THE NATURALNESS OF BELIEF

New Essays on Theism's Rationality

Edited by PAUL COPAN
and CHARLES TALIAFERRO

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LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Lexington Books
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Copan, Paul, editor. | Taliaferro, Charles, editor.
Title: The naturalness of belief : new essays on theism's rationality / edited by Paul Copan and Charles Taliaferro.
Description: Lanham : Lexington Books, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018041393 (print) | LCCN 2018044969 (ebook) | ISBN 9781498579919 (Electronic) | ISBN 9781498579902 (cloth : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Naturalism. | Naturalism—Religious aspects. | Theism. | Belief and doubt. | Faith.
Classification: LCC B828.2 (ebook) | LCC B828.2 .N45 2018 (print) | DDC 211/.3—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018041393

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

Paul Copan and Charles Taliaferro

A TALE OF TWO IMAGES

The notable naturalistic philosopher John Searle asks:

> There is exactly one overriding question in contemporary philosophy. . . . How do we fit in? . . . How can we square this self-conception of ourselves as mindful, meaning-creating, free, rational, etc., agents with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles?[1]

Searle insists that our commonsense self-understanding of what it means to be human is in serious need of revision in light of the "scientific" stance he takes as normative:

> Physical events can have only physical explanations, and consciousness is not physical, so consciousness plays no explanatory role whatsoever. If, for example, you think you ate because you were consciously hungry, or got married because you were consciously in love with your prospective spouse, or withdrew your hand from the flame because you consciously felt a pain, or spoke up at a meeting because you consciously disagreed with the main speaker, you are mistaken in every case. In each case the effect was a physical event and therefore must have an entirely physical explanation.[2]

This perspective is in keeping with what Wilfrid Sellars (1912–1989) called the "scientific image" of "man-in-the-world."[3] If we had to distill this version of *strict* naturalism to its essential parts, its creed could be summarized thus: a metaphysic of materialism, an etiology of determinism, and an epistemology of scientism. That is, matter is all the reality that exists; every event is in principle completely predictable because it is determined by antecedent

causes and effects going all the way back to the Big Bang; and knowledge is solely (or best) acquired through the deliverances of science.

The implications of strict naturalism are grim or even counterintuitive. For example, Bertrand Russell affirmed that any philosophy hoping to stand must ultimately take for granted the (naturalistic) picture of unguided causes and accidental collocations of atoms and must be built on the "firm foundation of unyielding despair."[4] When it comes to naturalism's implications for morality, naturalist Kai Nielsen contends that reason can't bring us to morality; this picture "is not a pleasant one," and that reflecting on it "depresses me."[5] When it comes to consciousness, naturalist Daniel Dennett considers it an illusion—something fellow-atheist Thomas Nagel finds utterly confused:

> You may well ask how consciousness can be an illusion, since every illusion is itself a conscious experience. . . . So it cannot appear to me that I am conscious though I am not . . . the reality of my own consciousness is the one thing I cannot be deluded about. . . . The view [of Dennett] is so unnatural that it is hard to convey. . . . Dennett asks us to turn our backs on what is glaringly obvious. . . . And he asks us to do this because the reality of such phenomena is incompatible with the scientific materialism that in his view sets the outer bounds of reality. He is, in Aristotle's words, "maintaining a thesis at all costs."[6]

Jaegwon Kim acknowledges the stark picture painted by the naturalistic brush. Naturalism is "imperialistic; it demands 'full coverage' . . . and exacts a terribly high ontological price."[7]

However, not all naturalists take so bleak a view. They would adhere to another version or vision of naturalism—a *broad* naturalism, which Sellars calls the "manifest image." (Thomas Reid would call this the view of "common sense.") They take a view of things with which theists would concur—namely, that humans possess intrinsic moral value and that they are purpose-seeking, self-conscious, personally responsible agents.

BORROWING FROM THEISM?

The strict naturalist rejects broad naturalism as inconsistent, as it suspiciously seems to borrow from a theistic—though commonsensical—metaphysic (see Searle's quotation above). These "broad" views are not rooted in science and thus are "illusory"—the stuff of "folk psychology." The Scientific Image has no room for a first-person view of things or for personal identity over time.

If, as Russell maintained, our starting point is purposeless, valueless, nonrational, nonconscious, impersonal deterministic processes, then an outcome of meaning-minded, (intrinsically) valuable, rational, self-conscious, willing personal agents comes as a shock to the metaphysical system. By contrast, this manifest image is highly probable given the metaphysics of theism.

Theism affirms that a being of maximal greatness exists—a worship-worthy, self-existent personal being that is all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present. A finite time ago, God created a world distinct from Godself—a world of order and beauty that is worthy of study and delight. This being also created humans to bear the divine image—a stamp of distinctness in the world of creatures. The *imago Dei* involves the capacity for deep rationality, relationality, spirituality, responsibility, and moral reasoning and action. Despite creaturely turning away from this being, this stamp of the divine is still detectable.

Consider the following chart (Table 0.1) that compares the metaphysical contexts of theism and naturalism. It notes many of the phenomena we take to be matters of commonsensical human experience as well as accepted scientific observation. Some may quibble with some of the categorizations, but hopefully the upshot is evident. Despite the optimism of the broad naturalist, these phenomena are far more probable given theism than naturalism. By contrast broad naturalists will affirm these features that are very much at home in a theistic universe. Such things, Alvin Plantinga contends, are "not at all surprising or improbable on theism" since "God presumably would want there to be life, and indeed intelligent life with which (whom) to communicate and share love; given atheism it is [surprising]; therefore theism is to be preferred to atheism."[8]

Table 0.1 Common Phenomena Viewed through Theistic and Naturalistic Lenses

Phenomena We Observe, Assume, or Recognize	*Theistic Context*	*Naturalistic Context*
(Self-)consciousness exists.	God is supremely self-aware/-conscious.	Consciousness was produced by mindless, nonconscious processes.
Personal beings exist.	God is a personal Being.	The universe was produced by impersonal processes.
We believe we make free personal decisions/ choices, assuming humans are accountable for their actions.	God is spirit and a free Being, who can freely choose to act (e.g., to create or not).	We have emerged by material, deterministic processes beyond our control.
Secondary qualities (colors, smells, sounds, tastes, textures) exist throughout the world.	God is a source of pleasure who gives capacities to his creatures to enjoy or take pleasure in.	The universe was produced from colorless, odorless, soundless, tasteless, textureless particles and processes.
We trust our senses and rational faculties as generally reliable in producing true beliefs. The world is knowable.	A God of truth and rationality exists.	Naturalistic evolution is only interested in survival and reproduction, not truth. So, many beliefs would help us survive (e.g., the belief that humans have dignity and worth) but be completely false.

Table 0.1 (Continued)

Phenomena We Observe, Assume, or Recognize	*Theistic Context*	*Naturalistic Context*
Human beings have intrinsic value/dignity and rights.	God is the supremely valuable Being.	Human beings were produced by valueless processes.
Objective moral values/duties exist.	God's character is the source of goodness/moral values.	The universe was produced by nonmoral processes.
The universe began to exist a finite time ago—without previously existing matter, energy, space, or time.	A powerful, previously existing God brought the universe into being without any preexisting material. (Here, something emerges from something.)	The universe came into existence from nothing by nothing—or was, perhaps, self-caused. (Here, something comes from nothing.)
First life emerged.	God is a living, active Being.	Life somehow emerged from nonliving matter.
The universe is finely tuned for human life (known as "the Goldilocks effect"—the universe is "just right" for life).	God is a wise, intelligent Designer.	All the cosmic constants just happened to be right; given enough time and/or many possible worlds, a finely tuned world eventually emerged.
Beauty exists—not only in landscapes and sunsets but in "elegant" or "beautiful" scientific theories).	God is creative and capable of creating beautiful things according to His pleasure.	Beauty in the natural world is superabundant and in many cases superfluous (often not linked to survival).
We (tend to) believe that life has purpose and meaning. For most of us, life is worth living.	God has created/designed us for certain purposes (to love Him, others, etc.); when we live them out, our lives find meaning/enrichment.	There is no cosmic purpose, blueprint, or goal for human existence.
Real evils—both moral and natural—exist/take place in the world.	Evil's definition assumes a design plan (how things ought to be, but are not) or standard of goodness by which we judge something to be evil. God is a good Designer; His existence supplies the crucial moral context to make sense of evil.	Atrocities, pain, and suffering just happen. This is just how things are—with no "plan" or standard of goodness to which things ought to conform.

This chart notes various phenomena that we take for granted and sets these alongside the corresponding metaphysical "furniture" of theism and naturalism.

On strict naturalism, many of these phenomena will be treated in a reductionistic fashion. But this is too high a price to pay for many naturalists, who gravitate toward a more humanized, broad naturalism. But doing so borrows from the ontological capital of theism, as features such as consciousness, human dignity, the beauty of the cosmos, and the like do not naturally flow from the materialism and determinism of a naturalistic world.

THEISM'S NATURALISTIC ALLIES AND ITS FAVORABLE CRITERIA

Perhaps these assertions are deemed too quick. However, it turns out that many naturalists themselves consider their own worldview ill-equipped to explain such phenomena as the universe's beginning and fine-tuning for life as well as the emergence of first life—in addition to moral responsibility, human dignity, consciousness, rationality, beauty, and the like. It is not uncommon to read frank confessions by naturalists who admit to being baffled by the existence of these realities which appear to be utterly out of place in a naturalistic world.[9]

Furthermore, the consideration of certain criteria reinforces this point. Theistic explanation turns out to be more natural, more unifying, and more basic than naturalism. First, consider how this range of features noted in the chart above is more "at home" or more "natural"—that is, less surprising and vastly more probable—on theism and even more "natural" within a theistic framework. Second, theism offers a more unifying explanation for these remarkably diverse phenomena; that is, the worldview of theism offers greater coherence and interconnection than naturalism; on theism, the existence of a maximally great being and creator brings a wide range of features into the world: the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe, consciousness, rationality, beauty, free will, human dignity, moral duties, and so on. Finally, rather than simply asserting these features as brute facts in the world, theism affords a more basic or deeper explanation for the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe for the existence of consciousness, beauty, free agency, rationality, and the like. Instead of positing that the universe is just there and that's all and instead of taking for granted that the conditions happen to be "just right" for *permitting*, *producing*, as well as *sustaining* life from the Big Bang to the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, theism actually presents the resources for—and actually anticipates—these outcomes. The same can be said for theism's deeper explanatory power to account for the emergence of

consciousness, human dignity, objective moral values, free agency, beauty, and the like. Apart from Graham Oppy's defense of naturalism in this book, the remaining chapters will present the more substantive, wide-ranging case for theism that we can here only sketch out in brief.

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS BOOK

Part I ("The Unnaturalness of Naturalism?") consists of naturalist Graham Oppy's chapter, "Naturalism and Naturalness." He discusses some of the familiar ways the term "natural" is used. He advances a minimalist naturalist stance—that "(a) there are none but natural causal entities with none but natural causal powers ('natural reality exhausts causal reality'); and (b) well-established science is our touchstone for identifying causal entities and causal powers." He then compares the worldviews of theism and naturalism, challenging some facets of theism's alleged naturalness. While science offers a convergence of expert opinion and correctives to errors in human thinking, anything beyond this is philosophical speculation.

Part II examines certain "Foundational Considerations." Charles Taliaferro leads off with two chapters—"Is Naturalism Natural?" (chapter 2) and "The Contraction and Expansion of Naturalism and the Theistic Challenge" (chapter 3). In the former, he examines a number of criticisms of theism (e.g., the alleged incoherence of God as a "disembodied" being) and the naturalistic claim that science can get along very well without invoking God to explain things. However, the very possibility of doing science actually requires the mind or the mental to get off the ground, but mind does not comfortably (naturally) fit within a strictly material reality. Theism, however, can account for the contingent universe's beginning as well as provide rich resources for the mental life of naturalistic scientists.

In the next chapter, Taliaferro argues that strict naturalism cannot account for obvious facts of consciousness, inner experience, intentionality, and the like, and this calls into question the viability of naturalism as a worldview and should prompt us to look afresh at theism's resources, which readily accounts for those features. Taliaferro cites naturalist Michael Lockwood's acknowledgment that no description of brain activity "is remotely capable of capturing what is distinctive about consciousness" and that "I cannot believe that anyone with a philosophical training, looking dispassionately at these [reductive materialist] programmes," would take any of them seriously for a moment." Some naturalists move beyond the scientific image of reductive naturalism to embrace a broader "manifest" version. Yet in doing so, they help themselves to nonscientific objects (sometimes including Platonic

entities). But this effort seems strained and actually reveals the fact that the very features that are more at home or natural on theism.

In the final chapter of this section, Scott Smith argues that ontological naturalism deprives us of knowledge of the world since intentionality is impossible given its metaphysic. He examines the work of Daniel Dennett and others, arguing that since we do have knowledge, a different ontology must be true. He notes various implications this has for science as well as religion.

Part III (Theistic Belief, Science, and Naturalism) begins with a discussion of the cognitive science of religion (CSR), which is methodologically agnostic rather than methodologically atheistic. The chapter, "In What Sense Might Religion Be Natural?," by Justin Barrett and Aku Visala explores the ways in which religion is natural. The authors note widespread agreement in CSR that religious belief/belief in God or the supernatural and in intentional agency commonly arises in early childhood; it is both cognitively natural and cross-cultural. In their conclusions, they note various misunderstandings regarding the naturalness of religion. For instance, they write: "Mere scientific research into human cognition or the evolutionary origins of religion is not enough to ground the claim that theism, for instance, is false. More substantive, mainly philosophical arguments, are needed for this conclusion."

In chapter 6 ("Science, Methodological Naturalism, and Question-Begging") Robert Larmer challenges *methodological* naturalism—an allegedly essential requirement for doing science and one which even various theists embrace. This view is not to be confused with *metaphysical* naturalism, we are told. The latter entails God's nonexistence whereas the former does not. Larmer, however, insists that things are not so tidy: "The core claim of methodological naturalism is that no event should ever be explained as having been directly caused by a supernatural agent" and thus "one must always appeal to natural causes in explaining what takes place in the world." But such a claim is not metaphysically neutral. Given the impossibility of a metaphysical—and thus methodological—neutralism, Larmer advocates for a "methodological pluralism": "In areas where worldviews such as naturalism and theism clash or might seem to clash, it is reasonable to allow their proponents to explore competing points of view. To do so is a necessary condition of fostering a healthy intellectual environment."

Part IV shifts to matters of value: Axiology and Naturalism. Angus Menuge's chapter on "Alienating Humanity" (chapter 7) contends that naturalistic evolutionary ethics undermines human rights, which presuppose moral realism. Whereas theism has robust resources to account for human rights, the evolutionary ethics of naturalism—the result of undirected, causal processes such as natural selection—fails to do so, and this is a point on

which many ethical naturalists agree. Menuge engages the defense of moral realism by atheist philosopher Erik Wielenberg, concluding that he fails in that effort.

In chapter 8, Matthew Flannagan's essay—"Divine Commands and the Euthyphro Dilemma: Some Naturalist Misperceptions"—examines various failed naturalistic attempts to undermine a modified divine command theory. One such attempt is the appeal to the "Euthyphro dilemma": allegedly, goodness based on either *arbitrary* commands (God could have commanded the opposite of what God did) or an *autonomous* standard external to God. One problem is that value (the good) cannot be reduced to moral duty (the right) since deeds of supererogation such as donating a kidney to a stranger are good, but aren't duties. Furthermore, the Euthyphro question is not a dilemma at all. One can evade the alleged horns of the "dilemma" by positing that moral duties (i.e., divine commands) are best understood as being rooted in God's omnibenevolent character, upon which commands are based. In addition to addressing various misunderstandings and misrepresentations of divine command theory, Flannagan responds to Euthyphro-style arguments that presumably undercut the divine command theory—namely, the "horrendous deeds" objection, the arbitrariness objection, and the vacuity objection.

Chapter 9 ("Beauty: A Troubling Reality for the Scientific Naturalist") by Douglas Geivett and James Spiegel offers a "direct argument against naturalism and an indirect argument for theism from beauty." We have good reasons for taking aesthetic realism as correct. For example, we engage in reasoned discussions regarding the aesthetic value of van Gogh's *Starry Night*—not simply our subjective or emotional responses to it—and many devote their lives to studying and evaluating works of art, which would be a waste of time if beauty is merely in the eye of the beholder. Given the normative nature of beauty, naturalism, which is descriptive rather than prescriptive, is unable to explain what needs explaining whereas theism is robustly equipped to do so. Such factors then count as evidence against naturalism and in favor of theism. Indeed, to deny the commonsensical understanding of beauty's reality—as with objective moral values—is to further undermine the rationality of naturalism.

Part V brings us to "Naturalism and Existential Considerations." Chapter 10 by Clifford Williams' addresses "Existential Arguments for Theistic Belief." When it comes to God's existence, not only are rational arguments important, but so are existential reasons—reasons related to deep, abiding, universal human longings. We all long for security, significance, meaning, forgiveness, goodness, and justice, and it would be strange if these deep human needs could not be satisfied. Although naturalism does not have the resources to

satisfy these longings, theism readily does. From an existential point of view, we are justified in believing in God.

In chapter 11, psychologist Paul Vitz looks at "The Psychology of Atheism: From Defective Fathers to Autism to Professional Socialization and Personal Convenience" It is common for naturalists to psychologize believers in God as escapist, clinging to a fabricated heavenly Father figure in order to navigate life's harshness and pain. However, the sword cuts both ways. Vitz makes the point that if we look at the world's leading atheists in the modern era from D'Holbach to Dawkins, it seems that these appear to be the more likely psychologically disordered. He observes that, among other negative features, what virtually all of these atheists have in common is bad or missing fathers or father-substitutes. By contrast, leading theists from the same era—from Butler to Bonhoeffer—had positive relationships with their fathers or father-substitutes. Vitz further explores the psychology of belief as it relates to autism. From a psychological point of view, belief in God is not indication of mental maladjustment. If anything, maladjustment that would better fit the profile of the hard-nosed atheist.

In the final section of Part V, Paul Copan and Jeremiah Johnston look at "The Cultural Implications of Theism versus Naturalism." In contrast to strict naturalism, broad naturalism attempts to account for the emergence of objective moral values from valueless, mindless, material processes—value from valuelessness. In the case of nonnaturalistic atheistic moral realist Erik Wielenberg, he holds to a kind of Platonic realm of "moral facts" that somehow anticipate the eventual emergence of intrinsically valuable human beings that must attend to those preexisting facts. Aside from this massive cosmic coincidence, Wielenberg must move away from naturalism to posit this nonnatural transcendent realm of eternal moral facts, which is very much on the way to affirming theism.[10] By contrast, the moral argument makes the ready, natural connection between a supremely valuable divine being and human dignity, moral duties, as well as personal agency and responsibility. But this chapter pushes beyond the moral resources of theism by pointing to the dramatic moral impact of the biblical faith in history. The connection of the biblical faith to the founding of modern science, democracy, human rights, literacy and public education are well-documented, and even nontheistic scholars readily acknowledge this point.

The final section—Part VI ("Naturalism, Freedom, and Immortality")—concludes with two chapters. Chapter 13—J.P. Moreland's "Theism, Robust Naturalism, and Robust Libertarian Free Will"—offers a clear definition and a sustained argument in defense of robust libertarian agency. He argues that, on naturalism, the existence of libertarian agents is a virtual metaphysical impossibility. By contrast, their existence is very much at home in a theistic world.

Along the way, Moreland critiques an attempt by Kevin Timpe and Jonathan Jacobs to show that naturalism and libertarian free will are consistent.

In chapter 14 ("The Naturalness and Justification of Belief in Life after Death"), Jonathan Loose explores explanations for the ubiquity of belief in life after death—a belief that turns out not to be rooted "in either religious instruction or the fear of death." According to CSR, this intuitive, easily acquired, and transmitted belief is more innate and cognitive than cultural. Loose suggests that such a belief does not favor philosophical naturalism; any such suggestion stems more from a metaphysically naturalistic imposition on the evidence, thus limiting or even prohibiting any nonnaturalistic defeaters to challenge naturalistic assumptions. Further problems exist for naturalistic interpretations of such widespread afterlife beliefs, which some consider a "spandrel." If we consider parallel naturalistic arguments from CSR against belief in God (e.g., theistic/religious belief as a spandrel), this would simultaneously undermine the naturalist's commitment to a scientistic epistemology as a spandrel as well. Theism, however, helps rescue the scientific endeavor from spandrelism.

CONCLUSION

These chapters serve as pointers to a much larger body of arguments and literature giving evidence for the naturalness of theistic belief. Much of what we take for granted about not only the finite, finely tuned, life-producing universe itself, but of features of human existence (e.g., consciousness, moral duties, agency, aesthetics, intuitive beliefs, deep longings, moral reforms, and democratizing gains) is quite at home in a theistic universe. Such things are ill-fitting in a naturalistic metaphysic. No wonder many naturalists want to broaden their metaphysic in order to accommodate characteristics of human existence that seem inescapable and nonnegotiable. But in doing so, they move closer toward theism and away from their naturalistic roots. Theistic belief is far more natural than naturalistic belief.

NOTES

1. John R. Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 4.

2. John Searle, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1997), 154.

3. Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Science, Perception, and Reality* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991).

4. Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 41.

5. Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral? Revisited," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (January 1984): 90.

6. Thomas Nagel, "Is Consciousness an Illusion?" A Review of Daniel Dennett's *From Bacteria to Bach and Back Again*. *NY Times Review of Books* (March 9, 2017), http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/03/09/is-consciousness-an-illusion-dennett-evolution/

7. Jaegwon Kim, "Mental Causation and Two Conceptions of Mental Properties." Paper presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting (December 1993), 22–23.

8. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 199.

9. For example, see Paul Copan, "The Naturalists are Declaring the Glory of God: Discovering Natural Theology in the Unlikeliest Places," in *Philosophy and the Christian Worldview: Analysis, Assessment and Development*, eds. David Werther and Mark D. Linville (New York: Continuum, 2012), 50–70; Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

10. Paul Copan, "Ethics Needs God," in *Debating Christian Theism*, eds. J. P. Moreland, Chad V. Meister, and Khaldoun Sweis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85–100.

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Part I

THE UNNATURALNESS OF NATURALISM?

