good.

But there is a third volume because this is not the only consequence of the predicted discovery about space. The reduction of physics to ontology will enable scientists to explain how consciousness is part of the natural world, and when ontological scientists trace the existence of their complete scientific explanation of nature to philosophy, they will discover that Western civilization is a distinct stage in the evolution of life. The genius behind most of Western philosophy is metaphysics, by which I mean the belief that we have a cognitive power, called *Reason*, that enables us to know Reality behind Appearance, and so I call Western civilization the *metaphysical stage*. Metaphysics was Plato's shortcut to the perfect kind of knowledge that the pre-Socratics had expected to acquire by using the empirical method to discover the first cause. They agreed in the end that substances are the first cause, but not about the natures of the substances constituting the natural world, and assuming that Reason is a faculty of intuition, Plato was, in effect, claiming that a faculty of rational intuition enables us to know the natures of those substances deeply enough to explain the nature of the good and vindicate his teacher, Socrates. Though intuitionistic metaphysics failed, that is a long story because it had a long career in Western culture, and what I want to emphasize is that the ontological explanation of why we ought to be moral is the foundation for explaining Western civilization as the metaphysical stage. Ontological scientists will not only explain the Cartesian mind by the brain but also explain the Christian God by the natural world. When the metaphysical stage is complete, it will be clear that the natural world has all the perfections attributed to its

creator, except for existing outside space and time. It will turn out that there is much truth in religious beliefs, such as the origin of our spiritual nature in the Garden of Eden, the meaning of the crucifixion of Christ, and the doctrine of the trinity.

But the relevant point here is that what metaphysicians mean by Appearance and Reason is consciousness (or parts of it). When ontological scientists explain the origin of their complete explanation of nature as an inevitable part of the metaphysical stage, they will use their explanation of how consciousness is part of the natural world to discount an illusion inherent in consciousness, and so they will find themselves knowing Reality behind Appearance. This is the perfect knowledge sought by metaphysicians, but it is also the perfect knowledge sought by the pre-Socratics, because ontological scientists will know that space and matter are the first cause of the natural world. However, since scientists are naturalists who use the empirical method to know what really exists, ontological scientists will insist that their perfect cognitive power be called *naturalistic Reason*. This is the upshot of the argument in the *Unification of Science and Philosophy*, the third volume of *Naturalistic Reason*.

If naturalistic Reason knows Reality behind Appearance, we can expect everyone to be drawn into agreement about what is true because they will know which beliefs correspond to Reality. Since that will restore Enlightenment confidence in the rational pursuit of truth, it will do the job that you say needs to be done and win the battle "in the realm of ideas where the true battles most truly rage." As you will remember, after issues about the nature of reality and truth divided you and Sam Harris irreconcilably, you chose to continue the rational pursuit of truth two years ago by debating the nature of the good. Those debates are what inspired me to try publishing my argument in this way, and I

now hope that naturalistic Reason will draw you and Sam into agreement about the nature of the true.

There may be incomplete or mistaken arguments in this trilogy. But I am confident that the discovery about space will cause a scientific revolution and cut the Gordian Knot of philosophy, and since this sounds too good to be true, let me say something about its origin. I have been working on this argument, pretty much on my own, for over 45 years, while teaching philosophy at American University for 30 years and since retiring from teaching over 20 years ago. As a philosopher, I have written this argument with a care that justifies expecting it to stand up under such scrutiny, and I am prepared to defend it on all fronts. My reason for writing you and a few others is to make what I have discovered public. I am about to turn 83, and I believe that it is my duty to tell others about my discoveries because my spiritual organism has given me the leisure and privilege to enjoy a life spent in such an exceedingly meaningful way.

Even to someone who believes in the rational pursuit of truth, the prospect of reading a detailed all-inclusive explanation of the natural world in three volumes is daunting, so I am offering an easier 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](http://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 may cast doubt on it. You can reach me personally at [philliphscibner@yahoo.com](mailto:philliphscibner@yahoo.com).