

## Does the Moon Exist if No One is Looking at It?

(<https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep95>)

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Does physics point to the mind? We have a wonderful opportunity to ask that question here on Mind Matters News.

Announcer:

Welcome to Mind Matters News, where artificial and natural intelligence meet head on.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Greetings. Welcome to Mind Matters News. This is Dr. Michael Egnor and I have the privilege today to have as my guest, Dr. Bernardo Kastrup. Dr. Kastrup has done a lot of work leading the modern renaissance of metaphysical idealism, which is the notion that reality is essentially mental. He has a PhD in philosophy with a focus in ontology and philosophy of mind and another PhD in computer engineering.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

As a scientist, Bernardo has worked for The European Organization for Nuclear Research and for Phillips Research Laboratories, and he has written many academic papers and books. He's also written extensively on philosophy of the mind, and it's our privilege, Bernardo, to have you as our guest today.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

My privilege to be here, Mike. It's an honor to speak to you.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Thank you. You have said and written that physics points to the mind. What do you mean?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I'm alluding to quantum mechanics, which is a tricky thing to allude to because it's so generally misunderstood and abused. But I dare to believe that I am not misunderstanding what has been going on over the past several decades in experiments around quantum entanglement, which basically refute the notion of physical realism. These experiments refute the notion that there is an objective physical world out there, even when it's not being observed with defined objects occupying defined positions in space-time.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I think this notion which is so intrinsically related to materialism or physicalism, this notion is out the window now. I think it has been now sufficiently refuted that we can move on. And that would mean that we should move on from materialism then.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

I would certainly agree that a deep look at quantum mechanics really leads one to believe that idealism is overall a much more satisfactory description of nature than is materialism. But I'm curious, does that mean that if no one is looking at the moon that it's not there?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Well, there certainly is something out there that is independent of all of us as individual minds, and which seems to hold the state of the world when nobody is looking at the world. Because when I park my car in my garage at the end of the day, and I come home and I fall asleep, and the next day I go down, hey, I find my car right there where I left it the last time I looked. So there is clearly, something out there that is holding a state independently of all of us.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

The question is, is this something out there physical, in the sense that we attribute to the word? In other words, is this something out there constituted of defined objects, with defined positions in space-time which are outside, and independent of consciousness itself? That I would say is not the case, but I do think that there are transpersonal mental states that are not under the control of my volition or your volition, which do not depend on my looking at it or your looking at it.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

So they are just out there. They are not physical, they are mental states. And physicality arises when there is an interaction between mine or your mental state and these transpersonal mental states out there. That interaction, that interference gives rise to what we call the physical world of objects in space-time obeying cause or laws.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

These transpersonal mental states, are they any person's mental states, or are they mental states that exist without persons?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I would say they are mental states that exist without persons. By definition, these are the mental states that transcend personal mentality or mentation so to say.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

And if you were to describe your own metaphysical perspective, would it be Platonist? Would it be Aristotelian? Would it be idealist in a more general sense?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

It would be objective idealism largely. There are several versions of idealism. Maybe excuse for if I just give a very quick intro to the two main ones.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Oh, please.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

There is subjective idealism, idealism that goes back to Bishop Berkeley, and the idea there is that the world exists only so far as my perception of the world. And there is objective idealism, which says that no, the world exists outside of our perceptions of the world, but this world is itself mental, or exists in a transpersonal form of consciousness. So it is objective from our perspective, but it is still mental.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Now, my view of idealism is mostly related to objective idealism. I do think there is a world out there independent of us, so that's objective idealism. But at the same time, I also think that what we call the physical world depends on our observation. That's what physics is suggesting. Physicality only arises once there is a conscious being looking at this transpersonal mental state.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

That interaction is what leads to physicality. And from that perspective, I am a subjective idealist as well, with respect to the physical world, and an objective idealist with respect to these transpersonal mental states that are out there, but are not physical.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