Chapter 1

Naturalism and Naturalness

A Naturalist's Perspective

Graham Oppy

I have been asked to discuss—and perhaps to defend—the "naturalness" of naturalism. Since I have not seen the other contributions to this volume, I am not sure where it will be most useful to direct my efforts. I am a naturalist; some of my recent works[1] can be read, in part, as defenses of naturalism. But it is not clear that one needs to embrace the claim that naturalism is "natural" in order to be a naturalist. Much turns on what it would be for naturalism to be "natural." As we shall see, this is hardly a straightforward matter.

LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

"Natural" carries a lot of baggage. Consider some of the available contrasts:

1. "processed," "refined," "ersatz," "synthetic" (food, material, stuff)
2. "artificial," "strained," "faux," "affected," "phony" (character, manner, bearing, speech)
3. "acquired," "taught" (knowledge, belief)
4. "perverted," "deviant," "degenerate," "immoral," "decadent" (act, thought)
5. "abnormal," "atypical," " unorthodox," "irregular," "preternatural," "surprising," "unpredictable" (event, state, instance, sample, outcome)
6. "illegitimate," "bastard" (offspring)
7. "unreasonable," "illogical," "incomprehensible" (inference, conclusion, belief)
8. "unreal," "intangible," "non-concrete" (object, reality, property)
9. "artifactual," "gerrymandered" (kind)
10. "supernatural," "magical," "miraculous" (person, being, event)

11. “revealed” (theology)
12. “human,” “institutional” (law)
13. “artificial,” “assisted” (selection, insemination, childbirth)
14. “not reflecting the cards one holds” (bridge bid)
15. “neither sharp nor flat” (note in music)
16. “unbleached,” “undyed” (fabric)

“Naturalism” also carries a lot of baggage: within philosophy: “moral naturalism,” “mathematical naturalism,” “methodological naturalism,” “scientific naturalism,” “epistemological naturalism,” “metaphysical naturalism,” and so forth; beyond philosophy: “literary naturalism,” “dramatic naturalism,” “artistic naturalism,” “educational naturalism,” “political naturalism,” “sociological naturalism,” and so on.

If we are to discuss the naturalness of naturalism, then we need to be very clear what we mean by “natural” and “naturalism,” and we need to take care that our discussion is not derailed by the myriad alternative meanings and associations that these terms bear.

Many of the contrasts between the “natural” and the “nonnatural” are degreed: some things are more natural than others. In these cases, it typically won’t make much sense to ask after the absolute “naturalness” of things. Rather, the interesting questions will be comparative: Is *this* thing more natural or less natural than *that* thing?

In this volume, the primary question is comparative: Is *naturalism* more or less natural than *theism*? So it is not just that we need to be clear about what we mean by “naturalism”; we need to be no less clear what we mean by “theism.”

WORLDVIEWS AND BIG PICTURES

“Naturalism” and “theism” are names for claims (theses, statements).

Theism is the claim that there is at least one god. Monotheism is the claim that there is exactly one god. Atheism is the claim that there are no gods.

Naturalism is the claim that: (a) there are none but natural causal entities with none but natural causal powers (“natural reality exhausts causal reality”); and (b) well-established science is our touchstone for identifying causal entities and causal powers.

Worldviews are complete theories of everything: logic, model selection, ontology, epistemology, axiology, normativity, natural sciences, human sciences, formal sciences, applied sciences, humanities, arts, and so on. Worldviews are idealizations; none of us has, nor could have, a complete theory of everything. *Big pictures* are our approximations to worldviews: our big

pictures take in what we believe in the domains of logic, model selection, ontology, epistemology, axiology, normativity, natural sciences, human sciences, formal sciences, applied sciences, humanities, arts, and so on.

Theistic big pictures include, or are committed to, the claim that there is at least one god. Monotheistic big pictures include, or are committed to, the claim that there is exactly one god. Atheistic big pictures include, or are committed to, the claim that there are no gods. Naturalistic big pictures include, or are committed to, the claim that: (a) there are none but natural causal entities with none but natural causal powers; and (b) well-established science is our touchstone for theorizing about causal entities and causal powers.

When we ask about "the naturalness of naturalism," what we are interested in is whether naturalistic big pictures are more or less natural than theistic big pictures. Of course, there are many very different naturalistic big pictures and many very different theistic big pictures. Depending upon the details of our interest, it may be that it would be more accurate to say that we are interested in whether *best* naturalistic big pictures are more or less natural than *best* theistic big pictures. In cases where "natural" carries normative implications, it may be that little interest attaches to consideration of less than best theistic big pictures and less than best naturalistic big pictures.

It is plausible to suppose that best naturalistic big pictures and best theistic big pictures will exhibit widespread agreement. In particular, wherever there is universal expert agreement, we should expect universal expert agreement to be reflected in both best naturalistic big pictures and best theistic big pictures. Across logic, mathematics, physics, chemistry, pharmacology, and a host of other domains, there is an enormous amount that is agreed by, for example, all members of all of the relevant national academies. Nothing that contradicts this agreed material will belong to any best naturalistic big pictures or best theistic big pictures. When we are comparing best theistic big pictures and best naturalistic big pictures, we can treat everything upon which they agree as *data*.

It is plausible to suppose that best naturalistic big pictures and best theistic big pictures will exhibit widespread disagreement in those areas where there simply is no universal expert agreement: philosophy, politics, religion, and the like. Indeed, we expect to find widespread disagreement in these areas *between* best naturalistic big pictures and *between* best theistic big pictures. For the purposes of the coming discussion, I shall pretend that we are talking about a particular best naturalistic big picture N and a particular best theistic big picture T. But I shall try to assume as little as possible about the actual content of N and T. (I think that best atheistic big pictures are best naturalistic big pictures. So, by my lights, I am also pretending that we are talking about a particular best atheistic big picture and a particular best theistic big picture. However, not everyone accepts that best atheistic big pictures are best naturalistic big pictures.)

BY THE NUMBERS

One question about the "naturalness" of commitment to N and T concerns the *numbers* of people who are committed to each. If there are many committed to T and few committed to N, then that yields a sense in which commitment to N is not "natural": atypical, unorthodox, or the like. As it happens, the world contains few committed to N, and very many committed to T. Moreover, this has always been true: whenever and wherever it has been true that there is either commitment to N or commitment to T, the world has always seen vastly greater commitment to T than to N. In this purely statistical sense, considering the entire population of the world, commitment to N is not "natural."

But what is true for the world at large is not true for the membership of scientific academies and leading institutions of higher education in prosperous democracies. Among the membership of scientific academies and leading institutions of higher education in prosperous democracies, there are more naturalists than there are theists. In the same purely statistical sense, considering the membership of scientific academies and leading institutions of higher education in prosperous democracies, commitment to N is at least as "natural" as commitment to T. Moreover, this has been true for at least the past hundred years.[2]

Furthermore, when we look at the general population in prosperous democracies we see that, over the past century, there has been a significant drop in the percentage of that population committed to T, and a significant increase in the percentage of that population committed to N. Moreover, the rates at which the one percentage is dropping and the other percentage is increasing have also been steadily increasing over this period. Even where, in prosperous democracies, it remains true that commitment to N is not "natural," it is also true that commitment to N has been becoming increasingly more "natural," and commitment to T has been becoming increasingly less "natural." If current trends in our prosperous democracies continue, by the end of this century N will be more "natural" than T was at the beginning of the last century in prosperous democracies.[3]

MORALITY AND HAPPINESS

A second question about the "naturalness" of commitment to N and T concerns the *lives* of the people committed to each. It is not uncommon for those with one of these commitments to say that those with the other commitment are *immoral* and/or *unhappy*. If it were true that those with one of these commitments are much more prone to immorality and/or unhappiness than those with the other commitment, then that might yield a sense in which the

first commitment is not "natural": perverted, deviant, degenerate, decadent, wicked, or the like.

There is very broad agreement between N and T about what we should not *do*. N and T agree that we should not do harm: we should not kill, enslave, exploit, steal, cheat, lie, free ride, and so forth, except where it is permissible for us to do so. (Consider the case of killing. Most suppose that it can be permissible to kill in self-defense. Most suppose that it can be permissible to kill to protect one's nearest and dearest. Many suppose that it can be permissible to kill in the course of a just war. Many suppose that it can be permissible to kill first-trimester human fetuses. Many suppose that it is permissible to kill on the proper authority of the state. Many suppose that it is permissible to kill nonhuman animals for food. Some suppose that it is permissible to kill nonhuman animals for pleasure. And so on. Nonetheless, all agree that we should not kill, except where it is permissible to do so; and, very importantly, there is a large range of cases in which all agree that it would not be permissible to kill.) There is also very broad agreement between N and T about how we should and should not *be*: we should be benevolent, civil, compassionate, cooperative, courageous, diligent, empathetic, honest, humble, just, kind, liberal, patient, prudent, sensitive, sincere, and sympathetic, and so on; we should not be boorish, callous, cold, cowardly, dishonest, illiberal, impatient, imprudent, insincere, lazy, mean, petty, rude, stingy, uncooperative, unfair, vain, wanton, and so forth. Given that there is broad agreement between N and T about what we should not do, and how we should and should not be, it would be surprising if there is significant systematic difference in the morality and/or happiness of those committed to N and T.

There is a mountain of data that bears on the morality and happiness of those committed to N and T. If there were systematic differences in the morality and/or happiness of those committed to N and T, then we should expect to be able to detect those differences in the data that we have about populations in which there is significant variation in rates of commitment to N and T. If those with commitment to N are much more immoral and unhappy than those with commitment to T, then we should expect that immorality and unhappiness to show up in data about, for example: homicide rates; incarceration rates; juvenile mortality; average lifespan; consumption of pornography, adolescent gonorrhea, and syphilis infections; all age gonorrhea and syphilis infections; adolescent abortions; adolescent births; youth suicide; all age suicide; fertility; marriage; marriage duration; divorce; average life satisfaction; alcohol consumption; corruption; income; income disparity; poverty; employment; hours of work; resource exploitation base; and so on. But serious analysis of this data[4] simply does not bear out the view that those with commitment to N are much more immoral and unhappy than those with commitment to T.

There are many studies that have examined more local claims about the relative morality and/or happiness of those committed to T and N, looking at: trustworthiness, law-abidingness, selfishness, emotional stability, mental health, physical health, sexual deviancy, and so on. These studies are all over the place; even meta-analyses do not all arrive at the same conclusions. Moreover, most studies fail to distinguish between those who are strongly committed to N and those who are not strongly committed to either T or N. But there is a significant body of work[5] which suggests that there are no relevant differences—concerning morality and happiness—between those strongly committed to N and those strongly committed to T.[6]

PRACTICAL REASONS

A third question about the "naturalness" of commitment to T and N concerns the reasons that one might have for one's commitment. If there are compelling reasons to prefer T to N, then commitment to N is not "natural": unreasonable, illogical, incomprehensible, ignorant, uninformed, or the like. If there are compelling reasons to prefer T to N, then those reasons might be theoretical, or practical, or both. I begin by considering the claim that there are compelling practical reasons to prefer T to N.

Human beings are vulnerable to existential anxieties about annihilation, catastrophe, death, deception, disease, guilt, injustice, insignificance, loneliness, loss, pain, unsatisfied want, and the like. Religions offer mastery of those existential anxieties. I suggest[7] something like the following explanatory framework:

> Religions are passionate communal displays—of costly commitments to the satisfaction of non-natural causal beings and/or the overcoming of non-natural causal regulative structures—that result from evolutionary canalization and convergence of: (1) widespread belief in non-natural causal agents and/or non-natural causal regulative structures; (2) hard to fake public expressions of costly material commitments to the satisfaction of those non-natural causal agents and/or the overcoming of or escape from those non-natural causal regulative structures; (3) mastery of people's existential anxieties by those costly commitments; and (4) ritualized, rhythmic sensory coordination of (1)-(3) in communion, congregation, intimate fellowship, and the like.

Those who suppose that there is compelling practical reason to prefer T to N are supposing that T is a best religious big picture: the nonnatural causal beings to which T is committed are part of a satisfying religious "ministering" to our "existential needs."

One important question here is about the extent to which religion itself creates the itches that it offers to scratch. Sure, human lives are likely to contain episodes characterized by deception, disease, guilt, injustice, loneliness, loss, pain, and unsatisfied desire. But human lives are also likely to contain episodes characterized by connection, exhilaration, fellowship, health, justice, pleasure, satisfied desire, and so forth. It is not irrational to prefer a typical human life to no life at all even if there are some human lives that it would be better not to live. If we focus our attention squarely on this worldly ills—deception, disease, guilt, injustice, loneliness, loss, pain, unsatisfied desire, and the like—it is simply not obvious that they do or should generate existential anxieties that are in need of "ministry" in flourishing human beings.

Those who suppose that there is a compelling practical reason to prefer T to N typically have a different range of "existential needs" in mind. In their view, we need "ministry" to cope with annihilation, cosmic insignificance, and postmortem insecurity. But practically rational beings who believe that there are no nonnatural causal agents and nonnatural causal regulative structures simply do not have worries about annihilation, cosmic insignificance, and postmortem security. Depending how things go, dying may be relatively unpleasant, but death itself is nothing to be feared. True, death may come too early—or too late—but the timing of death rarely tips the scales in favor of preference not to have lived at all.

Some suppose that considerations about *wagers* give us practical reason to prefer T over N. On this line of thought, since the expected utility of wagering on T is greater than the expected utility of wagering on N, we have practical reason to accept T rather than N. This is not the place to give a detailed analysis of such wagers.[8] Perhaps it suffices to note that there is no good reason for proponents of N to accept that the expected utility of wagering on T is greater than the expected utility of wagering on N.

THEORETICAL REASONS

Are there good *theoretical* reasons for preferring T to N? Since this is a question that I have discussed at length elsewhere,[9] I shall give only a very compressed summary of my answer to it.

Given that we treat T and N as comprehensive theories—"theories of everything"—our assessment of their comparative virtue is simply an assessment of comparative theoretical virtue. We treat everything on which T and N agree as data; we treat everything on which they disagree as theory. Our assessment of their comparative theoretical virtue has three stages. First, at least in principle, we give a complete articulation of T and N. Second, at

least in principle, we check to see whether either T or N is inconsistent. Third, assuming that both T and N survive the second stage, we check to see which of T and N makes the best trade-off between minimizing theoretical commitments and maximizing breadth and depth of explanation of data.

Pretend that we have complete articulations of T and N. In order to show that one of T and N is inconsistent, we need to find a set of sentences that belongs to the one that are jointly logically inconsistent. Assuming classical logic, one can rightly say that any such logically inconsistent set of sentences can be converted to a derivation of the defining claim of the opposing theory from premises all of which belong to the theory that is shown to be inconsistent. There are no extant derivations that satisfy this condition, either for T or for N.[10] So we proceed to the final stage of assessment.

While, in general, there is no agreed algorithm for theory assessment, there are special cases where assessment is straightforward. If, on given data, one theory does not anywhere give inferior explanations to a second theory and yet has fewer commitments than that second theory, then the first theory is better than the second. Elsewhere,[11] I argue that, while N has fewer commitments than T, N nowhere gives inferior explanations to T. So, I say, we should prefer N to T. While I allow that this argument is hardly incontestable, I do think that its virtues make it pretty implausible to suppose that there is a good argument that we should prefer T to N. Even if theoretical reason does not tell us to prefer N to T, it is very hard to believe that theoretical reason tells us to prefer T to N. (My own view is that it is a matter for judgment whether to prefer one of T and N to the other: this is just one of those many things on which sensitive, intelligent, well-informed, reflective people can reasonably disagree. When we consider the range of opinion, we should come down to the view that, in the now relevant sense, neither big picture is more "natural" than the other.)

INTUITION

It is not uncommon to hear the complaint that naturalism is out of tune with our most basic *intuitions* about, for example, consciousness, rationality, free will, persons, knowledge, intentionality, morality, cosmology, purpose, biological function, universals, scientific realism, material objects, beauty, evolution, and so on. Given that our intuitions are what come "naturally" to us, this might be taken to show that naturalism is not "natural." How should this complaint be understood and what should we make of it?

Here are some things that seem completely intuitive: we have compatibilist freedom; we do not have libertarian freedom; mental states and processes are neural states and processes; we talk about "minds" is a mere *façon de parler*;

none of us reliably forms true philosophical, political, or religious beliefs; naturalism is necessarily true; first-trimester abortion is morally permissible; causal reality began with the initial singularity; no religion is more credible than any other. I could go on.

When we are thinking about the comparative virtues of T and N, considerations about who finds what intuitive are completely irrelevant. Whether or not data is intuitive is irrelevant to its status as data. Whether or not theory is intuitive is irrelevant to the assessment of its theoretical virtue. It should have been obvious before I gave the above list that the intuitions of proponents of T and N do not align. What comes "naturally" to theists is different from what comes "naturally" to naturalists. Clash of intuitions gives no advantage to either side. (Given the symmetry of the situation, it would be the worst kind of special pleading to suppose that your intuitions carry more weight than do the intuitions of those on the other side.)

Many intuitions are mistaken. Consider, for example, intuitions of folk physics. When asked to drop a paperweight into a hoop on the ground below the window of a moving carriage, many people with no knowledge of theoretical physics deliberately wait until they are above or beyond the hoop before they let go of the paperweight. This is not just performance error; when asked, many people with no knowledge of theoretical physics say that the right thing to do is to wait until you are above or beyond the hoop before you let go of the paperweight. While some intuitions of folk physics are correct, many are mistaken.[12] In physics—as everywhere else—you do much better to rely on convergent expert opinion than on folk intuition. And, in areas where there is no convergent expert opinion—as, for example, in philosophy, politics, and religion—intuition has no role to play in objective arbitration of expert differences of opinion.

Note that I have *not* argued that you should always second-guess your own intuitions. Sure, if you hold opinions that run contrary to established convergent expert opinion, and if you have none but intuitive support for your opinions, then it is time for you to reconsider. But if you hold opinions where there is no established convergent expert opinion, then, even if you have none but intuitive support for your opinions, it may be that you have no reason to reconsider. In matters of philosophy, politics, and religion, it is hard to see any good reason why experts have greater entitlement to hold particular beliefs than those who are not experts.

EXPLANATIONS FOR "NATURALNESS"

Let's go back to the statistical sense of "natural." There has been considerable discussion, in recent times, of the fact that, across time and place,

certain kinds of nonnaturalistic beliefs have been more or less universal. It is a standard naturalistic belief that mindedness is late and local: there are not—and could not be—minded things other than relatively recently evolved or late-evolving biological organisms and downstream causal products of the actions of such organisms. But across time and place, belief in minded things other than relatively recently evolved or late-evolving biological organisms and downstream causal products of the actions of such organisms is ubiquitous. In many cultures, we find beliefs in unembodied yet causally efficacious minds; in most cultures, we find attributions of mindedness to features of landscapes, astronomical entities, and so forth. Why is this?

One theory that has gained traction suggests a two part explanation. On the one hand,[13] we are "naturally" prone to over-attribution of intentional agency: our brains house hyperactive agency detection devices that lead us to attribute agency when none is present. On the other hand,[14] when the misattributed agency is minimally counterintuitive, belief is both attractive and transmissible. Putting the two parts together: because we are "naturally" prone to over-attribution of intentional agency, lots of nonnaturalistic entities are thrown up as candidates for belief; and because we are "naturally" attracted to and "naturally" prone to transmit minimally counterintuitive beliefs, we find belief in nonnaturalistic entities in all human cultures. As Smith suggests,[15] there is a plausible third part to this explanation. It is not just that belief in nonnaturalistic entities is pervasive in human cultures; there are certain kinds of beliefs in nonnaturalistic entities that are pervasive in human cultures: lots of origin beliefs advert to world eggs; there are many beliefs about earth mothers and sky fathers; and so forth. It is plausible to suppose that, where the same kinds of beliefs crop up in many different times and places, this is not due merely to common features of our brains; in part, the commonality is explained by structural similarities in the external environments in which we live. Why so many beliefs in earth mothers and sky fathers? Because there is an observable connection between rain and the growth of plants; it is a very "natural" analogy to suppose that the sky is inseminating the earth. Some theorists—including Barrett—have conjectured that his theory fits "naturally" into T: our hyperactive agency detection device is given to us by god to facilitate belief in god on our part. But, even if we suppose that T includes some claim along those lines, it seems implausible that, in virtue of this fact, T gains some kind of explanatory advantage over N. After all, there is a perfectly straightforward evolutionary explanation of our coming to have a hyperactive agency detection device: far better false positives than false negatives in the detection of agential threats.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

My characterization of naturalism is *minimal*: there are many naturalists who take their naturalistic commitments to go well beyond the minimal requirements that earn entry to the class of naturalists, just as there are many theists who take their theistic commitments to go well beyond the minimal requirements that earn entry to the class of theists. Furthermore, there are many naturalists who disagree with me about the plausible commitments of N.

I maintain that the evaluative, the normative, and the abstract are independent of the causal: the minimal requirements for entry to the class of naturalists do not constrain the beliefs that naturalists hold about the evaluative, the normative, and the abstract. I also maintain that naturalists are perfectly entitled to rely upon their evolved cognitive capacities—for perception, memory, inference, and the like—across a wide range of domains, including domains that underwrite scientific investigation. Of course, our evolved cognitive capacities are imperfect in various respects, but the institutions of science are well-designed to correct for biases and performance errors across a wide range of domains. And, in those domains where there is no established convergence of expert opinion, there is only philosophical speculation.[16]

The subtitle of this work refers to "theism's reasonability." This expression is ambiguous. If it refers to the rational *permissibility* of theistic belief, then—as on the parallel reading of "naturalism's reasonability"—it refers to something that is really not worth contesting. However, if it refers to the rational *obligation* of theistic belief, then—as on the parallel reading of "naturalism's reasonability"—it refers to something that does not deserve to be taken seriously. When we are engaged in philosophy—as we are when we consider the question whether to prefer N to T—we are dealing with matters where there is no expert agreement on either content or method. In those circumstances, it is absurd to suppose that there is a substantive position—such as N or T—that is rationally required.

NOTES

1. See, for example, G. Oppy, *Naturalism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2018); and G. Oppy, *Atheism: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2018).

