



**THE STOIC
PHILOSOPHER**

Bridging Science and Spirituality in the Search for Answers

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Science and religion have historically been two opposing tools for explaining the world and our place in it. Why and how do natural phenomena occur? How did we end up with a world that has so much beauty, complexity, and organization? Do humans, as well as the world as a whole, have some kind of purpose, or does everything come down to random chance occurrences? What is consciousness, and where does it come from? These are questions that humans have grappled with for thousands of years. However, neither science nor classical theistic religion has been able to provide fully satisfactory answers. My view is that both science and religion have made the mistake of ignoring one another. Science holds that everything is explainable in and reducible to materialistic terms, leaving no room for God or any divine force. Religion, on the other hand, holds that everything is a product of God's will, often positioning science as being in direct contradiction to the teachings of holy scriptures. An example of this conflict is the debate between creationism and evolution. Both science and religion seem to touch on important truths but leave significant gaps in their explanations of the world. What if there is a middle ground—a way to bridge the gap between science and the concept of God in finding answers to these fundamental questions?

Consciousness seems to lie at the heart of the disconnect between science and religion. The “hard problem,” a term coined by modern philosopher David Chalmers, refers to our inability to explain what consciousness is, why it exists, and where it is located. Why are we conscious? If the goal of physical existence is merely to eat, sleep, and pass on our genes, theoretically, we could function as “philosophical zombies”—physical creatures that mechanically move through the world fulfilling our basic needs without subjective experience (Fridman and Chalmers). Science has been able to map certain cognitive processes to particular regions of the brain but has yet to provide a satisfactory explanation for why we experience subjective awareness. For instance, while brain imaging can identify regions activated during experiences like pain or joy, it cannot explain why these processes are accompanied by the feeling of pain or joy. Part of the problem, according to British philosopher Philip Goff, stems from the fact that Galileo Galilei—the pioneer of the modern scientific method—intentionally excluded non-measurable, qualitative aspects of the world from the scientific purview (Goff 135). His approach focused on what could be measured, which made sense for simplicity's sake. However, the issue is that we now rely on the scientific method to explain everything, though it was



Julia first developed an interest in Stoicism in 2015 after finding a copy of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* at a used bookstore. Seven years later, she dove into the philosophy after listening to the *Stoicism on Fire* podcast and enrolling in the College's SES program. Julia completed the Marcus Aurelius Program in 2024 and went on to become a mentor. Professionally, Julia works in administration and accounting for an environmental non-profit. Her hobbies include hiking with her dogs and scuba diving.



never designed to do so. Many people assume that science will one day explain consciousness, but we overlook the fact that the scientific method was built to handle quantifiable data—not the qualitative nature of experience. On the other hand, classical theistic religion offers an explanation for consciousness, but this explanation is grounded in faith in supernatural causes that lack empirical evidence and often clash with modern scientific findings.

Pantheism—the belief that nature itself *is* God—has been around for thousands of years but has gained recent popularity as people seek to reconcile modern science with the intuition that there is more to existence than science alone can explain. Even some modern scientists have expressed sentiments that resonate with Pantheistic ideas. Some examples are astrophysicist Bernard Haisch, who has explored the idea of a conscious universe, and biologist Stuart Kauffman, who suggests that nature is self-organizing in ways that may be seen as divine. Theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking has also expressed awe for the universe’s order and complexity, although has never formally aligned himself with Pantheistic beliefs. These scientists echo the deep reverence humans have long held for nature, dating back to early hunter-gatherer communities, who used storytelling and cave drawings to depict natural phenomena as personified, even divine, forces. The ancient Greeks and Romans portrayed these natural powers as embodied gods and goddesses. For some, this was a form of polytheism, where these gods were worshipped as real entities. For others, including the Stoics, these gods were used as metaphorical representations of nature’s divine power. Pantheists like the Stoics viewed the natural world—with all its complexity, beauty, order, and organization—as inherently endowed with reason and rationality. Nature itself was seen as a divine mind. To them, God was not external or above the world; God was the world.