I think it's fair to say that certainly 20th century and 21st century science has lent a great deal of credibility to the idealist perspective, but science really, since Newton has been dominated by a materialist perspective. Why do you think that materialism has held sway for so long?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I think it's clear why it arose and why it was so popular in the beginning. It did solve a couple of problems. There were things that we had difficulty in accounting for before materialism, such as the regularities of the behavior of nature. Nature seems to behave in very regular, predictable ways that we got into the habit of calling laws. They are not really laws because they don't need to be obeyed, they just happen to be the way things happen. But these regularities were difficult to account for under previous worldviews that were largely religious.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Another thing that it may have done, it may have enabled a separation between fledgling scientists of the 17th century and the objects of their study. They could pretend that they were detached observers, and that brought a certain level of objectivity to early science which was useful. I also think there were strong psychological reasons for our intellectual establishment so to say, to embrace materialism the way they did in the 19th century.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Psychological reasons related to ego defense, looking for meaning, differentiation, self-validation, trying to compensate for the loss of a religious outlook that we had before through the gain in control, sheer control of nature that the materialist outlook was conducive to. So I think these are all reasons, some good, some bad for why materialism came at the moment it came.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Now, why it is still there despite flying in the face of evidence, both from physics and neuroscience, I would say, and despite our already understanding a very good argument why it is a malformed and

intrinsically contradictory metaphysics to begin with, despite all this it's still enduring. People are manufacturing plausibility for materialism continuously. Very intelligent people, very renowned people are so invested in materialism. Their image is so invested in it that they use their intelligence to manufacture plausibility for materialism.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Let's look at physics. The dichotomy we have now, given the experimental results from quantum mechanics is either you grant that the physical world is only there if it's being observed, or if you wanted to safeguard the intuitions behind materialism, you have to say that there is an infinitude of parallel but real physical universes arising every centisecond every time somebody or something just looks up. This is ridiculous.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I submit to you that there is nothing more implausible than there's nothing. It's inconceivable to think of something more implausible than this, yet we have famous physicists who are saying, "Well, this is the way to go." Why? Because the alternative would imply having to part with materialism and all the psychological investment that our intellectual establishment has made into it. And that's a pity.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

I would certainly agree that Everett's many-worlds hypothesis, were it to be proposed in a psychiatrist's office would warrant a diagnosis of psychosis. It's crazy. And it might make the mathematics work, but goodness gracious, it's madness. And why anybody would adhere to that perspective to defend materialism rather than just admit that mind plays a fundamental role in the metaphysics of reality is very hard to understand. Do you believe in God?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

That's a big question.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

That's the big question, huh? What role, if any, does God or the concept of God play in your metaphysical perspective?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Let me put it this way. If a very close friend or a family member asks me, do you believe in God, I will instantly say yes. In public, it's more difficult because I don't know exactly what people mean when they use the word. Do I believe in a bearded man up there in the sky that knows everything and is subjecting us to basically torture in order to see whether we comply with His directives? No, that's not my view of God. Do I believe in an omniscient ground for all existence, the image of which, or at least a partial image of which is the universe we contemplate when we look up to the stars? Yes. Yes, I think that's very reasonable hypothesis, a very reasonable thing to postulate given logic and the empirical evidence that's available to us today.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I do not know whether this omniscient consciousness is self-reflective. I don't know whether it's deliberate. I'm inclined to think that it's not, which doesn't exclude intelligence. You can have very, very

high levels of intelligence without metacognitive introspection, without self-reflection. So I tend to think that this omniscient mind underlying all nature is not self-reflective because it seems to behave in very regular ways, which are characteristic of instinct, intelligent instinct that it may be. After all, the universal constants seem to be very highly fine-tuned. That suggests something very intelligent instinct, but not deliberate, not self-reflective.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

It would seem in a way then that the mind that you're describing is obviously a mind of enormous power and intelligence, et cetera, except that if it's not self-reflective, then that would be a pretty radical limitation on the mind. That it could know everything except itself.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

That gives us a very serious hint for the possible meaning of life, because we are self-reflective. We have evolved this capability struggling in this environment of ours, in this planetary ecosystem. So I think that's a very, very interesting hint to what might be going on here. What is the attempt? Why is this happening? Where are we going with it? Who set us up for this, and for what end? I think that there is a hint to it right there.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

