

# The Sapient Cosmos in a Nutshell

James B Glattfelder Feb 21, 2025

What is the nature of consciousness and reality? How are the two connected? And what does it all mean?

*The Sapient Cosmos is a penetrating inquiry into the nature of reality that weaves together insights from physics, philosophy, complexity theory, psychology, psychedelics, and more. Glattfelder exposes the fallacies of some of our culture's deepest metaphysical convictions while opening new doors on ancient questions. I deeply appreciate his work. Highly recommended.*

*Christopher Bache, PhD, author of "LSD and the Mind of the Universe: Diamonds from Heaven"*

*The Sapient Cosmos* inquires “what a modern-day synthesis of science and philosophy teaches us about the emergence of information, consciousness, and meaning.” It wonders how the Western academic perspective compares to what other cultures have discovered. Could

the Western mind be missing a fundamental truth about itself and the cosmos, the understanding of which could change everything?

## **Chapter 1**

The story begins with the deepening schism in the philosophy of mind. Two antipodal perspectives have emerged, either disparaging consciousness as an **epiphenomenal** mirage or accepting it as a fundamental property of reality. The core of the debate is a clash of **metaphysical** beliefs. Either consciousness is not what it seems to be, or reality is not what it seems to be. In order to progress, an examination of what we know about the nature of reality is called for.

## **Chapter 2**

The enigma of scientific knowledge generation, from fundamental physics to emergent complexity, is discussed. While rationality, common sense, and logic are concepts that are dear to us, reality appears very unconcerned about these human constructs. Indeed, the fundamental weirdness of nature and the long list of existential dilemmas transcend any reasoning. Making matters worse, physicists almost unanimously ignore the philosophical implications of their work. As such, most scientists have unknowingly adopted an implicit metaphysical belief, rendering the universe inherently random and meaningless, implying a sense of cosmic nihilism.

## Chapter 3

The ongoing information-theoretic paradigm shift unfolding in physics is outlined. Information appears as a valid candidate for the most fundamental building block of physical reality — the sole **ontological** primitive from which the fabric of reality is woven. Furthermore, information is emerging as a unifying theme in our theoretical understanding of the workings of nature, from quantum mechanics and cosmology to complexity theory.

In more detail, black hole thermodynamics suggests that our three-dimensional reality is a two-dimensional informational hologram. Then, non-equilibrium thermodynamics reveals how entropy production drives self-organized structure formation in the universe, with entropy being a measure of missing information. Finally, spacetime may not be fundamental at all but instead emerges from a deeper, entangled network of quantum information.

In summary, modern physics has revealed that the common-sense world we perceive through our rational consciousness is not a true reflection of fundamental reality — a realm that appears to be a ghostlike, incoherent, intangible, contradictory, constrained, but fundamentally interconnected substrate beneath the veneer of the seemingly physical.

James B. Glattfelder



# The Sapient Cosmos

What a Modern-Day Synthesis of Science and  
Philosophy Teaches Us About the Emergence of  
Information, Consciousness, and Meaning

## Chapter 4

Finally, consciousness is unleashed. The many accounts of shamans, mystics, meditators, and psychonauts — all daring navigators of otherworldly realms accessible to consciousness — are investigated. A **transcendental multiverse of pure experience** is uncovered, just waiting to be explored by anyone brave enough to go beyond the comforting familiarity of consensus reality. Moreover, a formidable blind spot in the modern Western mind's understanding is revealed.

This is reflected in pervasive psychedelic illiteracy and hostility towards altered states of consciousness, ignoring the long and rich role psychedelics have played in human culture, from Soma in ancient India to Kykeon in Classical Greece. More recently, in the 19th Century, doctors and scientists routinely experimented with the mind-altering effects of nitrous oxide and ether. In a fateful turn, the Western mind deemed any deviation from sober waking consciousness a delusional hallucination. As a result, all substances modulating consciousness were stigmatized, demonized, and finally banned.

Today, in the wake of the psychedelic renaissance, the nascent philosophy of psychedelics is establishing its legitimacy in the philosophy of mind. The contours of the experiential realms of reality accessible to pure consciousness suggest the possibility of an **empirical metaphysics**.

## Chapter 5

After uncovering the constraints, limitations, assumptions, and biases in the Western understanding of consciousness and reality in the preceding chapters, new perspectives are discussed. For instance, the notion that consciousness is self-experiential information.

However, the main focus of *The Sapient Cosmos* is to assess the viability of a consciousness-only view of reality. In other words, how can we understand the recent renaissance of **metaphysical idealism** in the philosophy of mind? To this aim, the doctrine of

physicalism, idealism's antithesis, is scrutinized. Physicalism posits that everything in the universe can be reduced to and explained by physical entities, their properties, and interactions. It is a metaphysical proposition, assuming a materialist-reductionist ontology.