2. See: E. Larsen and L. Witham, "Scientists are Still Keeping the Faith," *Nature* 386 (1998): 435–36; E. Larsen and L. Witham, "Leading Scientists Still Reject God," *Nature* 394 (1998): 313; E. Ecklund and C. Scheitle "Religion and Academic

Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines and Demographics," *Social Problems* 54 (2007): 289–307; N. Gross and S. Simmons, "The Religiosity of American College and University Professors," *Sociology of Religion* 70 (2009): 101–29; M. Stirrat and E. Cornwell, "Eminent Scientists Reject the Supernatural: A Survey of the Royal Society," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 6 (2013): https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1186%2F1936-6434-6-33.pdf; and E. Ecklund et al., "Religion among Scientists in International Context: A New Study of Scientists in Eight Regions," *Socius* 2 (2016): 1–9.

3. See P. Zuckerman, *Atheism and Secularity*, 2 vols. (Westport: Praeger, 2009); L. Lugo, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Have No Religious Affiliation," *Pew Research Centre* (2012): http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/; and W. Gervais and M. Najile, "How Many Atheists Are There?" *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2017): doi: 10.1177/1948550617707015.

4. See, for example, G. Paul, "Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in Prosperous Democracies," *Journal of Religion and Society* 7 (2005): 1–17; G. Paul, "The Chronic Dependence of Popular Religiosity upon Dysfunctional Psychosociological Conditions," *Evolutionary Psychology* 7 (2009): 398–441; and P. Zuckerman, "Atheism, Secularity and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions," *Sociology Compass* 3 (2009): 949–71.

5. See, for example, C. Ross, "Religion and Psychological Distress," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (1990): 236–45; K. Hwang et al., "Extending Religion-Health Research to Secular Minorities: Issues and Concerns," *Journal of Religion and Health* 50 (2009): 608–22; J. Paterson and A. Francis, "Influence of Religiosity on Self-Reported Response to Psychological Therapies," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 20 (2017): 428–48.

6. For more detailed discussion of the studies and data adverted to in the past two paragraphs, see G. Oppy, *Atheism: The Basics* (especially chapters 4 and 5).

7. Roughly following S. Atran and A. Norenzayan, "Religion's Evolutionary Landscape: Counterintuition, Commitment, Compassion, Communion," *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 27 (2004): 713–70.

8. For some of my views on this, see G. Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 241–58.

9. See, for example, G. Oppy, *The Best Argument against God* (London: Macmillan, 2013).

10. I argue for this conclusion at some length in Oppy, *Arguing about Gods*, and in various subsequent publications.

11. See Oppy, *The Best Argument against God*, and subsequent publications.

12. For discussion of another example, see M. McCloskey et al., "Intuitive Physics: The Straight-Down Belief and Its Origins," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 9 (1983): 636–49.

13. See J. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004), and others.

14. See P. Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and others.

15. T. Smith, *Science and Religion: A Conflict of Methods* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Otago, 2017).

16. These claims are defended in Oppy, *Naturalism and Religion*.

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Part II

FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chapter 2

Is Naturalism Natural?

Charles Taliaferro

On some accounts, naturalism seems the most natural, problem-free philosophy of the cosmos. "Naturalism" has a range of definitions, but for this chapter it will simply be the denial of theism and the assertion that the physical sciences are the best guide to reality. This characterization is not the strictest version of naturalism, as it does not rule out the possibility that the social sciences can generate knowledge of the world, but it preserves the primacy of the physical sciences. In chapter 3, "The Contraction and Expansion of Naturalism," greater attention will be given to the different forms of naturalism. Because this chapter involves a comparative depiction of naturalism in relationship to theism, let us first consider why some philosophers think theism is not a live option and that some form of naturalism is preferable. To insure an accurate portrayal of some important objections to theism, I cite some passages at length rather than offer only succinct summaries.

CHALLENGING THEISM

What is in common behind the various anti-theistic objections and arguments that follow is the conviction that we have a problem-free concept of material bodily life. The mental or the mind (human, animal, or divine) is comparatively mysterious in contrast to the world as disclosed in the natural sciences. In an often cited passage from the book *Consciousness Explained*, Daniel Dennett offers this naturalistic overview:

> The prevailing wisdom, variously expressed and argued for, is materialism: there is only one sort of stuff, namely matter—the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology—and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical

> phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain. According to materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth.[1]

Consider just one more naturalist's assertion that we have a better idea of the mind-independent physical world than we have of the mind. Jaegwon Kim writes:

> The shared project of the majority of those who have worked on the mind-body problem over the past few decades has been to find a way of accommodating the mental within a principled physicalist scheme, while at the same time preserving it as something distinctive—that is, without losing what we value, or find special in our nature as creatures with minds.[2]

Because theism envisages God as a nonphysical or immaterial, purposive reality (some theists refer to the *divine mind*), one might well anticipate that such a firm physicalist framework is not the most natural site to accommodate theism.

Let us now consider a naturalistic critique of the concept of God itself. Some philosophers claim that the very idea of God as a non-bodily reality is itself deeply problematic compared with the natural, bodily ways in which we think of ourselves. The following passage from Anthony Kenny aptly summarizes the apparent incoherence of the idea of God as a non-bodily reality.

> It is perhaps barely possible to conceive of a disembodied spirit which is individuated not by having a body but by having an individual locus or viewpoint on the world. By this I mean that we imagine it as possessing information which, in the case of a normal embodied mind, would be available only from a particular point in space and time. This limited viewpoint would mark off an individual of this kind from other possible such disembodied entities. The viewpoint would thus find expression in the content of the thoughts entertained by such a being. The being could be tracked, one might say, as an information centre. Such a being would be something like a poltergeist or a tinkerbell. The intelligibility of the notion of pure spirit along this route seems to be in direct proportion to its triviality.
>
> Even if such a spirit is conceivable it will not help us in giving content to the notion of a God who is a non-embodied mind. For it was precisely the limitations in space and time that we imagined for such a being which made it possible to individuate it without a body. That is of no assistance towards conceiving of a personal God who is immaterial, ubiquitous and eternal. It is not just that we cannot know what thoughts are God's thoughts, but that there does not seem to be anything which would count as ascribing a thought to God in the way that we can ascribe thoughts to individual human thinkers.[3]

According to Kenny, embodiment or being a body (or even having a body) is essential for being a person. Embodied persons have fixed locations and we can identify their thought and action in natural, observable ways. But take away the body, and we have something like a Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* case of a smile without a face, in his case a smile without the Cat's face. Just as a smile is impossible without a face, a person's thinking is impossible without being embodied. As God (as traditionally conceived of in theism) lacks a body, "God" lacks intelligibility.

John Hick advances a similar critique of theism. According to Hick, if God is a person, God must be finite and materially bounded. But, as traditionally conceived, God is infinite, so the very idea of God is a self-contradiction. While Hick is not himself a naturalist, his objection below is a good representation of a naturalist case against theism.

> God is in some sense a person. But in what sense? Surely, if this is to mean anything clear and distinct it must mean that God is literally a person. So Swinburne [a theist] must mean that God is a person like ourselves, except for being infinite in power, knowledge, extension in time, and except also for being perfectly free and omnipresent and good. As Swinburne says, "God is supposed to be like us, in having basic powers, beliefs, and purposes—but ones very different from ours." But does the idea of an infinite person make sense? We know what it is to be a person because we are ourselves persons. And to be a person is to be a particular person, distinct from other person, each with our own boundaries. When two people are interacting with each other as persons, this is only because they have their own individual borders—otherwise they would not be two distinct persons. In other words, personhood is essentially finite, allowing for the existence of other persons. And so an infinite person is a self-contradiction. God cannot be both a person and infinite.[4]

Hick anticipates a theistic reply that he finds unacceptable:

> How might [a theist] reply to this? Possibly like this: God, the infinite person, allows finite persons to exist in a created realm, distinct from himself. So God is infinite, and we are finite. But this would not do. If God is omnipresent he must be present throughout the created realm. There cannot be both an omnipresent God and an area in which he is not present. And if, in the created realm, God interacts with finite persons (as recorded in the Bible), then both God and the other persons must have their individual borders. So [a theist] would have to defend the notion of an infinite person in some other way.[5]

Hick does not suggest another way as, presumably, he thinks there is none that is successful.

Naturalism, rather than beginning with some abstract object (a superpowered poltergeist) begins by taking evident, natural physical causation seriously. Evan Fales claims that the only source of energy we have discovered is physical.

> I suggest that we have evidence—abundant evidence—that the only sources of energy are natural ones. Our evidence is just this: whenever we are able to balance the books on the energy (and momentum) of a physical system, and find an increase or decrease, and we look hard enough for a physical explanation of that increase or decrease, we find one. There is no case in which, given sufficient understanding of a system, we have failed to find such a physical explanation. Of course, such an explanation may be lacking for a time. There are famous cases—e.g., the deviations in the orbit of Uranus, and the apparent lack of energy conservation in meson decay—that challenged this understanding. In each such case, the books have ultimately been balanced by the discovery of a physical cause—here, Neptune and the neutrino, respectively.[6]

Fales goes on to claim that our grasp of physical causation is not at all mysterious, for it is rooted in experience.

> I believe it is not true that we have no conception of physical interactions of these kinds, save in terms of constant conjunction. For we have direct experience of pushes and pulls, of their vectorial characteristics, and, quite precisely, of the balance of forces. Our understanding of causation itself is, so I have elsewhere argued, dependent upon these experiences. But these experiences are the experiences of bodily interactions of embodied creatures. Insofar as we imagine God [to be] a disembodied being, we have no analogue in terms of which suitably to extend this notion. This is not to say that there could not be any such sort of causation. But it does mean that we have no ready conceptual access to what such a causal relationship could be; and in this respect, it is certainly not on a part with our understanding of physical interactions.[7]

Fales makes much of the view that causation involves the transfer of energy. How are we to imagine that God transfers energy from Godself to the cosmos? There would have to be an infusion of energy or the cosmos suddenly appearing out of nothing with the same finite amount of energy. Where did the energy come from?

> For theists, in any case, the results are unappealing. First and most fundamentally, the total charge involved in the creation event just considered is not nonzero. But even if we let that pass, there does not seem to be any sense that could be given to the suggestion that charge (or energy, or momentum) is transmitted from God to the world. After all, it is not that God has zero charge (or energy, etc.); He has no physical attributes at all. His not possessing any electric charge

> does not entail, obviously, that He is electrically neutral, like a neutrino. (And, of course, the same goes for energy and momentum.) It appears, then, that there is no physical quantity, invariant or not, that can be transmitted from God to the world, or exchanged between God and the world.[8]

In the same spirit as Fales, Jaegwon Kim thinks it is unimaginable how something nonphysical can have an effect on something physical.

> It simply does not seem credible that an immaterial substance, with no material characteristics and totally outside physical space, could causally influence and be influenced by the motions of material bodies that are strictly governed by physical law. Just try to imagine how something that isn't anywhere in physical space could alter in the slightest degree the trajectory of a single material particle in motion.[9]

So, while theism seems plagued with a conceptually suspect entity—God—it also seems to posit causal powers that are utterly mysterious compared with what we observe in the physical world.

The jewel in the crown for the case of naturalism's superiority over theism lies in the success of the natural (physical) science. Paul Draper offers the following case for naturalism based on the success of science:

> We have seen that the success of science in providing naturalistic explanations of natural phenomena strengthens the presumption of naturalism and so helps to support a modest methodological naturalism. More important, though, it strongly supports metaphysical naturalism over both supernaturalism in general and the theism in particular. To see why, recall that the attempts discussed earlier to provide a theological justification for methodological naturalism fail. It is at this point in any argument that the true significance of that failure is revealed. For it we lack any antecedent reason to believe that God would not want to act directly in nature, then we lack any antecedent reason on theism to expect science to be as successful in its quest for naturalistic explanation as it has been. By contrast, we have a very strong antecedent reason to expect such success on metaphysical naturalism, because there is strong antecedent reason to believe that most natural events have causes, and metaphysical naturalism entails that such causes must be natural ones. To put the point crudely, metaphysical naturalism "predicts" that science will succeed in discovering natural causes for natural phenomena, while supernaturalism and theism, though certainly consistent with such success, do not predict it. To put the point more precisely, such success is antecedently much more probable given metaphysical naturalism than it is given supernaturalism or given theism. Therefore, it strongly supports metaphysical naturalism over both supernaturalism and theism: it significantly raises the ratio of the probability of metaphysical naturalism to the probability of each of these other hypotheses. This argument represents an often ignored version of

> the problem of divine hiddenness. The problem here is not the problem of why, if God exists, she would allow reasonable nonbelief . . . , but rather, the more fundamental problem of why, if God or other supernatural beings exist, science can completely ignore them and explain so much.[10]

By Draper's lights, the success of scientific explanations in avoiding an appeal to God's agency is evidence that there is no God, for if God exists, it would not be likely that God would be idle (or hidden) from an explanatory point of view.

There are numerous additional arguments for naturalism's superiority over theism, but given spatial limitation, this sampling is perhaps enough for one chapter and sufficient to bring to light (in the next section) why some of us believe theism to be in a comparatively more reasonable than naturalism.

QUESTIONING NATURALISM

I propose that an important challenge to naturalism emerges when we question the primacy of our grasp of what counts as physical, especially if the physical is thought of as independent of mind and the mental. In the passage by Dennett, cited earlier, about today's materialism, there is an assumption that we have a clear grasp of physics, chemistry, and physiology. In the passage cited by Kim about the project of current philosophy, there is an assumption that we have a grasp of "a principled physicalist scheme," we are only unsure about how to accommodate the mental. But this seems to reverse what is actually the case: we cannot have physics, chemistry, and physiology without having scientists who have experiences, thoughts, ideas, concepts, observations, reasoning, and we cannot grasp what is "a principled physicalist scheme" without having a host of ideas and a reliable, trustworthy way of reasoning about causation and the world. In the examples Dennett gives of causation, we cannot have a clearer grasp of radioactivity, continental drift, and so on than we have a clear grasp of *the idea* of radioactivity, *the idea* of continental drift, and so on. To put matters succinctly, we would not have any of the natural or social sciences unless we assume there are experiencing, thinking, reasoning persons who can argue, make discoveries, and think. We essentially must have a clearer, reliable understanding of the mental, our ideas, concepts, judgments, and so on, than we have a concept of that which we use our ideal, concepts, and mental reasoning about what is beyond our mental life.

All our reasoning about the world involves what may be called mental causation: we draw conclusions based on entailment and evidential relations. Because of the absolute fundamental nature of our acquaintance with the

mental, we rarely appreciate its fundamental, sine qua non character. We are perhaps more concerned with particular theories of continental drift than with the obvious fact that we grasp entailment relations such as *if it is true that there is continental drift, then it follows that there is continental drift* and it is false to claim there is no continental drift. As Richard Fumerton points out: "Our fundamental ontological commitments must always be based on phenomenological acquaintance."[11] By the later, he is referring to our mental, subjective experience and thinking. He rightly notes the irony of how science is impossible without our mental, subjective experience and thinking, and yet science has been used to question the very existence of mental, subjective experience. "Scientific knowledge . . . ultimately rests on the kind of knowledge about which the naturalist is suspicious."[12] Fumerton offers the following cogent analysis of the primacy of our awareness of the mental and our only indirect awareness of the mind-independent world:

> This much is certain. We are directly and immediately aware of paradigmatically mental properties such as visual appearances and pain. Through that awareness we gain non-inferential knowledge that such properties are exemplified. This knowledge is the best sort of knowledge imaginable. There is no surer place to start one's ontological commitments. The awareness that allows foundational knowledge of these properties also allows one to think directly about those properties. When one thinks of searing pain, one is not thinking of the property indirectly through some property it has. When one thinks of searing pain one is (typically) not thinking of it as that states, whatever it is, that results from damage to tissue and produces pain-healing behavior. . . . It is the physical world that is epistemically and conceptually more problematic. We know the world of mind-independent, enduring objects only through the world of subjective and fleeting experience.[13]

Let us now turn to theism as it would be viewed from a philosophical perspective that appreciates the primacy of the mental as opposed to that which is independent of mind. Theism is thoroughly anchored in what may be considered intentional, mental categories such as intentionality, purposiveness, knowledge, and more. Theism is a comprehensive worldview that understands the cosmos's existence and continuation as the intentional creation of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, omnipresent, eternal or everlasting, necessarily existing (God's being is not contingent), purposive being.[14] If theism is correct, then the reason why this cosmos and its laws of nature persist is because of the comprehensive will of God. So, while naturalism takes the cosmos as basic (it does not exist in virtue of a transcendent cause), theism offers an account of why it exists rather than not. This chapter is not the place to offer a cosmological argument for theism (which I have done elsewhere) but to remind readers that in replying to the objections to

theism we keep in mind that theism challenges some of the assumptions and grounds of the objections.[15]

So, let us return to the objections, beginning with Kenny's. Putting to one side Kenny's comments on how conceiving of a poltergeist or a tinkerbell would be to conceive of something trivial (I would take both to be nontrivial matters), Kenny seems to give more philosophical weight to bodies than he does to thinking, as though we have a clearer grasp of material bodies than we have of thinking. Following the direction of Fumerton's stress on the primacy of our grasping the mental, I suggest we first and foremost have a grasp of ourselves (being aware of ourselves as selves) and only second grasp which body is yours or mine. The primacy of our self-awareness becomes evident if we imagine a bizarre case, perhaps brought on by injury or drugs, in which you might not be sure which body is yours. You might be in no danger at all in wondering what thoughts are your own, while you are not certain (imagine you are so constrained that you cannot locate your position from the standpoint of visual perspective) which body is yours. The opposite would be very odd indeed: imagine persons trying to identify what they are thinking based on their inspecting a variety of bodies. So, I suggest in response to Kenny, that the evident reality of thinking (its content) is something primarily and directly known by subjects or persons, certainly in the case of humans and other thinking animals, and that (if theism is true) we would know of God's thoughts in ways not unlike we know of each other's thoughts: sometimes through inference from observable states of affairs but sometimes through communication. Historically and today, the great theistic traditions uphold different views of God communicating through revelation. The Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an have all been taken to reveal the thoughts of God without conceptually being committed to thinking that God must therefore have a body.[16] Unless we presuppose the necessary truth of materialism (there cannot possibly be anything immaterial or nonphysical), the appearance that the God of theism communicates with persons (whether through prophets or other intermediaries or events) would be the appearance that such a state of affairs is possible.[17]

What about Hick's objection about persons and material boundaries? I propose that we do not distinguish persons primarily on the grounds that we have nonoverlapping bodies. The primary way of knowing who you are is in terms of your self-awareness; when you are self-aware of your feeling a certain way or thinking about anything, you are directly aware that you are the one having that feeling or thought. Realizing your distinction from other people is a matter of realizing that in such awareness you are aware of yourself as opposed to some other self. I suggest that a person's self-awareness is more reliable and secure than the concept that our material bodies are physically dense so that they cannot occupy the same spatial extension.

Contra Hick, I propose that all that is essential to conceive of two persons interacting is the thesis that the two persons are not-identical quite independent of what borders or boundaries might separate their bodies. Traditionally, theists conceive of God's omnipresence in terms of the exercise of divine attributes that do not in any way entail spatial exclusion (e.g., if God is present in a place, then God must occupy that place in a way that excludes other individuals or things). To claim that God is present in London and a distant star is to claim that London and the star exist and endure over time because of God's ongoing intentional, creative sustaining power, God know all truths about such places, and God can act directly on any things in both places.[18] To suppose that such an account of omnipresence conceptually requires us to think that God is materially present with a physical boundary between God and London and the star seems either preposterous or to assume that some form of materialism is not just necessarily true, but known to be necessarily true.[19]

Turning to Fales and Kim, I submit that (as argued in response to Dennett) our most immediate awareness of causation is mental causation. Fales' account of causation in terms of energy is not as fundamental as the account of causation in our reasoning about energy, our ideas about causation, our concepts (to use his examples) Neptune and the neutrino. Interestingly, each of Dennett's, Fales', and Kim's examples of causation is impersonal. In Dennett's cases of radiation, continental drift, and so on, (presumably) no explanations involve reason, desires, intentions, plans, purposes; in Fales' we have cases of "vectorial characteristics . . . the balance of forces"; and Kim refers to "the trajectory of a single material particle in motion," but we would have no conception of causation without having the ideas of cause and effect, without being able to reason about continental drift, without knowing or having ideas of material particles and being able to conceive of their entailments and relations. Fales and Kim seem to suppose that we have a clear grasp of bodily, material causation, and then question the idea of "a disembodied being," whereas I propose that we have first and foremost a concept of mental causation prior to (or as more fundamental to) our grasp of how bodies interact. Do we have good evidence that any (or all) conceivable intentional causal agency can only be exercised by exclusively physical forces? To successfully answer such a question in the affirmative, we would need a problem-free concept of what it is to be physical and (along with a number of philosophers like Noam Chomsky and Galen Strawson) I contend that we currently lack consensus on a sound understanding of what it is to be physical.[20]

Before turning to Draper on science, two further points about Fales. First, referring to the God of theism as "disembodied" is not without some precedence (e.g., in work by Richard Swinburne), but the term seems misleading.

"Disembodied" suggests being unnatural or damaged or impaired. A less misleading terms would be to refer to God in terms of the traditional attributes—which do not include "being disembodied," though some philosophers refer to God as immaterial or incorporeal. (In so doing, such philosophers did not think being immaterial or incorporeal entailed being disembodied, because the same philosophers thought we ourselves are immaterial or incorporeal souls and yet embodied.) Second, Fales implicitly seems to lean on a principle of the conservation of energy, suggesting that causation involves the transfer of energy in a closed, physical system. Even if the world is a closed physical system, we would still face the ultimate cosmological question of why there is such a system at all or a different system, to which theism has an answer (or so I have argued elsewhere). Theism would offer us a cosmic explanation of why our cosmos with its laws of nature exist and continue to exist. But it should also be added that there seems to be empirical evidence that causation within the physical world does not always involve the transference of energy. The evidence comes from quantum mechanics and from a theorem of John Bell's, appropriately called "Bell's Theorem," which shows that, if certain predicted correlations occur, then they cannot be explained through a transfer of energy.[21]

Let us now turn to Draper's position. In doing so, I suggest a modest, terminological point. In addition to using the term "theism," Draper uses the term "supernatural." I suggest the use of the term "supernatural" in this context is not helpful, as the "supernatural" includes all kinds of paranormal entities like ghosts and witches. Historically, the term "supernatural" was often aligned with superstition, involving phenomena that go beyond reason (see the use of the term by Hobbes in *Leviathan*). "Theism" is the more common and historically established usage. Moving to points of more substance, I do not think that the success of the natural sciences increases the likelihood of naturalism—quite the opposite. The natural sciences themselves do not provide any reason why the cosmos exists at all or continues to exist. To get such an account, I believe it is essential to appeal to the power of a necessarily existing being beyond the cosmos.