What do you think of Thomas Aquinas' demonstrations of the existence of God, his five ways?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I am very skeptical of logical demonstrations for the existence of God. That's something that is inherent to scholasticism. It is tempting. I have had a phase in which I was tempted to try to demonstrate all kinds of things just by sitting and reasoning through a certain line of thought, but I don't think that ultimately holds up.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

That said, I think we have very good reasons of another kind to postulate this inconceivable intelligence, a conscious intelligence at the ground of nature.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Do you believe that free will exists?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Yes, but I would have to qualify this. Because I think, unless you have thought through this question carefully, one's notion of free will is malformed. It's not coherent. Let me try to clarify this to you. We tend to think of free will as something that is neither random nor determined. If it is determined, then it's not free. But if it's random, is it free will? Because it's just random. It doesn't mean anything. It could be anything.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I think what we actually mean by free will is when choices and actions are determined, but they are determined by that which we identify ourselves with. In other words, I have free will in so far as my choices are determined by what I think of as me, instead of an external force. So if I choose a job, I am

free to choose that job because I prefer the job, because I think I will feel good or because I want the salary that comes with it, instead of I lost my other job, or I need to feed my children, an external force that imposes itself on me and forces a choice I make.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Now the question is, at the cosmic level, at the universal level, is there free will? I would say surely, because if all reality is grounded on this conscious intelligence, this omniscient intelligence at the ground of nature, what it must do is what it wants to do because there is nothing outside of it to force it to do otherwise. In other words, it is free. It has free will because it does what it wants. But at the same time, what it wants is what it must want because of what it intrinsically is.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

As Schopenhauer said, the essence of what he said was that we can choose certain actions, but we cannot choose what we want to choose. The want is determined, it's a function of what you are. So yes, I believe in free will, but at the same time I believe in a form of determinism that I think means the exact same thing as free will. They are not only compatible, they are the same thing, just looked at from two different perspectives.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Do you believe that human free will has an objective moral accountability? That is that, are we morally accountable for what we choose in an objective way?

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

I think most of our choices, even most of our wants are not determined by the executive ego, that part of ourselves that we identify with. Can we really choose what we feel? Can we really choose what we think? I certainly can't, otherwise I wouldn't be as neurotic as I am. And neurosis is one's inability to think what one wants, or to feel the way one wants to feel. So my feelings and thoughts seem to be imposed on me from something that I don't quite identify myself with as an individual, as a person.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Well, I know there are other states of consciousness in which does identify with my ego and identify precisely with that, that right now I consider foreign to me. So it's a matter of perspective. But from the usual perspective of human beings, I think we have little freedom, not only society imposes itself on us, the physical world imposes itself on us. Even our own "unconscious mind", which I prefer to call the obfuscated mind, our hidden traumas, the things we don't want to know about ourselves, our past, our worries, our insecurities, they impose themselves on us as well, and force us to go certain ways. So I think there is little free will from that perspective.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Now, from a moral perspective, I like to think that morality can be established objectively, but not on the basis of some fundamental pronouncement about the nature of being or the nature of reality. I think ethics are pretty operational, they are pragmatic, so to say. I think a moral code or ethical code is that which allows our collective behavior to be the most conducive possible to progress, however you want to define progress.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

If progress is to live well and explore and unfold our capabilities as human beings, then there are certain rules or certain best practices that would make society as conducive as possible to that telos, to that goal of developing our potentials as human beings. And that could ground the morality at a very pragmatic, even objective level, but not necessarily appealing to ... how to say it? To a revealed moral code from a transcendent source, if you know what I mean.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Sure.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Because if you look out to how the universe works, how nature works, suffering is clearly part of it, as much as love. If the ground of our realities, this omniscient intelligence that we might as well call God, then terror and unimaginable cruelty is clearly a part of the potentialities of God. Why do I say that? Because it happens. And if it happens, it couldn't have come from anywhere else. So yeah, I think I said what I wanted to say.

Dr. Michael Egnor:

Yeah, sure. Well, I thank you very much, Dr. Kastrup. It's been a fascinating discussion. And I thank you for participating in our podcast. Thank you.

Dr. Bernardo Kastrup:

Thanks for having me. It was a pleasure.

Announcer:

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