Interestingly, physicalism has unwittingly been adopted by most scientifically-minded people who believe it to be a scientific claim. This, however, is a category mistake, as it conflates the descriptive scope of science with a metaphysical claim about the ultimate nature of reality. By definition, metaphysics begins where physics ends. So, while the latter inquires about the "how," the former contemplates the "what." As a result, most academics have uncritically internalized the metaphysical assumptions of physicalism, severely tainting the lens through which the Western mind examines the nature of consciousness and reality.

It is very conceivable that the stagnation seen in fundamental physics, the inexplicability of subjective experience, and the mystery shrouding the emergence of complexity in the cosmos are all rooted in faulty implicit metaphysical assumptions that have never been critically assessed. In short, the current limits to scientific knowledge could simply be cultural, an artifact of a worldview that was established before the ground-shattering discoveries of physics were made in the 20th Century.

Contrasting physicalism, idealism posits that reality is fundamentally and exclusively mental. In other words, it claims that consciousness is the essence of existence, with everything physical being derived from a ground of purely transpersonal, aperspectival, and unconditioned consciousness. Such a metaphysical outlook greatly dismays the physicalists.

Idealism is impossible to grasp rationally. However, it is a perspective that can be fully experienced and always has been. Since the dawning of the human mind, people have encountered immaterial levels of reality firsthand, either spontaneously or deliberately. At last, the shamans, mystics, meditators, and psychonauts, long ignored by the Western mind, get to have their say in decoding the nature of existence. Accounts of their transcendental explorations can now be understood in a larger context. Indeed, the great wealth of alternative modes of sentience, conjured up by non-ordinary states of consciousness, renders sober waking consciousness just one competing state in the vast transcendental multiverse of experiences.

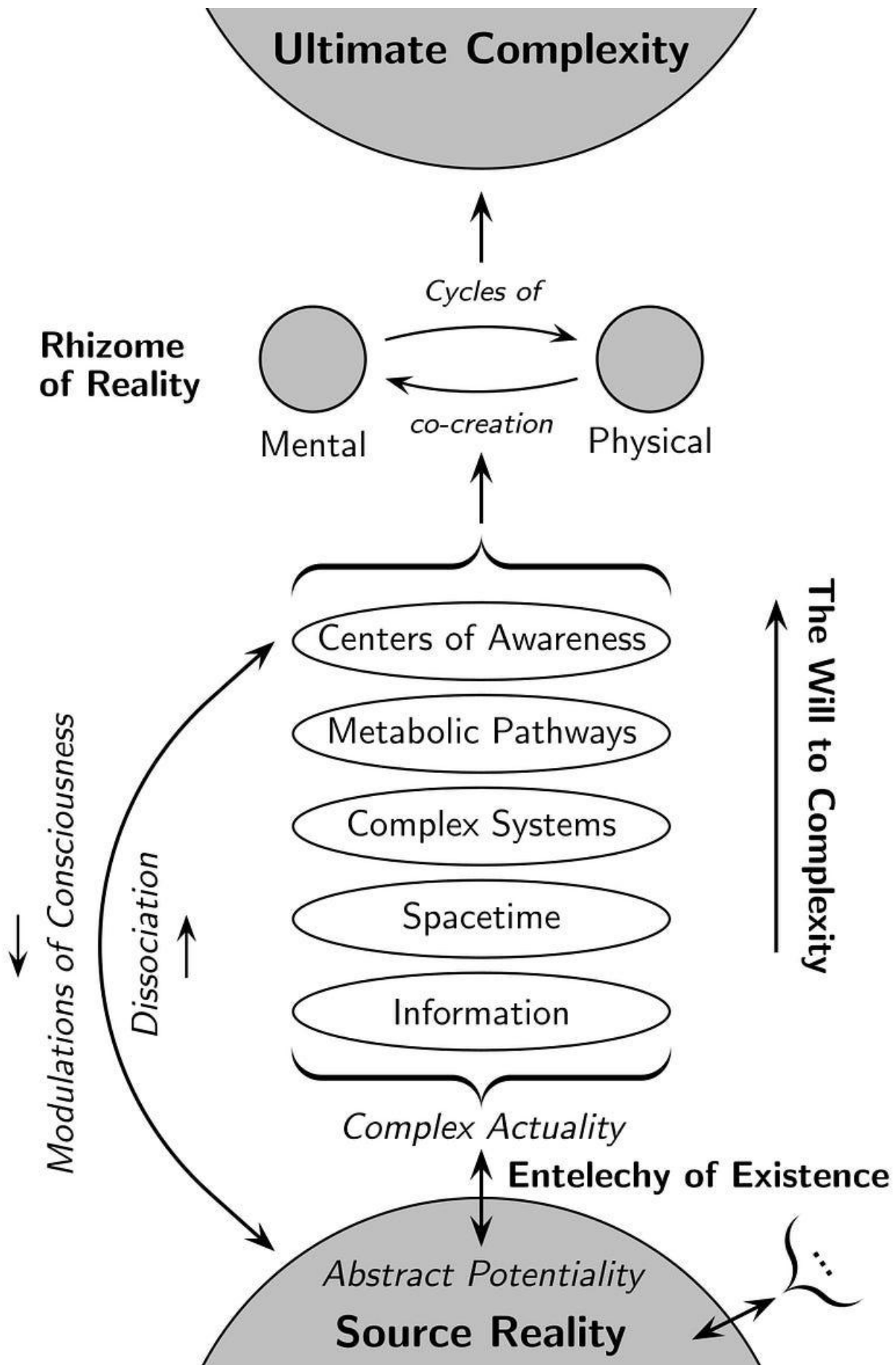
# The Sapient Cosmos

**What a Modern-Day Synthesis of  
Science and Philosophy Teaches Us  
About the Emergence of Information,  
Consciousness, and Meaning**