As for the thesis that, if there is a God it would be odd if the sciences can "completely ignore" God, this itself seems odd. If God (as traditionally conceived) exists, God is not an animal, rock, gas, energy field, and so on. God is not, in other words, the kind of being that is studied by science. The fact that natural science identifies natural causes (causes that do not involve special acts of divine agency) is not any reason to think there is not a God of nature or even a God who acts in the cosmos to bring about events that would not otherwise occur if there were no divine agency. This is because God is not available for repeatable experiments or subject to empirical observation (which is

not to say that God cannot be or is not experienced, just not experienced in empirically controllable experiments).

I propose in chapter 3 some reasons for thinking that theism is not a scientific hypothesis, but a philosophical worldview subject to the kinds of philosophical reasons that come into play in defending or objecting to philosophical worldview. In this chapter I only suggest that it is implausible to contend that the success of the natural sciences supports naturalism as a worldview, as opposed to theism, because it is implausible to believe that natural science employs as a presupposition *methodological atheism*—that is, a methodology that is explicitly committed to the nonexistence of the God of theism. It would be more accurate to claim that the natural sciences proceeds on the grounds of *methodological agnosticism* (simply not taking a stand in terms of affirming or denying the existence of God).

SURPRISED BY THEISM

I propose that background convictions are important in assessing whether theism or naturalism is the more natural (in terms of fitting, justified, plausible) position. The importance of background positions is evident in this observation by Paul Churchland:

> Most scientists and philosophers would cite the presumed fact that humans have their origins in 4.5 billion years of purely chemical and biological evolution as a weighty consideration in favor of expecting mental phenomena to be nothing but a particularly exquisite articulation of the basic properties of matter and energy.[22]

If we assume that we have a coherent, comprehensive account of the natural world in light of the natural sciences and our concept of God is fraught with "unnatural" problematic features, then naturalism wins. But there are reasons to question the sufficiency of naturalism in accounting for the existence and continuation of the cosmos itself.[23] And reasons to question those forms of naturalism that subordinate mind or the mental, and once we come to see the primacy of mental causation, we can appreciate more fully the promise of theism. Explanations in terms of intentionality (human or divine) are intelligible options in a cosmos that is not known to be exclusively materialist.

The goal of chapter 3 is to argue that naturalism faces a dilemma: the more contracted it becomes by narrowing its ontology to the natural sciences, the more implausible it becomes, but the more broad the form of naturalism, the less likely naturalism becomes and the more plausible theism becomes.[24]

NOTES

1. Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991), 33.
2. Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World*, from the *Representation and Mind Series* ed. Hillary Putnam and Ned Block (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 2.
3. Anthony Kenny, *The Unknown God* (London: Continuun, 2004), 79.
4. John Hick, "God and Christianity According to Swinburne," *European Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 27.
5. Ibid.
6. Evan Fales, *Divine Intervention* (London: Routledge, 2010), 16.
7. Ibid., 17.
8. Ibid., 26.
9. Jaegwon Kim, "Epiphenomenonal and Supervenient Causation," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. IX, ed. P. A. French, T. E. Uehing, and H. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 266.
10. Paul Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. W. J. Wainwright, 272–303, 299. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
11. Richard Fumerton, *Knowledge, Thought, and the Case for Dualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 233.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 218–19.
14. For a defense of the coherence of the theistic attributes, see my *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
15. For a defense of the cosmological argument see my *Philosophy of Religion: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).
16. For a philosophy of revelation, see my "Oracles, Obstacles, and Revelations," in *God, Mind, and Knowledge*, ed. Andrew Moore (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).
17. See Charles Taliaferro and Jil Evans, *The Image in Mind* (London: Continuum, 2011).
18. See my *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
19. See Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).
20. See Noam Chomsky, "Naturalism and Dualism in the Study of Language and Mind," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2, no. 2 (1994): 181–209.
21. See Chapter 6 in Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
22. Paul Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul: A Philosophical Journey into the Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 21.
23. For a brilliant defense of explaining the cosmos in terms of a transcendent, necessarily existing being, see Alexander Pruss and Joshua Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
24. I gratefully acknowledge comments and edits by Paul Copan and Wael Awada.

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Chapter 3

The Contraction and Expansion of Naturalism and the Theistic Challenge

Charles Taliaferro

There are many forms of naturalism today. Some naturalists endeavor to allow little more in their worldview and methodology than can be secured by the natural sciences. They thereby earn titles like *strict* or even *extreme scientific naturalists* (sometimes also called *puritanical naturalists*). Arthur Danto described naturalism along these lines when he characterized it as "a species of philosophical monism according to which whatever exists or happens is natural in the sense of being susceptible to explanation through methods . . . paradigmatically exemplified by the natural sciences."[1] In this chapter I take stock of such strict forms of naturalism, highlighting the difficulty facing such a contracted worldview. I then consider more expansive forms of naturalism, theories that have been described as forms of naturalism that are *broad*, *liberal*, *commonsensical*, *latitudinarian*, *friendly*, or simply *secular*. I argue that while broad naturalism is preferable to strict naturalism, the broader the form of naturalism, the more plausible theism becomes.

STRICT NATURALISM: THE PROBLEM OF LOCATION

Strict naturalism insists upon the primacy (or exclusive, unrivaled authority) of the world as described and explained by the natural science. Such a world is constructed from a third-person point of view. Strict naturalism is ably summarized in the passage from Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained* cited in chapter 2 [add page number]. Here is a more recent presentation of strict naturalism by Dennett in which he describes his worldview as behavioristic:

> My "behaviorism" . . . is the behaviorism of science. Meteorology is behavioristic in this sense and so is chemistry, and physics and geology and astronomy.

> When you have achieved a theory and explain all meteorological behavior, you get to declare victory, you've finished the task, because that's all there is to explain.[2]

Note that in Dennett's account, the modes of acceptable explanation (as with his earlier list of materialistic explanations) do not involve any reasons, thinking, experiencing, ideas, or thoughts. What we have in the case of Dennett (and others) is the forsaking of fundamental mental processes that make meteorology, physics, chemistry, biology, geology, and astrology possible. Sure, an account of the causal powers of subatomic particles may not require minds, but to conclude in some broader, philosophical way, "that's all there is to explain," is to forget that explaining, thinking, reasoning, subjective awareness, first-person points of view are there to also be taken into account.

To see how strict naturalism leads to a problematic view of experience and evident first-person conscious states, consider the work of Paul Churchland as well as further work by Dennett. In his classic text *Matter and Consciousness*, Churchland offers the following portrait of a neuroscientist who has a thorough, clear understanding of the body and its physical processes, but she is perplexed about whether there is anything more going on in persons than what is disclosed in terms of electrochemical events:

> Put yourself in the shoes of a neuroscientist who is concerned to trace the origins of behavior back up the motor nerves to the active cells in the motor cortex of the cerebrum, and to trace in turn their activity into inputs from other parts of the brain, and from the various sensory nerves. She finds a thoroughly physical system of awesome structure and delicacy, and much intricate activity, all of it unambiguously chemical or electrical in nature, and she finds no hint at all of any nonphysical inputs. . . . What is she to think? From the standpoint of her research, human behavior is exhaustively a function of the activity of the physical brain.[3]

The line of reasoning is in some sense elegant. Assuming that you can get an exhaustive, purely physical explanation going, why posit *some additional reality to do any work*? Churchland and Dennett both apply Ockham's razor: If there is no need to posit something in addition to the body and its physical states, do not do so. According to Dennett, dualism is the view that "an enlargement of the ontology of the physical sciences is called for"; dualism adds "something above and beyond the atoms and molecules that compose the brain."[4] If we can get a successful account of persons in the brain sciences or in the natural sciences more generally, it would be anti-scientific to be a dualist. Dennett sums up a view deeply shared in the current philosophical literature: "Dualism is to be avoided at all costs."[5]

Churchland further argues that when we consider our mental states of sensing and so on, we are not on reliable grounds in terms of understanding the true nature of the world or what we are sensing. Dualists wind up assuming that "inner observation or introspection reveals things as they really are in their innermost nature."[6] This assumption, however, should not be made.

> This assumption is suspect because we already know that our other forms of observation—sight, hearing, touch, and so on—do no such thing. The red surface of an apple does not look like a matrix of molecules reflecting photons at certain critical wave lengths, but that is what it is. The sound of a flute does not sound like a sinusoidal compression wave train in the atmosphere, but that is what it is. The warmth of the summer air does not feel like the mean kinetic energy of millions of tiny molecules, but that is what it is. If one's pains and hopes and beliefs do not introspectively seem like electrochemical states in a neural network, that may be only because our faculty of introspection, like our other senses, is not sufficiently penetrating to reveal such hidden details.[7]

Churchland proposes that the natural sciences are able to reveal the hidden structures of the world and its states more accurately than introspection or self-observation.

Dennett's case against subjective states of awareness is as radical as Churchland's. Dennett takes particular aim at our apparent awareness of ourselves as subjects, claiming that the idea that we are substantial individual subjects who endure over time and experience the world in different ways is problematic. Dennett thinks there is nothing physical in the brain or the body as a whole that can play the role of such a substantial, individual subject. "The trouble with brains," writes Dennett, "is that when you look in them, you discover that there's nobody home."[8] Dennett contends that the person is best viewed as a coordinated series of functions and that there is no self who acts as a subject. "Conscious minds are more-or-less serial virtual machines implemented—inefficiently—on the parallel hardware that evolution has provided for us."[9]

Dennett thinks that our tendency to believe that we have subjective appearances (what he calls "seemings") is due to an implicit assumption of some form of dualism. If there is a soul or self as a nonphysical subject, perhaps that self can be the subject of experience; Dennett describes dualism as positing a little person (a homunculus) in the head who beholds a screen on which are projected pictures of the external world. He describes the little person as occupying a Cartesian theater. But, according to Dennett, to court dualism is to entertain a virtual impossibility (see the problem of interaction below), and a proper explanation of the self needs to dispense with "seemings" and the Cartesian theater. Dennett does not go so far as to deny that people form

judgments, but he does deny that persons have experiential states in which the world appears to us in different ways.

> Perhaps the Cartesian Theatre is popular because it is the place where the seemings can happen in addition to the judgings. But . . . postulating a real seeming in addition to the judging or "taking" expressed in the subject's report is multiplying entities beyond necessity. Worse, it is multiplying entities beyond possibility; the sort of inner presentation in which real seemings happen is a hopeless metaphysical dodge, a way of trying to have your cake and eat it too, especially since those who are inclined to talk this way are eager to insist that this inner presentation does not occur in some mysterious, dualist sort of space perfused with Cartesian ghost-ether. When you discard Cartesian dualism, you really must discard the show that would have gone on in the Cartesian Theatre, and the audience as well, for neither the show nor the audience is to be found in the brain, and the brain is the only real place there is to look for them.[10]

The reasoning here seems to be that if we must recognize that subjects have experiential states (and presumably this includes an awareness that a light seemed to move along a path in a person's visual field) that are not themselves cognitive judgments, we have to posit a self. However, there is no self to be found in the brain, and the brain as a whole does not constitute a unified self. Therefore there cannot be such experiential appearings.

In a very useful book, *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction*, Susan Blackmore endorses Dennett's rejection of the substantial self, and she offers the following portrait of three choices in philosophy of mind. One can either embrace a dualist outlook (which is hopeless), adopt a form of materialism that simply asserts that the brain is conscious of itself (which she finds problematic), or deny the substantial self.

> Having rejected the Cartesian theatre, [Dennett] also rejects its audience of one who watches the show. The self, he claims, is something that needs to be explained, but it does not exist in the way that a physical object (or even a brain process) exists. Like a centre of gravity in physics, it is a useful abstraction. Indeed he calls it a "center of narrative gravity." Our language spins the story of a self and so we come to believe that there is, in addition to our single body, a single inner self who has consciousness, holds opinions, and makes decisions. Really, there is no inner self but only multiple parallel processes that give rise to a benign user illusion—a useful fiction. It seems we have some tough choices in thinking about our own precious self. We can hang on to the way it feels and assume that a persisting self or soul or spirit exists, even though it cannot be found and leads to deep philosophical troubles. We can equate it with some kind of brain process and shelve the problem of why this brain process should have conscious experience at all, or we can reject any persisting entity that corresponds to our feeling of being a self.[11]

Blackmore thinks "our feeling of being a self" is unreliable, and she rejects the idea that we are persisting selves. She acknowledges that this is not easy personally, but there are good intellectual grounds for the denial of a substantial self.

> The trouble is that it is very hard to accept in one's own personal life. It means taking a radically different view of every experience. It means accepting that there is no one who is having these experiences. It means accepting that every time I seem to exist, this is just a temporary fiction and not the same "me" who seemed to exist a moment before, or last week, or last year. This is tough, but I think it gets easier with practice.[12]

IS STRICT NATURALISM TOO RESTRICTIVE?

The first question to raise in response to the above radical materialist proposal is whether one can make any sense of "the third-person" point of view at work in science (and in ordinary, nonscientific reflection) without there being a first-person perspective of self-aware, conscious subjects. As noted in "Is Naturalism Natural?" Dennett claims to be more certain about mass, charge, and space-time than he is of experience.[13] How, though, might *we have any idea at all* of mass and charge or any science at all unless there are scientists who have experiences of the world and can reason about those experiences? Dennett's construction of science without experience (or a science that can construe experience as "a back burner issue") is a radical departure from the understanding of science from Copernicus and Galileo to Einstein which sees science itself as a purposive activity being carried out by subjects who record observations, engage in predictions, theories, and so on (all of which are presumed to involve experiences). As Richard Fumerton succinctly states concerning the primacy of the mental, all our beliefs about the world depend on our prior, clearer acquaintance with the mental: "Our thought of the physical is parasitic upon our thought of sensation."[14] In an important critique of projects like Dennett's and Churchland's with the telling title "Cognitive Suicide," Lynne Baker claims that their projects would leave the practice of science itself utterly mysterious: "It is difficult to see how to construe what scientists are doing when they engage in research if they lack mental states with content. The ideas of evidence, hypothesis, and experiment at least seem to presuppose [mental] content."[15]

Dennett and Churchland defend their giving exclusive priority to a scientific third-person approach to reality on the grounds that our appeal to experience in the first-person is profoundly unreliable. Why assume that we should be confident about our psychological states when we have been so wrong in the past with our beliefs about the world? Perhaps our confidence in the

reality of consciousness and experience is akin to past beliefs that the earth is flat and there are witches.[16] Two replies are in order.

First, how far off the track were the "folk" ideas in the past? Arguably, if the majority of the beliefs our ancestors had about food, work, safety, trade, and travel had not been reliable, then they would not have survived. Moreover, many people today overestimate the ignorance of the past, as has been exposed by books like Jeffrey Russell's *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians*, which points out that many pre-Columbians going all the way back to Ancient Greece knew what we know: the earth is round.

But second, and more importantly, conscious awareness and experience are simply too fundamental to not be confident that for as long as people could reflect on experience, they knew they were having experiences. A person in severe pain in ancient Babylon may have been confused about the cause of pain, and the pain may even have been induced by wildly false beliefs, but it is hard to believe that the subject might have been mistaken that he was feeling pain. It seems, instead, profoundly implausible that persons in the past were mistaken when they treated each other as having experiences of pain, pleasure, anger and love, and so on. This is not to say that progress has not been made to develop more accurate concepts and devices for describing and explaining experience, but it is difficult to hold that people were wrong in thinking they have experiences. According to Searle, if Dennett claims that persons in the past appeared to have experiences, then they had experiences; you cannot appear to have an experience without having an experience.

> But someone might object: Is it not possible that science might discover that Dennett was right, that there really are no such things as inner qualitative mental states, that the whole thing is an illusion like sunsets? After all, if science can discover that sunsets are a systematic illusion, why could it not also discover that conscious states such as pains are illusions too? There is this difference: in the case of sunsets science does not deny the existence of the datum, that the sun appears to move through the sky. Rather it gives an alternative explanation of this and other data. Science preserves the appearance while giving us a deeper insight into the reality behind the appearance. But Dennett denies the appearance to start with. But couldn't we disprove the existence of these data by proving that they are only illusions? No, you can't disprove the existence of conscious experiences by proving that they are only an appearance disguising the underlying reality, because *where consciousness is concerned the existence of the appearance is the reality*. If it seems to me exactly as if I am having conscious experiences, then I am having conscious experiences. This is not an epistemic point. I might make various sorts of mistakes about my experiences, for example, if I suffered from phantom limb pains. But whether reliably reported or not, the experience of feeling the pain is identical with the pain in a way that the experience of seeing a sunset is not identical with a sunset.[17]

Searle's point may be bolstered by considering how peculiar it would be for you to be working with a dentist who claims that, despite your appearing to be in agonizing, mind-shattering pain, this is merely an appearance and you are actually not feeling any pain at all. The dentist might accurately point out that the pain is being caused by tooth decay or certain nerve damage or perhaps the pain is brought on by your anxious anticipation of a root canal operation, but when it comes to pain itself, for a subjects to be in agonizing pain is for them to feel agonizing pain. There seems little room to avoid "mentalistic" terms here and substitute talk of pain with talk of purely physicochemical processes.

To bring to light the larger difficulty of simply beginning with what Churchland and Dennett understand to be our scientific, third-person view of the world, let us return to Churchland's description of the neurologist. Churchland describes a neurologist who finds "no hint at all of any nonphysical parts." She does, however, seem to be studying "sensory nerves" and so we can assume that her work includes some explanations of a subject having this or that sensation. Imagine the neurologist is trying to find the neurological conditions that are causing a subject acute pain. Using acute pain as an example of a sensory state, consider this question: Is the acute painful sensory state of the subject the very same thing as the "unambiguously chemical . . . activity of the physical brain"? Arguably, if the neurologist were only able to study the electrochemical properties of the brain as an unambiguous physical reality, she would not thereby be studying the sensation of acute pain. Presumably she could only learn that the subject is in pain based on the subject's testimony, behavioral signs (moaning), or correlating analogous chemical activities in other subjects who testify to pain or provide us with reliable behavioral signs. Simply to observe the electrochemical activity of the brain does not seem to amount to observing the acute pain. If she treats the electrochemical activity as pain, isn't that a matter of her adopting a theory of physicalism according to which sensations are brain states, rather than her making an empirical observation? I suggest that, strictly speaking, when the neurologist refers to pain states, it is far from clear that these states are to be treated exhaustively in terms of brain activity. As Richard Swinburne observes:

> My sensations are no doubt *caused* by brain-events, but they are not *themselves* brain-events. My having a red after-image or a pain or a smell of roast beef are real events. If science describes only firings of neurons in the brain, it has not told us everything that is going on. For it is a further fact about the world that there are pains and after-images, and science must state this fact and attempt to explain it.[18]

Might it be the case, however, that what we experience in the first-person simply is the very same thing as brain activity, though it is seen through

different frameworks or concepts? After all, the same person (Muhammad Ali) might be known under different names (Cassius Clay) and some people might mistakenly think there are two persons (that "Muhammad Ali" is a different person than the one called "Cassius Clay"). But Muhammad Ali is identical with Cassius Clay. Similarly, someone may understand water as H_2O and another person who lacks knowledge of atomic theory may simply know water as a colorless, odorless liquid. Yet H_2O is identical with water. Analogously, some philosophers propose that the first-person perspective is only a different framework or conceptual vantage point on what can be properly identified as nonmental, physicochemical processes from a third-person, scientific point of view.

One problem with this reply is that the different frameworks in the cases of Muhammad Ali/Cassius Clay and water/H_2O are merely species of the generic third-person framework. Hence it makes sense to assert that these terms refer to the same person or thing from different vantage points within the third-person framework. With a little investigation, you may see that the one called "Muhammad Ali" is the one called "Cassius Clay" and similarly with water being H_2O and a colorless, odorless liquid. To see water is to see H_2O. But the third-person and first-person perspectives are themselves different generic frameworks that lack a broader shared background framework in light of which to make sense of an assertion of identity between a brain state/event and a conscious, subjective experience. Thus, no amount of seeing brain activity will count as seeing consciousness or thinking.

A second problem with this defense of physicalism can be illustrated by considering Churchland's identification of warmth with mean molecular kinetic energy. It is true that if "temperature" ("warmth") refers to molecular motion in some inanimate object, then heat indeed mean molecular kinetic energy, but if "temperature" refers to *feeling hot* (a subjective state), it has not been "long established" that *feeling hot* is the very same thing as *molecules in motion*. It may be that there would be no feeling of heat without molecular motion, and it is reasonable to see molecular motion as the cause of feeling heat (in a being with a healthy nervous system and brain), but there is no evident identity between sensation and molecular motion. You could know all the facts about a human or nonhuman animal's molecular composition and activity, but without knowing how to correlate the molecular processes with something more (the *feeling* of heat), you would not know the mental states of the subject. And the same is true for Churchland's other cases: It is not obvious that seeing red is the same thing as a matrix of molecules reflecting photons; the molecular motion may (once it impacts a person's retina and stimulates the visual cortex) cause a person to see red, but the molecular motion is not necessarily the seeing itself. A musician may use a flute to cause a sinusoidal compression wave train in the atmosphere, but that is not the same thing as

the sensation of hearing music, which occurs only when the wave train stimulates the ear canal, and initiates an elaborate process involving the tympanic membrane, the stapes, the cochlea, the auditory cortex, and so on. All these give rise to a person's hearing the music as a sensory, conscious experience. Churchland can simply assert the contrary position that temperature (sensory feelings included) is mean molecular kinetic energy, and so on, but this would not count as an argument for the truth of his position.