A.A. Long writes in his book *Hellenistic Philosophy* -

“Nature is not merely a physical power causing stability and change; it is also something endowed with rationality par excellence. That which holds the world together is a supreme rational being, God, who directs all events for purposes which are necessarily good. Soul of the world, mind of the world, Nature, God—these terms all refer to one and the same thing—the ‘artistic fire’ going on its way to create.” (Long, 148)

Pierre Hadot echoes a similar sentiment in *The Inner Citadel* -

“‘My’ nature and the common Nature are not opposed, nor external to each other, for ‘my’ nature and ‘my’ reason are nothing other than an emanation from universal Reason and universal Nature, which are immanent in all things. Thus, these two natures are identical.” (Hadot, 130)

This Stoic view of a rational, divine nature offers a powerful framework for reconciling scientific exploration with spiritual reverence. By interpreting natural laws as manifestations of a universal rationality, Stoic Pantheism suggests that scientific discoveries not only explain the mechanisms of the universe but also reveal its inherent divinity, bridging the gap between empirical inquiry and spiritual meaning.

Stoic Pantheism ties closely in with Panpsychism, the belief that consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous property of the universe, similar to how mass is a property of matter (Goff and Rogan).



While not all Panpsychists are Pantheists, and not all Pantheists are Panpsychists, the two philosophies complement one another. The Stoics were both Pantheists and Panpsychists, believing that nature is not only divine, but also rational and conscious. They believed in the concept of *pneuma*—a life-giving force made of fire and air that permeates matter, giving it structure in inanimate objects, life and reproductive capacity in plants, consciousness and impulse in animals, and reason in humans (Rubarth). As A.A. Long puts it, “All parts of the universe are related to one another by the pneuma which pervades them.” (Long, 163). Pneuma not only was responsible for the rationality of humankind, but was also what made the cosmos as a whole rational.

Philip Goff, in his book *Why: The Purpose of the Universe*, argues that the cosmological constants—precise values like the weight of a hydrogen atom or the gravitational force—are finely tuned to allow for the existence of complex life and consciousness (Goff 17–20). He suggests that these constants are more likely to exist in a universe where consciousness is a deliberate outcome rather than a byproduct of random chance. While this might seem speculative or “unscientific” to some, there is nothing in modern science that contradicts this idea. In fact, Panpsychist Pantheism may offer the most plausible reconciliation between modern science and humanity’s innate sense of the divine. This view avoids the conflict between science and theism by recognizing that science’s material explanations coexist with a deeper, rational consciousness imbued in the fabric of nature. By rejecting the need for supernatural interventions while embracing the idea of nature as divine, Pantheism and Panpsychism provide a more harmonious and encompassing explanation of existence. Unlike science, which struggles to account for subjective experience, or religion, which demands faith in unseen forces, these philosophies integrate the observable universe with the sense of purpose and consciousness that religion offers.

If nature and God are one and the same, this challenges the prevailing Western view that nature exists as a resource for human consumption. Instead, we are part of nature, and our well-being is inextricably tied to its flourishing. When we harm nature, we harm ourselves. As the most rational beings on Earth, and perhaps even the Universe, we have a duty to protect and respect nature as the source of life, consciousness, and well-being. Our rationality does not grant us the right to exploit nature but instead imposes a responsibility to ensure its prosperity for all living beings. Other creatures, like us, are products of nature’s divine mind. This understanding, if adopted, could drastically change humans’ relationship to the natural world, especially in-lieu of current environmental crises such as climate change, pollution, species extinction, resource extraction, and over-consumption. I would like to point the reader to the extensive writings of Dr. Kai Whiting on the subject of Stoicism and environmentalism, an important topic that deserves more attention than this essay is able to provide.

Where classical theistic religion and modern science both fall short in addressing life’s biggest existential questions, Pantheism and Panpsychism offer a bridge between the two. These perspectives allow us to see that belief in a divine power and reliance on modern science are not mutually exclusive. Many atheists, while rejecting traditional religion, still yearn for some form of spirituality or greater purpose. The idea that everything happens by chance, with no purpose, can feel bleak. At the same time, we trust science to explain the natural world, and rightly so, as it has been quite effective. Yet, science falters when it comes to explaining consciousness. If science cannot explain this phenomenon, we must be open to alternative explanations that fall outside its



domain. Pantheism and Panpsychism do not merely bridge the gap between science and religion; they offer the most compelling framework for understanding reality that we have to date. By recognizing that consciousness and rationality are fundamental properties of the universe, which is itself divine, these perspectives avoid the pitfalls of both the mechanistic materialism of science and the faith-based claims of traditional theism. They propose a universe where meaning, purpose, and empirical discovery coexist seamlessly, making them not just an alternative but a superior lens through which to view existence.

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