## Chapter 6

A final synthesis is presented: **syncretic idealism**. This is a philosophical proposition that combines reoccurring aspects found in different formulations of idealism with elements from other philosophical systems of thought and insights from the evolving information-theoretic paradigm of physics. The aim is a novel worldview integrating concepts formerly only expressed in isolation. This emerging unified tapestry woven from the threads of ideas proposed over time by many keen thinkers offers a radical recontextualization of our notion of existence, a fresh understanding of being and the nature of reality, specifically related to information, complexity, consciousness, and meaning.

*The aim of the chapter is to gently introduce the reader to all the concepts heavily condensed into the following information-rich sentence: Syncretic idealism presents a multi-tiered ontology, describing the transition from abstract quantum potentiality to the manifestation of complex actuality, outlining the assembly of physicality from the ontological fields of information fueling the computational engine at the core of reality, unveiling a teleological ordering force — **a will to complexity** — sculpting manifestations of increasing complexity resulting in sapience and disclosing the final emergence of dissociated centers of consciousness, yielding a sentient cosmos.*



Syncretic idealism visualized.

The emerging metaphysical picture speaks of a reality imbued with meaning and purpose and the participatory role of its bounded centers of consciousness. Thus, a **scientific spirituality** is uncovered within syncretic idealism's framework. Crucially, its categories can be, and always have been, experienced and chronicled in abundance, rendering syncretic idealism an empirical metaphysics.

## Epilogue

We are truly living in remarkable times. On the one hand, human ingenuity has unleashed technological marvels that seem almost magical. We are witnessing rapid technological advancements far surpassing what was once deemed possible. At the same time, our current era is defined by deeply troubling crises: the unfolding ecocide, the acceleration of economic inequality, the deterioration of social cohesion, the rise of entrenched ideologies, and the rejection of a shared reality in a post-truth world that weaponizes ignorance and grievances.

We appear to have reached a crossroads. Two paths unfold before the human mind. We can continue our trajectory of destruction, cruelty, and misery into a dystopian future, or we can liberate our minds, and crucially the minds of our children, by reimagining existence inspired by the meaning inherent in metaphysical idealism. Simply by

cultivating our consciousness, we can transform our shared experience of reality at any time.

For the first time in history, we have the opportunity to embrace a scientific spiritual vision of existence. One in which consciousness is fundamental. One which takes the ignored metaphysical implications of over a hundred years of quantum weirdness seriously. One that does not trivialize the subjective first-person perspective. One that sees profound metaphysical relevance in the phenomenal accounts of shamans, mystics, meditators, and psychonauts over the ages.

Ever since the human mind awoke to its own existence, it has wondered about its cosmic significance. Perhaps now, equipped with a new kind of science that is informed and guided by a brave new philosophy, it can devise tools [epistemically](#) powerful enough to finally find answers to age-old questions of existence.

## Resources

*The Sapient Cosmos* builds upon the 686-page monograph [Information — Consciousness — Reality: How a New Understanding of the Universe Can Help Answer Age-Old Questions of Existence](#), an open-access publication appearing in [Springer's Frontiers Collection](#) in 2019. The [new book](#), to be published by [Essentia Books](#) on the 25th of March 2025, was first outlined in September 2022 in the post [Information — Consciousness — Reality: A Follow-Up](#) and later summarized in [The Sapient Cosmos: A Teaser](#). A

recent, short description can be found in [Planting seeds and waiting...](#) Of the 761 pages, 77 pages contain the extensive bibliography, and an additional 77 pages are devoted to notes.

### **Posts summarizing the chapters:**

- Chapter 1: [Thinking about the Mind](#)
- Chapter 2:
  - [Physics and Philosophy](#)
  - [The Philosophy of Science: An Idiosyncratic Primer](#)
- Chapter 3: [The Information-Theoretic Universe](#)
- Chapter 4: [Consciousness Unleashed](#)
- Chapter 5: [Idealism: A Consciousness-Only View of Reality](#)

### **Further reading:**

- [Behind the Veil](#)
- [The Fear of Public Speaking](#) (presenting a narrative based on the book at TEDxDaltVila in March 2024)
- [Metaphysical Conversations with AI](#)
- [Charting the Unknown: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Reality and Mind](#)