As for Dennett's elimination of the self as a substantial individual known from a first-person point of view to have experiences and so on, his position is very difficult (as Blackmore concedes) to consistently embrace in practice as well as in our ethical reflection. In a book that is on philosophy of religion (*Breaking the Spell*) and not philosophy of mind, Dennett seems to be very comfortable with asserting our privileged awareness of our own mental states. In the following passage, Dennett seems to think that each of us is an "insider" when it comes to our own self-awareness but an "outsider" when it comes to other persons.

> When it comes to interpreting religious avowals of others, everybody is an outsider. Why? Because religious avowals concern matters that are beyond observation, beyond meaningful test, so the only thing anybody can go on is religious behavior, and, more specifically, the behavior of professing. A child growing up in a culture is like an anthropologist, after all, surrounded by informants whose professings stand in need of interpretation. The fact that your informants are your father and mother, and speak in your mother tongue, does not give you anything more than a slight circumstantial advantage over the adult anthropologist who has to rely on a string of bilingual interpreters to query the informants. (And think about your own case: weren't you ever baffled or confused about just what you were supposed to believe? You know perfectly well that *you* don't have privileged access to the tenets of the faith in which you were raised. I am just asking you to generalize the point, to recognize that others are in no better position.)[19]

Elsewhere in the same book Dennett seems to be fully committed to the reality of selves and the first-person point of view and to shed his skepticism about being a complete outsider to others' state of mind. Consider this passage in which Dennett seeks to comfort his daughter:

> One's parents—or whoever are hard to distinguish from one's parents—have something approaching a dedicated hotline to acceptance, not as potent as hypnotic suggestion, but sometimes close to it. Many years ago, my five-year-old daughter, attempting to imitate the gymnast Nadia Comaneci's performance on the horizontal bar, tipped over the piano stool and painfully crushed two of her fingertips. How was I going to calm down this terrified child so I could safely

> drive her to the emergency room? Inspiration struck: I held my own hand near her throbbing little hand and sternly ordered: "Look, Andrea! I'm going to teach you a secret! You can push the pain into my hand with your hand. Go ahead, push! Push!" she tried—and it worked! She'd "pushed the pain" into Daddy's hand. Her relief (and fascination) were instantaneous. The effect lasted only for minutes, but with a few further administrations of impromptu hypnotic analgesia along the way, I got her to the emergency room, where they could give her the further treatment she needed. (Try it with your own child, if the occasion arises. You may be similarly lucky.) I was exploiting her instincts—though the rationale didn't occur to me until years later, when I was reflecting on it.[20]

In reply, Dennett may claim that these sorts of narratives are merely narratives and do not reflect or presuppose the reality of himself or his daughter as subjects who endure over time as real beings as opposed to being like (to use Blackmore's language) a center of gravity or a useful fiction. But the above case illustrates how difficult it is in practice to foreswear what we seem to grasp in the first-person. Dennett's own reported practical experience gives us some reason for thinking that the existence of the self and first-person point of view is something that needs to be recognized and scientifically explored (what are the neurological conditions enabling us to manage pain, and so on) rather than deny or explain away.

There are multiple projects other than Dennett's and Churchland's to advance strict naturalism, but perhaps enough has been presented to see why many naturalists seek to develop a broader, more liberal form of naturalism.

HOW BROAD IS YOUR NATURALISM?

Huw Price paints the following dramatic portrait of the current intellectual climate when it comes to naturalism.

> Like coastal cities in the third millennium, important areas of human discourse seem threatened by the rise of modern science. The problem isn't new of course, or wholly unwelcome. The tide of naturalism has been rising since the seventeenth century, and the rise owes more clarity than to pollution in the intellectual atmosphere. All the same, the regions under threat are some of the most central in human life—the four Ms for example: Morality, Modality Meaning, and Mental. Some of the key issues in contemporary metaphysics concern the place and fate of such concepts in a naturalistic worldview.[21]

In the previous section, we have seen some of the difficulties facing a strict naturalist account of consciousness or the "Mental." Strict naturalism also

seems to face the difficulty of denying normative facts. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur put the problem this way:

> If one follows modern Scientific Naturalism in supposing that natural science, and only natural science, tells us what there is in the world, then there seems to be no room for the existence of normative facts—or at least this will be so insofar as they cannot be reduced to the kinds of objective, causal facts with which natural science deals. Such considerations set the stage for one of the fundamental issues confronting philosophers today: Are there any indispensable, irreducible normative facts involving, say, reasons, meanings, and values that are not, or cannot, be accommodated within the scientific image of the world?[22]

Broad naturalists remain naturalists insofar as they are not theists, nor do they accept that there are miracles, souls that may survive death, and so on. Broad naturalists sometimes include Platonic entities in their list of banned objects. But some strategies for helping oneself to ostensibly nonscientific objects without abandoning naturalism seem strained. For example, Thomas Scanlon recognizes the reality of moral norms and the truth of moral knowledge, but he claims this needs no metaphysical support and involves no explanatory claims involving the physical world.[23] But this seems radically at odds with what we seem to know in our experience: people make events happen for moral reasons, truly acting on the basis of what they believe to be right, and so some events in the natural world seem to require explanations that include norms. Attempts by naturalists like Richard Rorty to dispel or identify the obligation to seek the truth with contingent conventional practices of justification fail to take seriously the fact that we as speakers (virtually universally) understand ourselves to be governed by the deep normative value of truth-telling. As Huw Price argues:

> In order to account for a core part of ordinary conversational practice, we must allow that speakers take themselves and their fellows to be governed by a norm stronger than that of justification. Not only is this a norm which speakers acknowledge they may fail to meet, even if their claims are well-justified—this much is true of what Rorty calls the cautionary use of truth—but also, more significantly, it is a norm which speakers immediately assume to be breached by someone with whom they disagree, independently of any diagnosis of the source of the disagreement. Indeed, this is the very essence of the norm of truth, in my view. It gives disagreement its immediate normative character, a character on which dialogue depends, and a character which no lesser norm could provide.[24]

Broad naturalists do well to acknowledge the bona fide status of intentional explanations. Strict naturalists face a serious difficulty of undermining reason when they supplant intentional accounts with non-intentional ones. If asked

to identify the smallest perfect number, presumably you would answer "6" because it is equal to the sum of its devisors, including "1" but not including itself, and there is no smaller number for which this is true. But what if the real explanation lies in physical-chemical processes lacking in beliefs? Such an explanation would be hopeless in terms of accounting for your saying "6" because this is entailed by 3+2+1.[25]

But once broad naturalism expands to include all such realities (consciousness; irreducible, intentional explanations; normative facts; etc.), is it still reasonable to believe that all that emerged from non-teleological, nonconscious sources? As J. L. Mackie notes, naturalism leaves us with the existence of the cosmos as a brute, not further accountable fact, and not intelligible "through and through."[26] Isn't it time to consider an alternative framework that might offer an intelligible account of why this cosmos exists and persists?

THE THEISTIC ALTERNATIVE

Strict and broad naturalists are united (as noted above) in their rejection of theism. Here, for example, is a wholesale rejection of theism in light of naturalism:

> Supernaturalism is ruled out since no object, property, or event can be causally efficacious in the natural world and yet fail to be an object of scientific investigation (in principle, at least). In this light, liberal naturalists have no problem in ruling out, on scientific grounds, supernatural entities such as immaterial gods, infinite and perfect divine attributes, irreducibly miraculous events, or Cartesian minds—that is, causally efficacious immaterial particulars that cannot in principle be investigated scientifically. Moreover, supernatural entities (both causally efficacious and noncausally efficacious) would require special modes of understanding that would be irreconcilable with scientific explanation—and would thereby violate the fundamental claim of naturalism.[27]

Naturalists have further argued that theism in principle is not well-suited for explanatory purposes. I cite Jan Narveson at length.

> It ought to be regarded as a major embarrassment to natural theology that the very idea of something like a universe's being "created" by some minded being is sufficiently mind-boggling that any attempt to provide a detailed account of how it might be done is bound to look silly, or mythical, or a vaguely anthropomorphized version of some familiar physical process. Creation stories abound in human societies, as we know. Accounts ascribe the creation to various mythical beings, chief gods among a sizeable polytheistic committee, giant

> tortoises, super-mom hens, and, one is tempted to say, God-knows-what. The Judeo-Christian account does no better, and perhaps does a bit worse, in proposing a "six-day" process of creation.
>
> It is plainly no surprise that details about just how all this was supposed to have happened [God creating the cosmos] are totally lacking when they are not, as I say, silly or simply poetic. For the fundamental idea is that some infinitely powerful mind simply willed it to be thus, and as they say, Lo!, it was so! If we aren't ready to accept that as an explanatory description—as we should not be, since it plainly doesn't explain anything, as distinct from merely asserting that it was in fact done—then where do we go from there? On all accounts, we at this point meet up with mystery. "How are we supposed to know the ways of the infinite and almighty God?" it is asked—as if that put-down made a decent substitute for an answer. But of course it doesn't. If we are serious about "natural theology," then we ought to be ready to supply content in our explication of theological hypotheses. Such explications carry the brunt of explanation. Why does water boil when heated? The scientific story supplies an analysis of matter in its liquid state, the effects of atmospheric pressure and heat, and so on until we see, in impressive detail, just how the thing works. An explanation's right to be called "scientific" is, indeed, in considerable part earned precisely by its ability to provide such detail.[28]

How might theism be defended in response to this dismissal of supernaturalism and Narveson's disparagement of theistic explanations?

Several points are worth observing in response. First we have seen how scientific knowledge cannot and should not rule out consciousness. And insofar as naturalists are compelled to recognize irreducible intentional explanations, there seems to be a reply to Narveson. If he wants there to be a mediated mechanism to account for our exercise of power, he seems to rule out basic powers for humans. And this seems implausible. Philosophers as diverse as Arthur Danto and Roderick Chisholm have argued that, on pain of an infinite regress, some of our acts must be basic and unmediated.[29] If my intending to write this sentence required me to intend something else and that required a further intention, and so on ad infinitum, ultimately I would have no powers of intentionality. We have further seen there are problems with ruling out intentional explanations involving norms. Narveson caricatures God's creating light by willing that there be light, but caution is in order lest we render nonsensical my deciding to turn on a light so that I might see you better.

As for "immaterial entities," the concept of what counts as material or immaterial is highly contentious (as noted in the previous chapter). I have argued elsewhere for a nonmaterialist view of consciousness.[30] Rather than recapitulate such arguments, I cite one materialist, Michael Lockwood, who has pointed out the ostensible implausibility of materialism.

> Let me begin by nailing my colours to the mast. I count myself a materialist, in the sense that I take consciousness to be a species of brain activity. Having said that, however, it seems to me evident that no description of brain activity of the relevant kind, couched in the currently available languages of physics, physiology, or functional or computational roles, is remotely capable of capturing what is distinctive about consciousness. So glaring, indeed, are the shortcomings of all the reductive programmes currently on offer, that I cannot believe that anyone with a philosophical training, looking dispassionately at these programmes, would take any of them seriously for a moment, were it not for a deep-seated conviction that current physical science has essentially got reality taped, and accordingly, *something* along the lines of what the reductionists are offering *must* be correct. To that extent, the very existence of consciousness seems to me to be a standing demonstration of the explanatory limitations of contemporary physical science. On the assumption that some form of materialism is nevertheless true, we have only to introspect in order to recognize that our present understanding of matter is itself radically deficient. Consciousness remains for us, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, what it was for Newton at the dawn of the eighteenth century: an occult power that lies beyond the pool of illumination that physical theory casts on the world we inhabit.[31]

If consciousness (intentions, desires, and so on) turns out to be nonphysical, then naturalists need to accommodate it in bona fide explanations. And if one cannot or should not rule out irreducibly teleological explanations we seem to be en route to entertaining the possibility of a cosmic teleological explanation in the form of theism.

One further important point needs to be addressed, concerning the difference between a scientific and philosophical explanation. Some naturalists appear to believe that if there is a God who created and sustains the cosmos, there must be material or scientifically determinable signs of God's action. John Searle, for example, writes:

> If it should turn out that God exists, that would have to be a fact of nature like any other. To the four basic forces in the universe—gravity, electromagnetism, weak and strong nuclear forces—we would add a fifth, the divine force. Or more likely, we would see the other forces as forms of the divine force. But it would still be all physics, albeit divine physics. If the supernatural existed, it too would have to be natural.[32]

Searle and many naturalists seem to insufficiently appreciate the theistic claim that God is the necessarily existing, omnipresent, all good, omnipotent, omniscient creator and sustainer of the cosmos. That the cosmos exists at all or endures over time and at any time is due to God's ongoing creative conservation. This thesis does not entail that there would be some material divine force in the cosmos (like radiation) but that the cosmos as a whole

only exists in virtue of God's purposive action. The fact (if it is one) that God sustains a contingent cosmos does not compete with natural and social science; it rather accounts for why there exists and persists a cosmos at all. Timothy O'Connor develops this point well in a recent defense of the cosmological argument.

> If our universe truly is contingent, the obtaining of certain fundamental facts or other will be explained without empirical theory, whatever the topological structure of empirical reality. An infinite regress of beings in or outside the spatiotemporal universe cannot forestall such a result. If there is to be an ultimate, or complete, explanation, it will have to ground in some way the most fundamental, contingent facts of the universe in a necessary being, something which has the reason for its existence within its own nature. It bears emphasis that such an unconditional explanation need not in any way compete with conditional, empirical explanations. Indeed, it is natural to suppose that empirical explanations will be subsumed within the larger structure of the complete explanation.[33]

CONCLUSION

I suggest that contemporary naturalism faces a difficult challenge. Restricted, highly constrained forms of strict naturalism are at radical odds with evident facts: the existence of consciousness, experience, intentional activity, norms, and so on. Broader naturalism is more plausible for accepting such a plethora of entia. But once we take on broader and broader concepts of the natural world, we invite another conversation. Given the increasing appreciation of the obstacles facing naturalism, should we reconsider the secular basis of naturalism?[34] In a number of publications,[35] I have urged that we should and that continued inquiry leads to a positive reappraisal of theism.[36]

NOTES

1. Arthur Danto, "Naturalism," in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 448.
2. D. Papineau and D. Dennett, "Philosophers and a Philosophical Dispute," *Times Literary Supplement* (August 2, 2017), 16.
3. Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 11.
4. Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 15.
5. Ibid., 37.
6. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, 15.
7. Ibid.

8. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 29.
9. Ibid., 218.
10. Ibid., 134.
11. Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.
12. Ibid., 81.
13. Daniel Dennett makes this claim in, "Facing Backwards on the Problem of Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3, no. 6 (1996): 4–6.
14. Richard Fumerton, *Knowledge, Thought, and the Case for Dualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 245.
15. Lynne Baker, "Cognitive Suicide," repr. in *Philosophy of Mind*, ed. John Heil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 404.
16. See Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, 46.
17. John Searle, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 1997), 111–12.
18. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, 8.
19. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006), 239–40.
20. Ibid., 130.
21. Huw Price, "Naturalism and the fate of the M-words," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1997): 247.
22. Mario De Caro and David McArthur, "Introduction," in *Naturalism and Normativity*, eds. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1.
23. See Thomas Scanlon, "Metaphysics and Morals," in *Naturalism and Normativity*, eds. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 173–92.
24. Huw Price, "Truth as Conventional Fiction," in *Naturalism and Normativity*, eds. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 230.
25. For an extended defense of irreducible, teleological explanations, see Charles Taliaferro and Jil Evans, *The Image in Mind* (London: Continuum, 2011).
26. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 85–86.
27. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, "Introduction," in *Naturalism and Normativity*, eds., Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 12–13.
28. Jan Narverson, "God by Design?" in *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, ed. Neil Manson (London: Routledge, 2003), 93.
29. See Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1976).
30. See Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
31. Michael Lockwood, "Consciousness and the Quantum World," in *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Q. Smith and A Jokic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 447.

32. John Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 35.

33. Timothy O'Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 76.

34. For further problems facing naturalism, see *Naturalism; A Critical Analysis*, eds. W. L. Craig and J. P. Moreland (London: Routledge, 2000).

35. See my *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and (with Stewart Goetz) *Naturalism* (Grands Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

36. I thank Paul Copan and Wael Awada for helpful comments and edits on an earlier version of this chapter.

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Chapter 4

Taking Philosophical Naturalism Seriously

Naturalism, Intentionality, and Knowledge

R. Scott Smith

Quite rightly, we value knowledge. According to much of contemporary Western academia, the sciences uniquely give us knowledge, or, at least, a superior kind of knowledge compared to that of religion or ethics. Of course, to be orthodox, scientists today should be methodological naturalists. As such, they should limit their accounts of physical events to the realm of nature. They should not appeal to any nonnatural agents or entities. Others, though, go further thinking that we also should be ontological naturalists. That is, roughly, the natural, or material, "realm" exhausts all that exists. There are no supernatural or immaterial entities; in particular, there are no essences, by which I mean Aristotelian natures. If real, an essential nature would be a thing's *whatness*—it would define what *kind* of thing something is. Thus, a human soul would define one as a *human* being. Moreover, each particular human soul would have present in it humanness, which is a form, or universal.

Yet, I will argue that ontological naturalism undercuts itself by depriving us of knowledge of the world, including in science. Still, we do have many cases in which we do know reality, and so a radically different ontology must be true. Thus, my focus is on the *ontology* of naturalism and *its* implications for knowledge of reality, including in science, *not* methodological naturalism as practiced in science. Moreover, my argument is similar to, but quite distinct from, Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism. On his view, we could not *trust* the deliverances of our cognitive faculties if they are the result of random processes.[1] Thus, his view allows for the possibility that there are irreducible mental states that could be together with their objects. However, I will contend that since there cannot be any irreducible

mental qualities on naturalism's ontology, there will not be any real *intentionality*. By "intentionality," I simply mean the ofness or aboutness of things like our thoughts, beliefs, purposes, concepts, and experiences used to make observations. Without intentionality, though, we will not have beliefs, concepts, or even interpretations. Moreover, there will not be any knowledge, and this is due to what we lack ontologically on naturalism.

To show this, I will explore primarily Daniel Dennett's views, especially his treatment of intentionality. I will use Dennett's important work, *The Intentional Stance*, and then supplement it with other writing he has done since then, all but one essay of which appears in his book *Brainchildren*. A more recent essay is his review of Robert Brandom's book, *Making It Explicit*.

After assessing his views, I will see if there are other naturalistic resources to solve this problem. There, I will consider Michael Tye's positions. These cases will help bring to light this problem for naturalism generally. However, since we do know reality in many instances, a different ontology must be true. Then, positively, I will try to show how we can know reality, which requires the existence and use of essences. Finally, I will suggest that these findings have important implications for science and even religion.

DENNETT'S VIEWS

For Dennett, "philosophy is allied with, and indeed continuous with, the physical sciences," and this makes his position amenable to many scientists.[2] Unlike many naturalistic philosophers, such as Fred Dretske or Michael Tye, Dennett argues that mental entities (like thoughts, beliefs, experiences, desires, etc.) and their intentional contents are not real. By "contents," he means the propositional content of a thought or belief, the felt-quality of an experience, and the like. Instead, he argues that we should consider them functionally, that "all attributions of content are founded on an appreciation of the *functional roles* of the items in question in the biological economy of the organism (or the engineering of the robot)."[3] However, this does not mean that Dennett is a thoroughgoing anti-realist; rather, he affirms a type of realism on which there exist objective patterns that real brains can detect in the real world.

Dennett focuses on predicting and explaining the behavior of entities, and he employs three strategies. First, from the *physical stance*, we treat an entity from the standpoint of the physical sciences, drawing upon the entity's physical makeup and the laws of physics. Second, and higher, we can adopt the *design stance* according to which we treat an entity as having been designed in a certain way. We then can make predictions that it will behave according to that design. Finally, we can use the *intentional stance* to interpret "an

entity by adopting the presupposition that is an approximation of the ideal of an optimally designed (i.e. rational) self-regarding agent."[4] The intentional stance works with his notion of an intentional system, which is anything that is amenable to analysis by that tactic.

To illustrate, humans would be intentional systems of the highest order on Earth. While a chess-playing computer's behavior can be interpreted from the physical and design stances, it also can be regarded as an intentional system that acts "rationally relative to a certain set of beliefs and goals."[5] Which stance we take reflects the need to predict and explain the computer's behavior. Adopting the intentional stance allows us much efficiency and power in predicting and explaining what the computer will do. When the entity is functioning properly, this stance allows us the efficiency of not having to know many (or all) of the details of the computer's design, or even its physical makeup. In addition, programmers could use many different designs to construct the computer's software; likewise, the physical constitution of the computer could vary widely from others. Importantly, we do not have to worry about all those details. Instead, by *treating* the computer as a rational agent with beliefs about the rules and strategies of chess, and the desire to win, we can predict that the computer will make the best available move in a given set of circumstances.

Therefore, the intentional stance is a *tactic* that enables us to predict defeasibly the behavior of entities via the *attribution* of intentionality. However, it does not commit us to the reality of such mental entities or their content. Rather, for Dennett, these attributions "are interpretations of the phenomena," and they serve as a "heuristic overlay."[6] Thus, for Dennett, to do good science, we do not need to introduce entities as objectively real beyond the metaphysical limits of materialistic science. We simply need to understand them as they truly are—*interpretations* or *takings* of things to be a certain way, when in reality there are no such things.

Now, Dennett's functionalist treatment of mental states and intentionality has raised questions. For instance, do animals have beliefs? In an essay by that name, Dennett says the answer depends on what we mean by "belief." In the sense that if "whatever the [animal's brain] structure is, it is sufficient to permit the sort of intelligent choice of behavior that is well predicted from the intentional stance," then animals have beliefs, as do amoebas and thermostats.[7]

On the other hand, if we press for what is *really* going on in an animal (or a human being) that has a belief, we have embarked on misguided search. Beyond what we can know from the intentional stance, there are no deeper facts to enable us to decide or know what is objectively real. Instead, when we pursue such further questions, "either you are curious about the actual design of their brains (at many levels of analysis), and the rationale of that design, or

you just want to know the most predictive intentional stance characterization of the animal with all its idealizations. If you think there is another, deeper sort of fact about animal minds, then the intentional stance won't help you find it—but then nothing will, since . . . you are no longer doing the cognitive science of wild animals; you are on a wild goose chase."[8]

Importantly, Dennett also rejects realism of mental content because he understands natural selection as a process that does not have foresight or representations (e.g., providing information about, or standing for, something) at all.[9] Additionally, all artifact intentionality (e.g., the ofness or aboutness of computer programs, or a robot with the most sophisticated AI design) derives from human intentionality. Nevertheless, if we take evolution by natural selection seriously, Dennett argues that humans also are artifacts. If so, our intentionality is not original, but derived as well.[10] Therefore, Dennett takes this point as decisive against realism of mental content, for if it were real, there always would be a matter of fact what a person really means, which would be real, objective, and have original, *intrinsic* intentionality.[11]

Since all human intentionality must be derived, we lack any intrinsic intentionality. Dennett also adopts the intentional stance toward evolution itself, such that if there is any original intentionality, "natural selection deserves the honor."[12] Indeed, he observes that this way of speaking of the design of artifacts by natural selection is quite common, even compelling. He therefore questions why realists about mental content, such as Dretske or Tye, would not want to embrace that implication of evolution by natural selection, when they are ready to embrace others.

