

Dear Thomas Nagel:

When I read your book, *Mind and Cosmos*, ten years ago, I knew that the argument I was working on would interest and challenge you. It's now ready to be made public.

I agree with you that the prevailing materialist neo-Darwinian orthodoxy is basically mistaken. And I agree with you that it would be worse to try to correct this mistake by defending belief in a transcendent creator. What is missing is an explanation of why there are conscious beings like us who understand their nature and know the necessity of their existence. So I agree with you about evolution being the cosmos waking up to the knowledge of its own nature.

But I disagree about its being the *telos* of evolution. It is just necessary. So in my view, your approach to correcting the mistake of materialist new-Darwinism is almost as wide of the mark as traditional theism. A teleological law is not required to explain why beings like us exist necessarily. Nor is it necessary to postulate neutral monism to explain how consciousness is part of the natural world. No faculty of rational intuition is needed to explain how beings like us have certainty about mathematics, the difference between good and evil, and much more. Even in a world where consciousness is epiphenomenal, reflective subjects can know that they are conscious.

You use absolute idealism as a model for the perfect knowledge that you believe is possible. But that is not the only model. It has the unity and completeness that you demand because everything was reduced to a mental substance, and you rightly reject it because science has learned too much about the natural world for idealism to be credible. But unity and completeness are essential

to the kind of knowledge you want, and it is a mistake to believe that you must give up reductionistic naturalism to have it.

The pre-Socratic philosophers believed there is a *first cause* that explains everything in the world. Though they didn't discover it, they were on a track that can lead to the kind of explanation of everything that you expect. After generations of arguing about it, all they discovered about the first cause was that it is all the substances constituting the natural world. They explained change by interactions of those substances as they endure through time. If pre-Socratics were *ontological naturalists*, contemporary ontological naturalists can discover the complete explanation that you want. They can discover the kinds of substances that constitute the world because what they find in it includes the laws of physics. The discovery that they include space as well as matter enables them to explain everything in a way that enables conscious beings to know the necessity of their own existence.

Since space is a substance that helps constitute the natural world, this is not a materialist ontology. Though the possibility that space is a substance has been defended ever since Newton by substantivalists, no one, to my knowledge, has defended this ontology because it assumes that space is not just a container of matter but also a substance that inter-acts with matter. Though space acts on bits of matter by giving them spatial relations, bits of matter also act on space in ways that affect other ways that space acts on bits of matter. Such inter-actions of space and matter are ontological mechanisms, and there are powers of interacting by which they can generate all the regularities described by laws of physics—and much more. This ontology can explain all the regularities studied by specialized sciences, and that reveals a series of stages of evolution that lead inevitably to the existence of beings like us on suitable planets throughout the universe. Spatio-materialism also explains how consciousness is

part of the natural world, and though consciousness is not an efficient cause of anything that happens in the natural world, there is an illusion inherent in consciousness that explains why we seem to have a faculty of rational intuition. When ontological scientists discount the *illusion of intuitionism*, they will discover that consciousness was a necessary part of the cause by which Western philosophy discovered that beings like us are conscious, and that will explain the necessity of logic, mathematics, and the cognitive powers on which science depends—as well as certainty about timeless ethical truths. Indeed, it will resolve the conflict between deontological and consequentialist ethical intuitions in pretty much the way that you predict in “Types of Intuition,” your 3 June 2021 essay in the *New York Review of Books*.

This explanation is simple and complete enough to show that reductionistic naturalism can give you the kind of complete knowledge that you are seeking. It is presented in a trilogy, called *Naturalistic Reason*, that I am self-publishing as I send you this message, and it is defended in enough detail that, if ontological naturalism is on the right track, it will cause the scientific revolution that it predicts. The first volume, *Unification of Physics*, predicts that physicists will soon infer spatio-materialism as the best explanation of what Eugene Wigner called the “unreasonable effectiveness” of mathematics in discovering laws of physics, and it shows in some quantitative detail how interactions of space and matter generate all the regularities described by laws of physics. Besides solving the problems of modern physics, the reduction of physics to ontology reveals a kind of efficient cause, not recognized by physics, called *geometrical causes*, which works by constraining what happens by physical causes. This enables the second volume, the *Unification of Science*, to predict how specialized sciences will explain the regularities they study completely enough to discover that the evolution of life on Earth includes a series of inevitable stages that brings reflective

subjects into existence on every suitable planet. Spatio-materialism enables ontological science to explain how consciousness is part of the natural world, and the third volume, the *Unification of Science and Philosophy*, predicts that ontological science will use it to infer that Western civilization is a stage of evolution that follows the stage represented by other civilizations on Earth because that is the best explanation of its own existence. I call it the *metaphysical stage* because it is caused by the exchange of metaphysical arguments, defined as the attempt to show how *Reason knows Reality behind Appearance*, and since ontological scientists will have to discount the illusion inherent in consciousness to explain how metaphysics has caused this stage, they will find themselves knowing Reality behind Appearance. But since they are ontological naturalists using the empirical method, they will insist that their cognitive power be called *naturalistic Reason*.

You will be skeptical of this prediction because it sounds too good to be true, and since you will wonder about anyone who asks you to consider such an unlikely argument, let me say something about myself and 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. There may be incomplete or mistaken arguments in it. But I am confident that the discovery that space is a substance that interacts with matter will eventually cause the scientific revolution I predict, 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 society has given me the leisure and privilege to enjoy a life spent in such an exceedingly meaningful way.

Even those, like you, who still believe in the rational pursuit of truth will find the prospect of reading a detailed all-inclusive explanation of the natural world in three volumes 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, 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 philliphscribner@yahoo.com.