Ladies and Gentlemen, so as not to offend anyone or doing him or her an injustice, let me propose to take myself as being present at the imagined meeting of Husserl’s offspring. Would I have had the chance of meeting Husserl, not only, as occasionally happened, in dreams, but in real life, he might have addressed his somewhat surprised sounding question to me: “So You Want to Naturalize Consciousness?” I myself am, indeed, of two minds regarding the question of the naturalization of consciousness. For there are times when I surprise myself to be in a naturalistic mood, and while it lasts, I could join with a few fellow phenomenologists those contemporary philosophers of mind who, confronted with the question of wanting to naturalize consciousness, are exclaiming askingly “Why! Why not?”

Then again, being acquainted with descriptive reflective analyses elaborated by Husserl and some of his offspring, analyses of conscious experiences and their noematic correlates as well as intentional implications and modifications thereof, I lend my ear to the master’s inquisitive “But How?”-question concerning the naturalization of consciousness and I am very receptive to his reservations regarding the project.

In this short contribution to the 150th anniversary Husserl Confer-
ence, I would like to substantiate somewhat what I have just hinted at about my being of two minds. I will proceed as follows: I start from a brief characterization of the scientific image that impresses me and illustrate how widespread efforts of naturalizing the mind and consciousness are in present-day analytic philosophy with which I have familiarized myself over the past decades, making me at times wavering in the sense just indicated. And then I turn to developing essentially one argument, intended to show, after all, that I positively take to heart Husserl’s “But How?”-question – intoned at this point, let’s say, like a father might do to his prodigal son, kindly disposed and with indulgence, while intimating no less that he would have been disappointed had I not returned to what he considered to be, perhaps, his most profound argument against a complete naturalization of consciousness.

First, then, science, ultimately physics in its present and no doubt still more in its future state, presents us with an awe-inspiring picture of the universe from its remote beginnings some 14 billion years ago down to the present and future development. It is a picture that appears to be deeply unified as one of a development out of material stuff getting ever more complex and, for all we know, reaching its most complex manifestation in the human brain. From such a perspective, material or physical monism, reducing everything there is and what it is like, even the conscious mind, ultimately to something material or physical in the natural order appears rather attractive for reasons of simplicity, parsimony, and elegance of explanation. Unsurprisingly, it seems to be defended, if not taken for granted, by many contemporary philosophers, especially among analytic philosophers of mind and consciousness who are often close to the natural sciences and to metaphysical realism. Over the past twenty years or so, I have become personally acquainted with quite a few of them and I can see the attraction of such a unitary view of reality. The broad cosmological picture presenting us with an uninterrupted causal history of the universe truly impresses me, too. And so, I do have my moments of weakness . . .

To illustrate how much along such a line of thought the project of the naturalization of mind and consciousness is present, consider the fol-