Dennett suggests two main, yet unobvious, reasons. First, if we are artifacts with derived intentionality, then we have no special authority over our mental lives via privileged access. However, second, even if we have such access to "deeper" facts (e.g., our mental states' contents), in order to fix the meanings of our thoughts, statements, and so on, those "facts" will fail to achieve their desired result, since there are *no deeper facts*.[13] Following W. V. O. Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation, there will be no deeper facts to determine the meaning of some words, or of some behavior, precisely because there are *no essences* to fix these meanings. As Dennett remarks, "Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation is thus of a piece with his attack on essentialism; if things had real, intrinsic essences, they could have real, intrinsic meanings."[14]

In his review essay of Robert Brandom's book *Making It Explicit*, Dennett gives further insights into this distinction between original and derived intentionality. Mostly, Dennett does not revise his work in *The Intentional Stance* so much as extend it. He takes up the two different routes he and Brandom take to answer, "Whence do intentional systems get their intentionality?"

That is, Dennett argues there must be a terminus somewhere to stop a regress, and his answer was (and still is) "the process of evolution by natural selection."[15] However, for Brandom, intentionality is a linguistic matter. Thus, his "regress stopper" is a community of language users.

In the face of this apparent challenge to his views, Dennett does not seem to modify his earlier answer in *The Intentional Stance*; rather, he further explains his rationale. Consider a case of communicating robots and their makers. In his earlier work, he would have focused his attention on how a robot would have derived its intentionality from its designers, to stop naturalistically a regress of derived intentionality. In so doing, he simply did not "make a big deal about the fact that this presupposes a community of communicators."[16]

That does not mean, however, that then he had little or no place for a community of language users. Already Dennett had observed that semantic properties of words and brain states involve more than relations to similar things. They also involve relations to the whole life of an organism and its environmental interaction, which would include a community.[17] Later, Dennett realizes that in *The Intentional Stance* he had "passed over . . . the issue of a community of communicating robot-makers as if it might be a local accident of history, rather than a constitutive requirement," but now he agrees that Brandom is right on that point.[18]

However, Dennett argues that Brandom is mistaken on grounding intentionality in the community. For even if the members of the community's language games have intentionality and thus can recognize various purposes in speech acts, how did they first come to have intentionality? Here, Dennett still argues that the best answer for a naturalist is to embrace his approach from *The Intentional Stance*, to appeal to the process of evolution by natural selection, and not a community, a gift from God, or some other nonnaturalistic answer.

With this background in place, now I will turn to assess the prospects for our abilities to know reality on Dennett's views.

ASSESSING DENNETT'S PROPOSAL

Dennett's work seems quite consistent in cashing out the implications of ontological naturalism and evolution by natural selection. He rightly appreciates the usefulness and power of adopting the physical, design, and intentional stances. Moreover, Dennett seems right; if there are no mental entities or content, then it seems the only room for "them" is in our use of such terms. Following Quine, Dennett rightly argues that if there are no essences to words, meanings, or mental states, or if there are no intrinsically mental qualities (a lesson we should draw from a consistent reading of naturalistic

evolution), then the thesis of indeterminacy of translation seems right, and it is integrally involved with his and Quine's attack on essentialism.

However, consider another observation Dennett makes in *The Intentional Stance*. In a discussion of real patterns and deeper facts, and Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, Dennett notices that Samuel Wheeler draws insightful connections between Jacques Derrida, Quine, and Donald Davidson. Wheeler argues that Derrida provides "important, if dangerous, supplementary arguments and considerations" to the ones that Davidson and other Quinians have made.[19] Wheeler explains that "for Quinians . . . it is obvious already that speech and thought are brain-writing, some kind of tokenings which are as much subject to interpretation as any other."[20]

Though Dennett denies the reality of any sort of essences, including intrinsically mental features, he maintains there are certain brute facts that are true of the real world, regardless of how we interpret it. This latter, good claim is a metaphysical one. Surely a mind-independent world exists that we can investigate and know by science. Still, on his view, since there are no essences, there are no mental states or representations that are intrinsically (i.e., due to their nature—what they are) about anything. Furthermore, natural selection is completely unrepresenting, so there cannot be any "natural signs," something that intrinsically would represent something else.

Therefore, Dallas Willard rightly argues that Dennett seems left only with "takings." That is, we *take* some inputs *as* some other things, or we *interpret* some input *as* something.[21] Dennett has stated this point almost explicitly when he discusses how brains process their raw stimulation: "There is no place where 'it all comes together,' no line the crossing of which is definitive of the end of pre-conscious processing and the beginning of conscious appreciation."[22] It seems there is no room for any aspect of the world to come directly before us in conscious awareness, to know as it is, apart from how that input has been processed, or taken, to be.

If any particular "taking as" cannot represent intrinsically something else, then that "taking" also must be taken, or interpreted, to be something else. Moreover, we also must take *that* taking as something else, and so on to infinity, without a way to start. As Willard contends, "Either there is going to be at some point a 'taking as' which does not itself represent anything (even what is 'taken')—which certainly sounds like a self-contradiction and is at best unlike the instances of 'taking' featured in Dennett's explanations—or there is going to be an infinite regress of takings."[23]

Yet, could not Dennett appeal to the reality of various brute facts as a way to stop this regress? As we have seen, he maintains there are real patterns, brains, and other facts about the real world. Moreover, we seem quite able to know these by science, so those two observations should stop the regress.

Now, many, including Dennett and myself, would not deny that a real world exists independently of our knowing it. Still, how would we know the things he maintains are real? It seems it would be by our using our senses to have experiences *of* them. Indeed, like thoughts and beliefs, these experiences, which we are using to make observations, also seem to be *of* things (a gas's behavior, a palm tree, Zika virus, etc.), and that ability requires intentionality.

Now, if we pay attention to what is before us in conscious awareness (whatever consciousness turns out to be), whether in scientific experiments or just daily life, I think we can make a significant observation: It does not seem possible that our experiences could be about anything else and still be those particular experiences. For instance, suppose we are measuring quantities of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in North America. Then we see if there are correlations of that data with changes in temperature patterns. It does not seem our observations of a gas could represent something else and still be *that* experience. Nor does it seem my taste of my Starbuck's chocolate smoothie *could* be about something else. I could have *different* experiences, but those particular experiences could not be about anything else and still be themselves. It seems that just due to what they are, our experiences are about their intended objects, even if those objects, such as Pegasus, do not obtain in reality. That is, our experiences' intentionality is *intrinsic*.

However, Dennett rejects intrinsic intentionality. Moreover, we have seen that he realizes we need *real* essences to our intentional states for there to be a *fact* of what our mental states are about. Now, such states include interpretations, for interpretations have intentionality too. However, without real, intrinsic intentionality, there is *no* real, intrinsic aboutness even to our interpretations.

What then should we think about Dennett's claims to be making interpretations of intentional systems from the intentional stance, or his claims about brute facts and objective patterns in reality? At best, we can only *take* (conceive, interpret) things to be such-and-such. If everything we can know, think about, or even experience is the result of a process involving only *takings*, since nothing is immediately *given* to us, then it seems *everything*, even Dennett's "brute facts," are not exempt from Derrida's point: Everything is a "text" which needs interpretation. Dennett's so-called brute, objective facts of the real world also are conceptualizations, the result of the "raw stimulus" having been "cooked" by the brain's distributed processes according to his multiple-drafts view of consciousness.[24] Even the so-called raw stimulus and objective patterns end up being interpretations (of something, but what?), just like the attributions of intentionality and folk psychological entities.

This problem is quickly exacerbated for it propels into a regress. If even what we think is given is just an interpretation, what is it we are interpreting? It seems we cannot have any way to get started with the interpretations. Moreover, there would not be any knowledge of reality, for it also requires *real* intentionality—for knowledge too is of things.

So, how can Dennett rationally justify his privileging the third-person, objective, materialistic view of the natural sciences of the real world? On his view, the language of materialism, cognitive science, and so on would be just as subject to Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation as the language of folk psychology. Why? The languages of cognitive science and materialism also end up being brain-writings, which are tokens. Therefore, as Dennett has admitted, they would be as much in need of interpretation as any other facet of existence.

Thus, when all the "facts" are in, there still will be alternative ways of stating them, in addition to the language of materialism and cognitive science. There will be no deeper facts to settle disputes that would arise, since there are no real essences. Therefore, applying Dennett's own logic, it always will be possible in principle for rival interpretations to tie for first place, with no way to adjudicate between them.

Perhaps Dennett could shift tactics and claim that his choice of a starting point is well justified, in that the materialistic, objective view of the world by the natural sciences is orthodoxy, which also has proven to be immensely progressive. Indeed, I would add that we have gained much knowledge through the natural sciences. Therefore, Dennett could argue that we do not need to posit unnecessary entities, and so this position seems to enjoy simplicity. Of course, Dennett's starting point is today's orthodoxy, and his approach allows us to make good predictions and solve a number of problems.

Nevertheless, any weight in its favor due to simplicity seems undermined by our utter inability to observe, think, or have knowledge. Therefore, it seems Dennett should take his own suggestion more seriously, that there are important, if not dangerous, parallels between his views and those of Derrida. The danger, however, is to Dennett's own views, including ontological naturalism, naturalistic evolution, and the practice of science. Derrida draws the more consistent conclusion than Dennett seems willing to do, once we acknowledge that there are only interpretations. Derrida realizes that if there are no givens, nothing is ever directly (immediately) present before us, and therefore everything is interpretation. Dennett, however, wants to privilege his "story," with its realist elements, as the objective truth about reality, but his own views (and those of ontological naturalism) end up being just another interpretation, and one that cannot give us the objective truth of the matter.

Thus, we have seen serious problems for Dennett's naturalism. This same problem seems to afflict eliminativist views as well, also due to a denial of

intentional states, their contents, and essences. However, perhaps there are other options available to naturalists that might overcome the lack of knowledge that seems to follow from Dennett's naturalism. For example, could some naturalists affirm there are real intentional states that, in some way, are *indeed* of their objects? It seems that a view like that of Michael Tye might fit those requirements very well. Therefore, I now turn to a summary of his views and their prospects.

TYE'S VIEWS

Unlike Dennett, Tye thinks our mental states (particularly perceptual states) and their intentionality are real. They are about their objects—and not something else—because they causally covary under optimal conditions.[25] Moreover, Tye is a representationalist; he thinks we can be directly acquainted with objects in reality.[26]

Also unlike Dennett's functionalism, Tye embraces a token reductive physicalism.[27] At the end of the day, though mental states, their qualia, and intentionality are real, they are reducible to particular brain states or configurations. Yet, Tye also distinguishes between *facts* and *FACTS*; the former involve *interpretations* of the physical, while the latter are nonconceptual.[28] While the language of physicalism can describe exhaustively the *FACTS* of reality, *facts* such as intentionality and mental states are conceptualizations of brain states.

Now, as a physicalist, Tye's view prohibits the existence of essences; so it might seem that his view might fare no better than Dennett's. That is, it seems Tye's view also might face a regress of interpretations without a way for us to start and know reality.[29] However, perhaps Tye has a solution for how a mental state can be about its intended object. On his view, a mental state represents, or is together, with its object due to their causal covariation.

Now, on a physicalist view, suppose we observe a liquid's behavior under certain conditions. Some light waves bounce off the liquid, impinge on our retinas, and eventually cause electrical-chemical reactions in our optic nerves, which cause brain states. Our "experiences" are the last state in a long, causal, completely physical chain. Surely empirical observations involve a causal process like this.

Even so, on physicalism it means we can work only with the last physical state. It seems we cannot transcend it or the causal chain of physical states and know if that last state is "about" the liquid or not.[30] Therefore, Tye's treatment of intentionality as just causal covariation in a physical system will not suffice to preserve the togetherness of a mental state with its object.

Now, so far, I have been making a negative case against our ability to know reality based on ontological naturalism. Yet, we do in fact *know* many truths about reality, and much of our knowledge has come through science. How can this be? In the next section, I will sketch such an argument.

TOWARD A POSITIVE CASE: THE ONTOLOGY NEEDED FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE OF REALITY

How might we account for the intrinsic intentionality of our mental states? Dennett realizes that if there were real essences, there could be a fact of the matter to a meaning of a word or expression. Similarly, if there were real essences to intentional states, then mental states really could have their intentionality intrinsically. That is, they would be of their object simply due to *what* they are.

However, just because we can have experiences that we use to make observations (such as of behaviors of gases in experiments), or thoughts about those behaviors, a mental state's mere intentionality is not sufficient in itself for our mental states to be together with its object. For we can think about many things, including possible states of affairs, without them having to obtain, such as Pegasus, or if my glasses are on my desk at home (when in fact they are on my dresser). The latter case parallels those in scientific testing of hypotheses, where we form a hypothesis and then test to see if it is accurate or not. Conversely, the existence of an object does not entail that there would be any thoughts or experiences of it. Generally speaking, there is not a necessary connection between mental states about an object and the object itself. Their connection, therefore, is *not* an existential one. What then would be the "nature" of their connection? Ontologically, how can our mental states be together with their intended objects?

Now, surely, they can be, and indeed, they often are, just as scientists, philosophers, and others presuppose in their daily lives. Since (1) the connection is not an existential one; (2) naturalists deny the existence of essences; and (3) there is no real, intrinsic intentionality on naturalism, it seems that we have reached a conclusion that undermines naturalism: The needed connection seems to be due to essences, just as Dennett realizes. If a mental state is of the appropriate kind, then the objectivity of the object is knowable. For example, we would not taste an argument to test its validity, nor would we tune a violin by smelling the strings. Instead, there seem to be constraints of an essential kind that determine which mental states and objects can come together in what Edmund Husserl called a relationship of "fulfillment," or verification. We can attend to a relationship in which the object is present before us in conscious awareness and found to be as we think it is.[31] Wholes,

such as balls, persons, insects, and more can enter into that relationship with the mental states that are of them due to the kind of properties they have. A given mental state is intrinsically of or about its intended object (whether it obtains or not) due to that state's intentional nature, or essence—to be of or about that object.

Some might object that perhaps naturalists can alleviate these concerns if they are willing to admit the emergence of genuinely irreducible intentional properties, mental ones that have as their essence to be of or about their intended object. Such mental states might emerge from the brain while remaining causally dependent upon it for their existence. However, even if we have such states, can they help us in knowing reality? Somehow, we need to be able to use them. Take a mundane case, an experience of some small, red, round object at a distance, such that we cannot discern if it is a ball, an apple, or something else. As we walk toward it, we can make observations of it. At some point, we can see it more clearly, and it appears to be an apple, but, of what kind? We make more observations, perhaps looking at its shape and bottom, where we notice it has the points that are characteristic of Red Delicious apples. We then form the belief that this is a Red Delicious apple.

Somehow, we have had a series of experiences that we know are of the same object. We progressed to a point where we could form a true belief that it is a particular kind of apple. (We need the same abilities when we make a series of observations of the behavior of the elements we are testing in a scientific experiment.) Now, this example requires that somehow we are able to have a noetic unity through the process, that we are able to compare what is given in the various experiences with each other, perhaps unconsciously, and even with our concept of what a Red Delicious apple is, and finally see it as such. On the other hand, with cases in which we are trying to understand something new to us, we can form a concept based on what we observe is in common among many noticings.

It seems there must be the ability for us to have these mental states present in our being—they must be somehow "in" me.[32] Moreover, we must be able to interact with them. For instance, we make observations, and we can use them to help us adjust our experiments. To do that, we can direct our bodies in various ways to make more observations.

Now, naturalists deny that human beings are a unity of body and soul, often based on the interaction objection. That is, how could two radically distinct kinds of things interact with each other? However, here we have the same problem, except now the naturalist needs to account for how we can interact with an irreducibly mental state, if we, especially our minds, are just made of matter. Thus, even from such a simple process (much less much more complex ones) of coming to have knowledge of an object in reality,

it seems clear that such knowledge requires that we are more than physical beings ourselves. It seems that we must have a unified, immaterial substance that is able to *have* these mental states present in it. This stands in contrast to Dennett's suggestion that there is no unified self, or even a unified taking; rather, "judgmental tasks are fragmented into many distributed moments of micro-taking."[33]

Of course, I have not given a detailed explanation of *how* our mental states with their essences can be together with their objects. Still, I have provided a more detailed explanation elsewhere.[34] However, we may sketch the basic idea as follows, with an example of observing lemurs. An experience of a lemur has present in it the intentional property, which is of a lemur. That experience has a *natural affinity* with properties making up the nature of lemurs. Those latter properties (which are intentional ones) are present in actual lemurs.[35] Therefore, our experiences (or other mental states) can be together with their objects, if they obtain, due to their respective natures, or essences.

IMPLICATIONS

If my arguments are correct, then it seems we simply cannot know reality on the basis of ontological naturalism. That, of course, would have sweeping implications for science and all aspects of life.

The existence of essences and our abilities to know reality might prompt a further question: What is the best explanation for their origin and their apparent design? The best answer does not seem to be a completely material process. Instead, it seems a more powerful explanation would be that God has made us so we can experience and know reality.

In sum, our abilities to have knowledge in science and any other discipline seem to require that we reject ontological naturalism.

NOTES

1. Alvin Plantinga, "Is Naturalism Irrational?" in *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 216–38.

2. Daniel Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 3rd printing (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 3.

3. Daniel Dennett, "Dennett, Daniel C.," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind: Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Guttenplan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 239.

4. Ibid.

5. Amy Kind, "The Intentional Stance," *Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind*, 2004, accessed September 30, 2016, https://sites.google.com/site/minddict/intentional-stance-the.

6. Dennett, "Dennett, Daniel C.," 239.

7. Daniel Dennett, *Brainchildren: Essays on Designing Minds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 331.

8. Ibid., 322.

9. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 299.

10. Ibid., 298.

11. Ibid., 294.

12. Ibid., 300, 318.

13. Ibid., 300.

14. Ibid., 319, n. 8.

15. Daniel Dennett, "The Evolution of 'Why?'" 2006, accessed September 30, 2016, http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/dennett/papers/Brandom.pdf, 4.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 5. See also *The Intentional Stance*, 65.

18. Dennett, "The Evolution of 'Why?'" 5.

19. Samuel Wheeler III, "Indeterminacy of French Interpretation: Derrida and Davidson," in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest Lepore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 477, in Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 40.

20. Wheeler, 492, in Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 40.

21. Dallas Willard, "Knowledge and naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig (New York: Routledge, 1999), 40.

22. Dennett, "Dennett, Daniel C.," 242.

23. Willard, "Knowledge and naturalism," 41.

24. Dennett, *Brainchildren,* 133.

25. Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness: A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind* (Cambridge: Bradford Books, 1995), 101–02.

26. Ibid., 100–01.

27. Ibid., 182.

28. Ibid., 172.

29. I also make this point from a different line of argument, which stems from his view that we do not have any nonconceptual access to our mental states. See R. Scott Smith, *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth-claims* (London: Routledge, 2012), 43–9.

30. There are other replies Tye or Fred Dretske, for instance, might make at this point, but I still think this is a significant threshold argument. See Smith, 41–53, for more exploration of other replies and rejoinders.

31. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Vol. II*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 745.

32. Here, I will not address another necessary condition, that of numerical sameness of person through time and change. Still, sameness of brains cannot secure personal

identity. Even brain cells change over time, and brains can develop new patterns, or "grooves," through psychological therapy.

33. Dennett, *Brainchildren*, 133.

34. See Smith, Chapter 9.

35. Dallas Willard, "How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The God's Eye View Vindicated?" *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 2 (1999): 18.

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Part III

THEISTIC BELIEF, SCIENCE, AND NATURALISM

Chapter 5

In What Senses Might Religion Be Natural?

Aku Visala and Justin L. Barrett

From Pascal Boyer's 1994 book *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas* onwards, the claim that religion is natural has been the slogan of the cognitive and evolutionary study of religion. Boyer's approach (and also that of his 2001 book, *Religion Explained*) emphasizes the ways in which ordinary, naturally occurring cognitive mechanisms inform and encourage the spread of ideas we commonly call religious. The idea has since been taken up by some critics of religious thought. Daniel Dennett, among many others, has argued that religion as a whole is a natural phenomenon, not a supernatural one.[1] But, are these meanings of the claim "religion is natural" the same?

These discussions revolve around the notions of naturalness and nature. The problem is that these expressions are notoriously vague and can mean different things in different contexts. In what follows, we examine several different notions of naturalness and explain what the cognitive study of religion means by naturalness. We distinguish four types of naturalness attributed to religion: methodological naturalness, cognitive naturalness, cross-cultural naturalness, and ontological naturalness. We argue that the cognitive study of religion does indeed suggest that religious thought and action (i.e., beliefs and actions concerning supernatural beings, spirits, the afterlife, and the like) are more natural than unnatural in some senses, but not in others.

METHODOLOGICAL NATURALNESS

Boyer's *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas* actually contains an outline of a program for the study of religion. This program entails a commitment to what we call the *methodological naturalness* of religion, namely, that at least some aspects of religion have nonreligious causes that are accessible for biological

and behavioral sciences.[2] For many philosophers and scientists—even theistic ones—such a claim is rather trivial: religion clearly involves practices, rituals, artifacts, and thoughts that clearly count as "natural" in the sense of being part of the immanent, physical world. Regardless of the metaphysical status of religion and the status of its truth-claims, these aspects of religion can be studied by sociological, psychological, and even biological methods.

