

Contents

| | | |
|----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Ultimate explanation | 1 |
| | An eightfold way | 1 |
| | Myths | 4 |
| | Creation myths | 8 |
| | Algorithmic compressibility | 10 |
| 2 | Laws | 14 |
| | The legacy of law | 14 |
| | The quest for unity | 17 |
| | Roger Boscovich | 19 |
| | Symmetries | 22 |
| | Infinities—to be or not to be? | 26 |
| | From strings to ‘M’ | 32 |
| | A flight of rationalistic fancy | 36 |
| | Goodbye to all that | 43 |
| 3 | Initial conditions | 44 |
| | At the edge of things | 44 |
| | Axioms | 45 |
| | Mathematical Jujitsu | 51 |
| | Initial conditions and time symmetry | 61 |
| | Time without time | 62 |
| | Cosmological time | 66 |
| | The problem of time | 76 |
| | Absolute space and time | 78 |
| | How far is far enough? | 83 |
| | The quantum mystery of time | 85 |
| | Quantum initial conditions | 88 |
| | The great divide | 90 |
| 4 | Forces and particles | 93 |
| | The stuff of the Universe | 93 |
| | The copy-cat principle | 95 |
| | Elementarity | 100 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| The atom and the vortex | 102 |
| A world beside itself | 104 |
| 5 Constants of Nature | 110 |
| The importance of being constant | 110 |
| Fundamentalism | 112 |
| What do constants tell us? | 117 |
| Varying constants | 124 |
| The cosmological constant | 128 |
| 6 Broken symmetries | 136 |
| The never-ending story | 136 |
| Broken symmetry | 138 |
| Natural theology: A tale of two tales | 140 |
| The flaws of nature | 143 |
| Chaos | 145 |
| Chance | 148 |
| The unpredictability of sex | 152 |
| Symmetry-breaking in the Universe | 154 |
| 7 Organizing principles | 160 |
| Where the wild things are | 160 |
| Big AL | 169 |
| Time | 173 |
| Being and becoming organized | 176 |
| The arrow of time | 180 |
| Far from equilibrium | 182 |
| The sands of time | 185 |
| The way of the world | 188 |
| 8 Selection effects | 192 |
| Ubiquitous bias | 192 |
| 9 Is ‘pi’ really in the sky? | 202 |
| In the centre of immensities | 202 |
| The number of the rose | 204 |
| Philosophies of mathematics | 206 |
| What is mathematics? | 212 |
| Mathematics and physics: An eternal golden braid | 219 |
| The intelligibility of the world | 224 |
| Algorithmic compressibility rides again | 231 |
| Continuity—a bridge too far? | 233 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| The secret of the Universe | 236 |
| Is the Universe a computer? | 238 |
| The unknowable | 242 |
| | |
| Select Bibliography | 247 |
| Index | 256 |