However, some anthropologists and scholars of religion have maintained that to study these aspects of religion is the miss the whole point, reducing religion to something that it is not. They maintain that there is an essence to religion that goes beyond what the standard methods of natural and behavioral sciences can discover. One line of argument is that human rational action cannot be explained in natural scientific terms, because human action does not fall under law-like generalizations or exhibit law-like patterns. Another argument is that all religions entail a special experiential essence—such as divine encounter, the experience of sacred space or the holy—that cannot be studied scientifically.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for instance, argues that human action cannot be causally explained because it occurs in a meaningful context of ideas and reasons. Culture is a public web of reasons and meanings that can only be accessed by participating in it and understanding it. Causal explanation of human action transforms or reduces all action to mere behavior and reasons to act into instincts, urges, or needs.[3] Against such views, the defender of methodological naturalness of religion (or a set of any human behavior and belief) must insist that reasons for action and other beliefs are at least to some extent accessible to cognitive and biological sciences. For Boyer, reasons and beliefs are mental representations produced by the physical brain; so there is at least a minimal causal story to be told about them. In other words, at least some aspects of our religious behavior and the reasoning that goes into it are accessible from a third-person point of view and susceptible to causal explanation of the scientific type.[4]

The second line of argument against methodological naturalness is based on the idea that religion is somehow a sui generis phenomenon. Sui generis theorists—sometimes also called anti-reductionists or religionists—claim that religious ideas and behaviors are spiritual and imaginative creations that are highly resistant to explanations based on nonreligious or psychological, social, or biological factors. A scholar of religion Mircea Eliade, for instance, insists that such explanations miss the distinctively religious nature of religion, that is, the aspect of the sacred.[5] Again, the methodological naturalist has to argue that instead of presuming some underlying sui generis experience or principle behind all religion, we should see religious behaviors and ideas at least partly caused by factors accessible to behavioral and biological sciences.[6]

COGNITIVE NATURALNESS AND CROSS-CULTURAL NATURALNESS

Methodological naturalness is not the only kind of naturalness that most cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion attribute to religion. To highlight the difference between further two types of naturalness, *cognitive naturalness* and *cross-cultural naturalness*, consider the following scenario. Suppose that I daily bait and set a live animal trap in my garden and repeatedly catch rabbits. I want to explain why it is the case that I am catching so many rabbits instead of something else, squirrels or foxes perhaps. It may be that something about the trap or the bait is especially good at catching rabbits (as opposed to squirrels or foxes) or that there are simply far more rabbits around to be caught than any other kind of animal. Of course, both could be true.

Suppose then that our minds are traps for cultural ideas. Now, it is a fact that human minds are full of religious ideas. Our minds are, thus, catching religious rabbits instead of, let us say, scientific foxes. Like in the case of the rabbit trap, the explanation of this fact might be that there is something about our minds that dispose it to catch religious ideas (something about the trap) or that there are simply many religious ideas in our environment. In the former case, religion would be *cognitively natural*, that is, our belief-forming mechanisms would be biased in such a way as to create a tendency or a disposition to acquire, think, and transmit religious ideas instead of some other kinds of ideas. In the latter case, religion would be *cross-culturally natural*, that is, most, if not all, human cultures would be proliferated with religious stimuli (including testimony and ritual).

Consider another example. One could come to believe that other human beings have minds because of multiple instances of social contact, many relevant interactions, and lots of discussion about minds and mental states. In this sense, it would be cross-culturally natural to believe in the minds of others. One could also have—due to several cognitive biases—a tendency or a disposition to form beliefs about others' minds that require only minimal triggering in the environment. This would mean that belief in the minds of others would be cognitively natural.

The main distinction between cognitive and cross-cultural naturalness, we think, is what role is given to conceptual biases (cognitive naturalness), on the one hand, and social learning (cross-cultural naturalness), on the other. If the typical human environment is rich in social interaction and talk about minds, and it is by virtue of this human environment that people typically believe that others have minds, then we might say that belief in others' minds is cross-culturally natural on that basis. Likewise, if our human conceptual

tendencies (independent of lots of mind-talk or social interaction in the environment) make us likely to form or entertain the belief in others' minds, we could call such beliefs cognitively natural on that basis. The social learning emphasis does not regard the human belief-forming mechanisms as particularly receptive to some ideas over others (*contra* cognitive naturalness) but sees the environment as saturated by cues or evidence for some ideas over others.

Notice, that both types of naturalness could be the case simultaneously: They should not be seen as rigid alternatives, but perhaps as existing in different ends of a spectrum. It might very well be the case that cross-cultural naturalness might be mostly explained in terms of the cognitive naturalness, or it could be that cross-cultural naturalness and cognitive naturalness reinforce and support each other.

At this juncture, I offer a few words on cognitive naturalness and conceptual biases in order to avoid confusions. It is rather typical to talk about hard-wired or innate behaviors and ideas, on the one hand, and culturally conditioned behaviors and ideas, on the other. Especially the popular science literature is full of hard-wired and innate god genes, beauty instincts, and moral codes. I, however, am rather critical of the claim that a clear-cut distinction between "innate" and "cultural" can be made in any meaningful way. This is the case especially with conceptual biases and other belief-forming tendencies. Thus, conceptual biases need not be innate or hard wired; instead, they could be rapidly and regularly maturing tendencies based on some combination of human biology and human environmental regularities—what Robert McCauley has called *maturationally natural* cognition.[7] We will return to McCauley's notion of maturational naturalness later in more detail.

Let us now summarize the different meanings of the naturalness of religion thesis examined above:

1. Religion (or at least some part of it) is natural in the sense that it can be studied by the methods of natural sciences and especially biology and cognitive science. We call this the *methodological naturalness* of religion thesis.
2. Religion (or at least some part of it) is natural in the sense that forming, thinking, and transmitting religious ideas are relatively easy (as opposed to some other types of ideas) for human beings with normally functioning biological and psychological makeup. This *cognitive naturalness* entails that there are other ideas that require more time, effort, and training to form and transmit than religious ones.
3. Religion is natural is the sense that there are general patterns of behavior and ideas that can be seen in most, if not all, human cultures. This

cross-cultural naturalness entails that at least some aspects of religion are not culture-specific but have to do with something universal about humans.

We should also add another kind of naturalness of religion thesis—mainly exemplified by those who argue for the falsity of religious truth-claims on the basis of natural explanations:

4. Religion can be argued to be natural in the sense that it does not have to do with the supernatural or nonnatural. In other words, the claim is that since all religions, including beliefs and practices, are naturally caused, their claims about supernatural or nonnatural realities are suspect or false. We call this *ontological naturalness* of religion.

We should be careful not to mix these four senses of the naturalness of religion claim, because they are not logically connected to each other and they can be defended and criticized independently of each other.

Different logical relationships, nevertheless, can and do exist among these four theses. Sometimes the cognitive naturalness thesis is used to explain the cross-cultural naturalness of religion, especially among those who think that "religion" as a whole is an evolutionary by-product rather than an adaptation. That cross-cultural naturalness is a product of cognitive naturalness, however, is not necessarily so: as we will illustrate below, numerous explanations of the cross-cultural naturalness of religion have been given in evolutionary, not cognitive terms. Further, writers such as Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins appear to use methodological, cognitive, and cross-cultural naturalness as grounds for thinking that religion is ontologically natural.[8]

Finally, the scope (or "strength") of these theses can vary significantly. For this reason, we included qualifications like "religion (or at least some part of it)" in the theses themselves. One can claim that religion is more or less cognitively, cross-culturally, or methodologically natural. One need not claim, for instance, that *all* religious thinking is cognitively natural: indeed, research indicates that there are forms of theological and philosophical reflection of religious ideas that are at least as cognitively demanding as scientific thinking. Further, one need not claim that religion is the same in all cultures: minimal cross-cultural naturalness simply requires that there are some recurring patterns. We will return to the issue of scope and strength at the end of the article.

In what follows, we take the methodological naturalness as granted and focus on the theories that entail either cognitive or cross-cultural naturalness of religion (or both).

EVIDENCE FOR THE COGNITIVE NATURALNESS OF RELIGION

In the last twenty years, research into the cognitive naturalness of religion has been conducted under the rubric of the so-called cognitive science of religion. Boyer, among many others, has presented evidence for religion's cognitive naturalness. The basic argument of Boyer is as follows:

1. Because of the numerous evolutionary selection pressures on our ancestors, all normally developing humans share cognitive systems that process information and solve basic problems in cross-culturally recurrent ways. Among these systems are those that produce what might be thought of as *intuitive ontologies*: assumptions about the different characteristics and causal properties of things in the world (such as physical objects, living things, and intentional agents).
2. Other things being equal, ideas that are not easily acquired, remembered, and transmitted, do not become widely shared to the extent that they become parts of the prevailing culture.
3. Ideas that closely approximate our intuitive ontological assumptions about the characteristics and causal properties of things in the world (that is, fit with our intuitive ontologies) are easily acquired, remembered, and transmitted. He calls such ideas intuitive. By contrast, ideas that are *highly counterintuitive* (or *maximally* counterintuitive), that is, ideas that deviate extensively from our intuitive ontological assumptions, are difficult to acquire, remember, and transmit.
4. Ideas that have a lot of *inferential potential*—the ability to readily generate inferences, predictions, and explanations pertinent to widely recurrent human concerns—are more attention-grabbing, and hence more memorable, than those that have low inferential potential.
5. Ideas of intentional agents generally have great inferential potential, but counterintuitive features (such as invisibility, super power, or super knowledge), can increase their inferential potential.
6. Other things being equal, ideas that are only slightly counterintuitive (or *minimally counterintuitive*) are more attention-grabbing than wholly intuitive ideas, and hence are more memorable.
7. Religious ideas, insofar as they are no more than minimally counterintuitive and have lots of inferential potential, are easy to acquire, remember, and transmit. Religious ideas often concern intentional agents with a small number of counterintuitive features that make them high in inferential potential. Finally, Boyer also explains why gods often get connected up to moral concerns and fortune and misfortune.

Other accounts of cognitive naturalness along similar lines have followed Boyer's, with differences in emphasis. Scott Atran's account gives more attention, for instance, to the role of religious rituals in signaling commitment to the community's religious beliefs, beliefs that may seem implausible at times.[9] Likewise, Barrett's treatments have focused more on additional cognitive foundations in early childhood.[10] Research by developmental psychologists suggests that children have a natural tendency to see features of the natural world as having purposes best accounted for by one or more intentional agents,[11] and it appears this tendency must be overridden or it persists into adulthood.[12] Children recognize that gods—not humans—are required to account for this apparent design.[13] Other divine attributes are easily extended to gods because they approximate the default assumptions children have about other minded beings, or are at least easily understood. In some ways, others may be assumed to be super knowing, super perceiving, and never dying until children learn otherwise (as is the case with humans, animals, and some gods).[14] It may be, too, that believing in a soul or afterlife is a minor tweak on natural intuitions concerning minds, bodies, and death.[15] Religious beliefs, then, are natural in the sense of conforming to the early developing expectations of children's conceptual systems.

To give more robust content for cognitive naturalness, in his book, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (2011), Robert McCauley develops a handful of heuristic questions for identifying whether a form of thought or cultural expression is closely undergirded by maturationally natural cognition. These questions include the following:

- Is the form of thought or cultural expression characterized by fluency, automaticity, and ease?
- Did it arise early in childhood (that is, before the age of five)?
- Is its invention "lost in the sands of time"?
- Does it (or did it) require artifacts or institutions that are not human universals?

McCauley argues that affirmative answers to questions such as the first three and a negative answer to the last suggest maturational naturalness and predict very little inter- and intra-group variability on the trait or expression in question. As should be evident, most folk religious beliefs and practices, as compared with science, chess, literacy, or bicycle riding are largely natural in McCauley's sense—that is, well supported by maturationally natural cognition.

EVIDENCE FOR THE CROSS-CULTURAL NATURALNESS OF RELIGION

Next, we will consider some evidence for the claim that religion is cross-culturally natural. Recall what cross-cultural naturalness means: The cultural environment in which humans find themselves is abundantly populated with religious ideas and that is why we find ourselves acquiring religious thoughts and actions. Religious ideas are plenty, like rabbits, and not much needs to be said about the particulars of the trap—our minds. The accounts as to why our environment is saturated by religiosity tend to be more evolutionary than cognitive.

The most common argument for cross-cultural naturalness of religion has been the potential adaptive or functional value of religious practices, particularly collective rituals.[16] Many social scientists of religion, following Durkheim, have observed that religious rituals may serve the function of enhancing group cohesion.[17] What the evolutionary perspective adds to more classical sociological accounts, such as Durkheim's, is a causal mechanism for why such rituals have survived and spread. Imagine a community C, which performs a ritual that engenders trust, good will, and cooperation between individuals in the community. Because of high levels of trust and cooperation, community C can be larger (thus benefiting individuals with greater labor specialization, greater protection against enemies and predators, access to harder to get resources such as large game), and more likely to share resources and engage in long-term exchange agreements that help insure against bouts of personal misfortune than it would be without the ritual in question. Such a community would have an advantage over communities that do not have such rituals, that is, individuals in community C would enjoy greater fitness than comparable individuals living in smaller, less cooperative communities. Hence, the genotype of culture C that gives rise to the ritual phenotype will be selectively encouraged, but further, the cultural environments of C would also out-survive competitors. The culture of cooperative communities—including their religious and ritual systems—would survive and reproduce better than their less-fit neighbors.

We can now ask the more detailed question about the causal mechanisms through which religious rituals accomplish this purported increase in-group cohesion. Signaling explanations are the most prominent candidates: costly-signaling and hard-to-fake-signaling. What the two theories have in common is that participation in religious rituals is thought to signal to members of the community a determination to cooperate. William Irons, for instance, has argued that these rituals serve as costly signals of commitment.[18] If a ritual is costly enough (in terms of time, energy, resources, or threat to well-being) that it discourages free-riders from taking advantage of a community's

cooperative networks without paying the cost of being a good cooperator oneself, then such a ritual is thought to filter out the free-riders. All who participate in the ritual(s) can be safely regarded as trustworthy, committed members of the community as they have already signaled their commitment at a personal cost. Empirical studies have provided some supportive evidence for a connection between ritual participation and in-group cooperation, trust, and/or altruism.[19]

Hard-to-fake-signaling theories of religion employ a different logic.[20] Rather than the cost of a religious ritual being high so as to weed-out pretenders seeking to parasitize the benefits of community membership, religious rituals are or generate genuine indexes of commitment that would be hard for a skeptic to feign. These indexes might be emotional reactions to the ritual such as ecstasy or weeping indicative of being a true believer. As such accounts generate considerable empirical and theoretical attention, they continue to receive critique and augmentation.[21]

In addition to the concern with cooperation and signaling intent to cooperate, evolutionary approaches also share in common the same resulting condition: communities with lots of religious actions. And having religious actions would carry with them the related beliefs, doctrines, and the like. Consequently, though the selection pressures target actions, ideas would be indirectly selected.

The difference, again, between cognitive and cross-cultural naturalness is this: evolutionary accounts simply posit the requisite cognitive equipment for acquisition and transmission of religious ideas and behaviors. Why the rituals have content we might call religious (as opposed to different content) or the structures they have, are left for others to explain. This division of labor could be justified or it may undermine any given signaling theory. In criticizing costly-signaling theories Murray and Moore write,

> The logic of costly signaling requires that signaling costs or benefits must vary in proportion to the quality being signaled. In the case of religion that is aimed at solving the problem of group cooperation, the quality being signaled is disposition to cooperate or cooperative intent. How is it exactly that signal costs correlate with cooperative intent? . . . What are needed are costs that certify commitment to principles or to norm supporting agents that enjoin moral behavior, rule following, or altruism…. Displaying powerful commitments to moralizing gods sends a message: I believe in the gods and will do what they command.[22]

Thus, not just any costly ritual will do as a signal, but those generated by obedience to a morally concerned god. But not all religious rituals feature such gods and not all communities have such gods. Why? Where do moralizing gods come from? To answer these questions, the evolutionary perspective

needs to be complemented by a cognitive answer. Signaling theories are not only richer with cognitive inputs but may require them if they are to be at all successful as accounts of religion, a synthesis we turn to below.

In principle, there is nothing to prevent combining the cognitive and the cross-cultural naturalness theses. That is, it could be that certain ideas, including those about minimally counterintuitive gods, are already likely to be entertained because of their cognitive naturalness, but some may also generate actions that prove to be adaptive for both the individual and the group in terms of producing interpersonal trust and cooperation. Jesse Bering, Dominic Johnson, and Ara Norenzayan have all offered accounts along these lines.[23] In these accounts, it is not merely ritually signaling in-group commitment that is important but acting (either ritually or otherwise) in response to one's god concepts such that one is more self-regulating in prosocial ways. Believing that a morally interested god is around and watching may lead one to resist cheating others.[24] It might also lead to individual being more generous, particularly to one's in-group.[25] These fears of superhuman punishment theories are not without concerns but have the virtue of capturing a much wider array of data concerning religion than either straight cognitive or straight social naturalness accounts.[26]

WHAT THE NATURALNESS OF RELIGION IS NOT

In conclusion, we want to identify some very common misunderstandings regarding the meaning and consequences of the different naturalness of religion theses discussed above.

First of all, it seems rather common to assume that if some aspects of what is called religion are natural in some way identified above, this applies to everything we may be tempted to call religious. In other words, if religion is cognitively natural, for example, then every religious idea is cognitively natural and, by implication, if we find some religious ideas that are not cognitively natural, this claim is falsified. Such a conclusion is not warranted. It is important to realize, that most cognitive and evolutionary theories about religion are not aimed at comprehensive explanations of all beliefs or practices that one may want to call religious. Most of these projects are attempts to account for a small subset of cross-culturally recurrent ideas, and practices such as afterlife beliefs, god concepts, prayer, religious ritual, and the like. Consequently, though one project may argue for the naturalness of some variety of religious beliefs, it does not follow that all religious beliefs are natural in the same respect.

Consider god-concepts, for instance. As we have seen, Boyer and others have argued that minimally counterintuitive god-concepts are more

cognitively natural than both intuitive concepts and maximally counterintuitive concepts. Based on developmental studies, Barrett has made a more specific argument for the conclusion that some kind of super-knowing creator god is cognitively natural.[27] However, it does not follow from this that the standard classical theistic God with attributes like atemporality and aseity is cognitively natural. Indeed, there is some evidence suggesting to the contrary.[28]

The fact that cognitive and evolutionary explanations of religion are pitched on this general level does not in any way diminish their scientific status or usefulness. Most psychological, biological, and social scientific explanations are like this anyway: They aim to explain population-level tendencies and do not purport to give a complete causal picture of some individual case. The explanations entail that the traits being explained are distributed in the real world such that while the bulk of people fit the general pattern, many will not and no special explanation for this distribution is necessarily required. The fact that the trap occasionally catches a wandering field mouse does not mean that it does not have a bias toward catching rabbits. Likewise, it may be that any given individual is not terribly attracted to religious concepts. Perhaps a special explanation in terms of unusual cognitive equipment or unusual environmental conditions would be helpful, but not necessarily. In any case, the point we want to make here is that we have no scientific reason to think that current cognitive, evolutionary, or social explanation of religion are either comprehensive explanations of religion or comprehensive accounts of religions in any ultimate, metaphysical sense.

A related misunderstanding has to do with the targets of cognitive and evolutionary explanations. Some such explanations are aimed at explaining how some set of ideas and practices has originated and why people believe it, but for the most part the target of cognitive and evolutionary explanations is the differences in cultural persistence between two (or more) sets of ideas and practices. That is, given two competing arrangements, why is one pattern more common than another? McCauley and Lawson's work on religious ritual forms is an example of such a project.[29] They draw upon ordinary cognitive system's dynamics to account for why some arrangements in the features of religious rituals recur more frequently than others. Similarly, Cohen's treatment of spirit possession does not attempt to account for why people believe in possessing spirits, but why it is that people tend to conceptualize spirit possession as a displacement of agency rather than in some other way.[30]

Another related misunderstanding is that if religion is natural, it has to be everywhere: All individuals or cultures need to be religious. Often one hears people say that religion cannot be natural because there are cultures that seem to lack religious ideas and behaviors and individuals that are not religious.

But as we have already seen, such claims are not entailed in any naturalness of religion thesis. Even given the cognitive or cross-cultural naturalness of religion, it might very well be the case that there are many individuals (and even some cultures) that exhibit no religious ideas or behaviors. As to the causal factors contributing to the emergence of nonreligious cultures or individuals the cognitive scientist or the biologist would probably have to turn to the historian, anthropologist, or sociologist.

Finally, we need to be careful not to mix the ontological naturalness of religion thesis with the others. Some argue that since cognitive and evolutionary theories make no direct reference to possibly existing gods, souls, spirits, and so forth, they entail, if true, that such entities do not exist. This would mean that the ontological naturalness of religion is somehow entailed in, say, the cognitive naturalness of religion. This is, again, not true. Mere scientific research into human cognition or the evolutionary origins of religion is not enough to ground the claim that theism, for instance, is false. More substantive, mainly philosophical, arguments are needed for this conclusion.[31] Thus, research in the area of cognitive and evolutionary study of religion should be understood as methodologically agnostic, not methodologically atheistic. It is true, however, that occasionally metaphysical commitments leak into the theories themselves. For instance, Stewart Guthrie's account of religious beliefs, as a by-product of a natural tendency to anthropomorphize, carries a tacit assumption that humans *falsely* detect gods in their environment.[32] But it may be that the background conditions under which these cognitive and cultural systems have emerged include one or more gods. Nothing, in principle, rules out this possibility, but scholars typically leave such a possibility to one side.

NOTES

1. D. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006).

2. P. Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

3. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

4. P. Boyer, "Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism," in *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism*, ed. P. Boyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9.

5. M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (London: Harvill Press, 1960). For a short overview, see D. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 158–192.

6. Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas*, 4–9. For a more detailed discussion of methodological naturalness, see A. Visala, *Theism, Naturalism and the Cognitive Study of Religion: Religion Explained?* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011).

7. R.N. McCauley, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

8. See Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* and R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006). Neither transparently argues from methodological, cognitive, or cross-cultural naturalness to ontological naturalness. It may be that they are beginning with ontological naturalness and demonstrating that such ontological naturalness is commensurate with these other forms of naturalness. Alternatively, they may simply be conflating these different forms of naturalness. J. M. Bering, *The God Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny and the Meaning of Life* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2011) is perhaps the most explicit in suggesting that cognitive naturalness implies ontological naturalness.

9. S. Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

10. J. L. Barrett, *Born Believers: The Science of Children's Religious Belief* (New York: The Free Press, 2012); J. L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004).

11. D. Kelemen, "Are Children 'Intuitive Theists'? Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature," *Psychological Science* 15 (2004): 295–301; D. Kelemen and C. DiYanni, "Intuitions about Origins: Purpose and Intelligent Design in Children's Reasoning about Nature," *Journal of Cognition & Development* 6 (2005): 3–31.

12. D. Kelemen and E. Rosset, "The Human Function Compunction: Teleological Explanation in Adults," *Cognition* 111 (2009): 138–143.

13. S. A. Gelman and K. E. Kremer, "Understanding Natural Cause: Children's Explanations of How Objects and Their Properties Originate," *Child Development* 62 (1991): 396–414; O. Petrovich, "Understanding of Non-Natural Causality in Children and Adults: A Case against Artificialism," *Psyche en Geloof*, 8 (1997): 151–165; O. Petrovich, "Preschool Children's Understanding of the Dichotomy Between the Natural and the Artificial," *Psychological Reports* 84 (1999): 3–27.

14. Barrett, *Born Believers*; J. L Barrett and R. A. Richert, "Anthropomorphism or Preparedness? Exploring Children's God Concepts," *Review of Religious Research* 44 (2003): 300–312.

15. J. M. Bering, "Intuitive Conceptions of Dead Agents' Minds: The Natural Foundations of Afterlife Beliefs as Phenomenological Boundary," *Journal of Cognition & Culture* 2 (2002): 263–308; J. M. Bering, "The Folk Psychology of Souls," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29 (2006): 453–462; J. M. Bering, K. McLeod, and T. K. Shackelford, "Reasoning about Dead Agents Reveals Possible Adaptive Trends," *Human Nature* 16 (2005): 360–381; P. Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (London: William Heinemann, 2004); P. Bloom, "Religion is natural," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 147–151.

16. E. O. Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). "Rituals" in this context is used very generally to include nearly any actions motivated by belief in supernatural agents or powers, but particularly connotes collective actions of this sort.

17. E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]).

18. W. Irons, "In Our Own Self-Image: The Evolution of Morality, Deception, and Religion," *Skeptic* 4 (1996): 50–61; W. Irons, "Religion as a Hard-to-Fake Sign of Commitment," in *The Evolution of Commitment*, ed. R. Nesse (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 292–309.

19. J. Bulbulia and A. Mahoney, "Religious Solidarity: The Hand Grenade Experiment," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8 (2008): 295–320; R. Sosis, "The Adaptive Value of Religious Ritual: Rituals Promote Group Cohesion by Requiring Members to Engage in Behavior that Is too Costly to Fake," *American Scientists* 92 (2004): 166–174; R. Sosis and E. Bressler, "Cooperation and Commune Longevity: A Test of the Costly Signaling Theory of Religion," *Cross-Cultural Research* 37 (2003): 211–239; R. Sosis & B. Ruffle, "Religious Ritual and Cooperation: Testing for a Relationship on Israeli Religious and Secular Kibbutzim," *Current Anthropology* 44 (2003): 713–722. Costly-signaling theories have also been challenged: see M. J. Murray and L. Moore, "Costly Signaling and the Origin of Religion," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 9, nos. 3–4 (2009): 225–245.

20. J. Bulbulia, "Religious Costs as Adaptations that Signal Altruistic Intention." *Evolution and Cognition* 10, no. 1 (2004): 19–38; R. Sosis, "Religion Behavior, Badges, and Bans: Signaling Theory and the Evolution of Religion," in *Where God and Science Meet: How the Brain and Evolutionary Sciences Alter Our Understanding of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. P. McNamara (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 61–68.

21. J. Bulbulia, "Charismatic Signaling," *Journal of Religion and Culture* 3, no. 4 (2009): 518–551; Murray and Moore, "Costly Signaling and the Origin of Religion."

22. Murray & Moore, "Costly Signaling and the Origin of Religion," 236.

23. A. Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); D. D. P. Johnson, *God Is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

24. J. M. Bering and D. D. P. Johnson, "O Lord ... You Perceive my Thoughts from Afar": Recursiveness and the Evolution of Supernatural Agency," *Journal of Cognition & Culture* 5 (2005): 118–142; D. D. P. Johnson, "God's Punishment and Public Goods: A Test of the Supernatural Punishment Hypothesis in 186 World Cultures," *Human Nature* 16 (2005): 410–446; D. D. P. Johnson, "God Would Be a Costly Accident: Supernatural Beliefs as Adaptive," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32, no. 6 (2009): 523–524; P. G. Purzycki, C. Apicella, Q. D. Atkinson et al. "Moralistic Gods, Supernatural Punishment and the Expansion of Human Sociality," *Nature* 530 (2016): 327–330.

25. A. Norenzayan, *Big Gods*; A. F. Shariff and A. Norenzayan, "God Is Watching You: Priming God Concepts Increase Prosocial Behavior in an Anonymous Economic Game," *Psychological Science* 18, no. 9 (2007): 803–809.

26. For criticisms, see J. P. Schloss and M. J. Murray, "Evolutionary Accounts of Belief in Supernatural Punishment: A Critical Review," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 1 (2011): 46–99.

27. Barrett, *Born Believers*.

28. There have been several studies on what Barrett calls the theological correctness effect. See, for example, J. L. Barrett, "Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraints and the Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1998): 325–339. For a more comprehensive treatment, see D. J. Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

29. R. N. McCauley and E. T. Lawson, eds., *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

30. E. Cohen, *The Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

31. For discussion, see, for example, Visala, *Theism, Naturalism and the Cognitive Study of Religion*; K. J. Clark and J. L. Barrett, "Reidian Religious Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (2011): 639–675; K. J. Clark D. Rabinowitz, "Knowledge and the Objection to Religious Belief from Cognitive Science," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3, no. 1 (2011): 67–91. See also the essays in J. P. Schloss and M. J. Murray, eds., *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and R. Trigg and J. L. Barrett, eds. *The Roots of Religion: Exploring the Cognitive Science of Religion* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

32. S. E. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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Chapter 6

Science, Methodological Naturalism, and Question-Begging

Robert Larmer

INTRODUCTION

Acceptance of methodological naturalism,[1] sometimes known as methodological atheism[2] or methodological materialism,[3] has been widely advocated as the way Christian thought is to be integrated with scientific inquiry. The assumption underlying this advocacy is that methodological naturalism can be easily distinguished from metaphysical naturalism. Presumably, in adopting methodological naturalism one does not commit to any metaphysical assertion concerning the existence or nonexistence of God, but rather to a heuristically useful method of investigating the physical world that can be embraced by theist, atheist, and agnostic alike. Thus, believer Kathryn Applegate, resources director of the Christian BioLogos Foundation, claims that

> methodological naturalism, the scientific practice of limiting the explanation of natural phenomena to only natural mechanisms, is a wise and powerful means of investigating the created order. . . . [It] has the practical benefit of allowing people of diverse worldviews to discover the workings of God's creation, whether or not they acknowledge it as such.[4]

And naturalist philosopher Michael Ruse asserts,

> In no sense is the methodological naturalist . . . committed to the denial of God's existence. It is simply that the methodological naturalist insists that, in as much as one is doing science, one avoid all theological or other religious references. In particular, one denies God a role in the creation.[5]

Such proponents insist that methodological naturalism is metaphysically neutral and thus constitutes no threat or impediment to Christian philosophy or theology.

Unfortunately, things are not so simple. If the claim that methodological naturalism is metaphysically neutral is to be accepted, it needs to be made clear to what it commits one as regards how science is to be viewed and practiced. Does its acceptance merely suggest that in seeking explanations of events, one should always investigate the possibility of an explanation in terms of physical causes, or does it require that happenings in the world must invariably be explained in terms of such causes? Does it allow the possibility that scientific investigation may confirm the implausibility, or even impossibility, of an explanation in terms of natural causes, for example, the origin of the universe? Does it rule out considering hypotheses of God's direct creative action in assessing the probability of explanations in terms of natural causes, for example, the origin of biological life? Typically, these and other questions are not explicitly addressed, though certain answers seem to be implicit in the position of its advocates.

Despite this lack of articulation, it appears clear that the core claim of methodological naturalism is that no event should ever be explained as having been directly caused by a supernatural agent. Thus, for example, Steven Cowan takes methodological naturalism to be the view "that science must seek only natural explanations for any phenomena that it might investigate."[6] Irrespective of one's metaphysical beliefs regarding the existence or possible existence of God, one must always appeal to natural causes in explaining what takes place in the world. The question which must be asked is whether such a commitment to the explanation of physical phenomena solely in terms of natural causes is genuinely metaphysically neutral. Otherwise, the claim that methodological naturalism is an easy fit with Christianity amounts to begging the question.

Prima facie, it is far from evident that methodological naturalism is metaphysically neutral. Would one be believed if one were to suggest accepting "methodological theism" as an approach to investigating human behavior, on the basis that such a methodology has no metaphysical implications? If one thinks that reality encompasses, or may encompass, more than the natural realm, and that science attempts to get at truths about reality, does it make sense to insist that science only ever contemplate naturalistic explanations of phenomena? If one accepts the Christian claim that God is active within creation, does it make sense to accept the claim that, in doing science, one must avoid all theological or religious references and that doing so in no way restricts our study of nature?[7] Can the methodological naturalist insist on denying God a role in the creation yet immediately add, as does Ruse, that "this is not to say that God did not have a role in the creation"?[8] Can one as a Christian affirm that God interacts with His creation, yet insist that "for science, theology can and must be ruled out as irrelevant"?[9]

METHODOLOGICAL NATURALISM, NATURAL THEOLOGY, AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

That methodological naturalism is not metaphysically neutral is revealed by the fact that its adoption rules out a great deal of natural theology. If it is illegitimate to posit a nonnatural cause of a physical event, then defenders of the cosmological argument are not entitled to attach any significance to the fact that cosmologists have come to accept that the physical universe had an absolute beginning for which no natural explanation exists. Even if scientific investigation reveals the impossibility of ever providing a natural cause of the universe's beginning, methodological naturalism prohibits postulating that the universe has a supernatural cause. Accepting methodological naturalism puts the Christian cosmologist in a strange position. As a Christian theist, she appears entitled to link the beginning of the universe with the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, but as a scientist she is constrained to insist that if there is an explanation of the beginning of the universe, it must be in terms of natural causes. Such juggling appears schizophrenic.

Adherents of the teleological argument fare no better. Any suggestion that elements of design could have been injected by God at specific times during the process of life's origin and development is ruled out as unacceptable. The suggestion that the apparent fine-tuning of the universe that permits the conditions under which life could originate and evolve is due to God's "front-loading" of design is also ruled out. If methodological naturalism rules out positing a nonnatural cause of the universe's origin, it can scarcely be understood as allowing a nonnatural explanation of its apparent fine-tuning.

Neither is the moral argument spared. Social scientists committed to methodological naturalism must seek an entirely natural explanation of ethical beliefs and practices. Under no circumstances is it permissible for them to postulate a nonnatural origin for the fact that, although it may take different forms, humans universally recognize a sense of "oughtness" that influences their behavior. Likewise, accounts of religious experience will be explained in purely natural terms. Accepting methodological naturalism guarantees that, however implausible, naturalistic accounts of morality and religious experience must always be posited, since nonnatural explanations are ruled impermissible. Inasmuch as it prohibits any linking of empirical data to a supernatural cause, methodological naturalism appears to commit its adherents to a basically fideistic position regarding belief in God.

Accepting methodological naturalism also has implications as concerns Christian theodicy. Critics of theism have largely abandoned what is known as the logical form of the problem of evil—namely, the claim that a contradiction can be derived from the statements "God exists" and "Evil exists." Instead, they have focused on what is known as the evidential form of the

problem, the claim that the existence of evil makes God's existence improbable. On this form of the problem, evil is taken as constituting a negative body of evidence against God's existence which, in the absence of a larger body of positive evidence, demonstrates the improbability of God's existence.

Methodological naturalism stacks the deck against adducing such positive evidence in as much as it a priori prohibits invoking God as the explanation of the universe or its various features. Once it becomes impossible to argue that cosmological, teleological, moral arguments, or religious experience provide a positive body of evidence for God, it is scarcely surprising that the existence of evil can be taken as rendering God's existence improbable. If the evidential form of the problem of evil is to be taken seriously, one would expect a just weighing of the evidence for and against God, but adopting methodological naturalism seriously curtails what facts about the world can count as evidence for God's existence. A methodology which guarantees that even if positive evidence for God's existence exists it cannot be understood as such is scarcely metaphysically neutral.

METHODOLOGICAL NATURALISM AND DIVINE AGENCY

The acceptance of methodological naturalism also has metaphysical implications regarding how God is to be conceived as achieving His purposes in the physical universe. Theists who are methodological naturalists appear logically committed to the view that God works exclusively by means of secondary natural causes. They must adopt what Howard Van Till has termed the "robust formational economy principle,"—namely, the assumption that there are no gaps in the formational economy of the universe. On this view, the universe should be viewed as "fully gifted" in the sense that the capacities of matter are sufficient to account for the actualization of all structures and events in the history of the universe without positing the direct intervention of its Creator.[10]

It is difficult to square this type of claim with traditional Christian belief in miracles and answered prayer. Faced with an account of water turning into wine at the spoken word of Jesus, or Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fishes, it seems that the methodological naturalist must either deny that the event occurred or seek a natural explanation of its occurrence.[11] Convinced that Jesus did in fact return from death, the Christian who is a methodological naturalist should presumably posit a natural explanation of the event and on no account posit a supernatural explanation. Given that the doctrine of the resurrection claims not only that Jesus bodily returned from death but that his return was the result of special divine action intervening on the usual course

of nature, it is difficult to see how Christians who embrace methodological naturalism can affirm the resurrection of Jesus as it has been traditionally understood. Are they to hold as scientists that the event must be thought to have a purely natural cause, yet as Christians that it did not?

Christians who are methodological naturalists are liable to reply that such events are not open to scientific investigation inasmuch as they are unique and non-repeatable and thus are not encompassed by methodological naturalism. Such a response is inadequate. Given good grounds for thinking that a unique historical event occurred, there is no reason to think it cannot be scientifically investigated. The mass extinction of the dinosaurs may be a unique event, but no one would suggest that it is not therefore open to scientific investigation of its probable cause. Equally, should one be convinced that there is good reason to think that Lazarus, having been dead, nevertheless emerged alive from his tomb upon the command of Jesus (John 11), it seems fair to ask the methodological naturalist whether natural causes must be posited as the only legitimate explanation of this physical event.

Further, claims of miracles and answered prayer are ongoing. There is no reason why such contemporary claims cannot be scientifically investigated. Claims of miraculous healing can be investigated in terms of before and after medical records and what we know regarding various diseases and physical ailments. Claims regarding the efficacy of prayer can be, indeed are, investigated by studies designed to test such claims.[12] If such studies were to establish that there exists a genuine correlation between prayer and positive medical outcomes, but that no plausible natural explanation is possible, should such results be dismissed as unscientific because no explanation in terms of natural causes is liable to be forthcoming? Should an explanation in terms of direct action of a supernatural agent be automatically dismissed as unscientific on the basis that scientific investigation can only reveal the operation of natural causes? If one thinks that a goal of science is to uncover the causes of events in the natural world, then methodological naturalism is a threat to this goal since it a priori rules out recognizing supernatural causes of events even if such causes exist and operate. As Del Ratzsch notes, "If part of reality lies beyond the natural realm, then science cannot get at the truth without abandoning the naturalism it presently follows as a methodological rule of thumb."[13]

Unless one espouses antirealism, scientists are in the business of investigating the nature of reality. Whether in metaphysics, religion, science, or other human endeavors, one needs to be able to follow the evidence where it leads. Methodological naturalism skews from the outset what will count as evidence and what form explanations can take, inasmuch as it requires that evidence be interpreted, and theories constructed, in such a manner as to conform to a naturalist framework. It guarantees that even if supernatural

causes operate within nature, they can never be recognized. If no matter what the physical phenomena and no matter how they resist explanation in terms of physical causes or non-supernatural agency, it is never admissible to posit a supernatural cause, then we have moved to a position that is unfalsifiable in the worst possible sense. There appears no reason to think that it is inconceivable that scientific investigation, in considering whether a naturalistic explanation can be given for a certain occurrence, might not conclude that it would never have occurred were nature left to its own devices. Ratzsch is thus correct in his observation that "any stipulation that it would be scientifically illegitimate to accept the inability of nature to produce life, no matter what the empirical and theoretical evidence, has, obviously, long since departed deep into the philosophical and worldview realms."[14]

ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY METHODOLOGICAL NATURALISM

Objections are liable to be raised on behalf of methodological naturalism. One of the most common is that scientific practice may be neatly separated from other areas of belief and inquiry. For example, Ruse writes that

> science, that is *qua* an enterprise formed through the practice of methodological naturalism, . . . has no place for talk of God. Just as, for instance, one were to go to the doctor one would not expect any advice on political matters, so if one goes to a scientist one does not expect any advice on or reference to theological matters. The physician may indeed have very strong political views, which one may or may not share. But the politics are irrelevant to the medicine. Similarly, the scientist may or may not have very strong theological views, which one may or may not share. But inasmuch as one is going to the scientist for science, theology can and must be ruled out as irrelevant.[15]

This is an argument from analogy. It is true that in most instances a physician's political views have little or no influence on his or her treatment of patients. The analogy scarcely establishes, however, that scientific and theological beliefs can be as easily separated as Ruse suggests. Philosophers of science have largely acknowledged that attempts to develop criteria that unambiguously demarcate science from other areas of rational inquiry have failed.[16] Thus Ratzsch makes the point that attempts to define science in terms of a commitment to methodological naturalism "are *prima facie* problematic for the simple reason that no one actually has a completely workable definition of science (nor even necessary and sufficient conditions), and that proposed definitions have been historically unstable."[17]

Further, it is important to distinguish between "nomological" and "historical" science.[18] Nomological science is concerned with inductive generalization and the formulation of laws. Historical science, on the other hand, is concerned with the explanation of specific, non-regularly occurring events, whose causal explanations do not fit a covering law model. To the degree that explanations in terms of supernatural agency are advocated, their proponents employ them in areas of historical science, for example, the origin of life or the abrupt appearance of radically new body structures in the fossil record.[19] As Paul Draper notes, "Methodological naturalism cannot be adequately defended by describing something called *the* scientific method then arguing that it cannot be applied to the supernatural . . . [since] the method described will be characteristic of nomological science, while appeals to the supernatural would naturally be used to answer historical questions."[20]

A basic problem with the claim that scientific practice can be neatly separated from other areas of belief and inquiry is the assumption that the methodology one employs has no links to one's beliefs about the nature or possible nature of reality. Not only is this assumption far from self-evidently true; it appears simply false.[21] If, for example, I believe that there exist, or may possibly exist, mental states which play a causal role in determining bodily behavior, it makes no sense to adopt methodological behaviorism, since its adoption guarantees the development of psychological theories in which mental states either do not exist or play no causal role in bodily behavior. Only if I have already established beyond plausible doubt that mental states do not exist or, if they do exist, play no causal role does it make sense to insist on methodological behaviorism as a prerequisite of developing psychological theories. To insist on its employment in the absence of sound reasons for disbelieving in the existence of mental states or their causal powers is to beg the question of whether its adoption is justified.

Methodological naturalism might seem a sensible approach to scientific theorizing if one believes that supernatural agents do not exist, or that if they do exist they never intervene in the operation of the physical universe.[22] If, however, one believes that a supernatural agent—say, God—exists or may exist, and might possibly intervene in the physical universe, it is misguided to adopt a methodology which forbids ever positing such intervention. Insisting that methodological naturalism be adopted implicitly commits one either to the claim that supernatural agents do not exist or to the claim that if they do they never intervene on the natural order. This, however, begs the important question of whether such claims are justified. Insofar as it guarantees that no matter what the evidence is it cannot be thought to lead to a supernatural cause, methodological naturalism makes the claim that all physical events have natural causes unfalsifiable.

An alternative to the a priori stipulation of methodological naturalism is the claim that it is justified on inductive grounds. Given the success that science has achieved in explaining the structure of the world in terms of natural causes, should not the adoption of methodological naturalism by science be regarded as justified? Thus, Elliot Sober, in his "Why Methodological Naturalism," comments that

> arguments against introducing the claim that God exists into scientific theories have often been *in-principle*; they attempt to show that this postulate *necessarily* prevents science from reaching one of its goals. . . . The argument I would offer is more modest. Naturalistic science has been a success. . . . The modest defense I would offer of methodological naturalism is simply this: *if it isn't broken, don't fix it*.[23]

Two comments are in order regarding such an alternative justification. First, such a justification does not accurately reflect how methodological naturalism is typically practiced. With few exceptions, its proponents advocate its adoption not on the grounds of inductive generalization but rather on the basis that it is an essential conceptual stipulation of doing science. Ruse, for example, contends that "any reliance on a supernatural force, a Creator intervening in a natural world by supernatural processes, is necessarily not science,"[24] and Eugenie Scott is prepared to assert that "by definition, science cannot consider supernatural explanations."[25] In practice, it serves as an absolute prohibition on ever taking seriously the possibility of supernatural causation as evidenced by Richard Lewontin's much quoted comment that

> it is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence of material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concept that produce material explanation, no matter how counterintuitive . . . for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.[26]

Second, the suggestion that methodological naturalism is justified on inductive grounds assumes that the progress of science has invariably provided natural explanations of events traditionally thought to be the result of supernatural intervention. The truth of this assumption is far from obvious. As noted earlier, in contrast with nomological science which seeks the explanation of generalizable regularly occurring events, historical science concerns itself with the explanation of specific, non-regularly occurring events whose causal explanations do not fit a covering law model. Questions of the origin of the universe and its apparent fine-tuning, questions of the origin and development of life, questions concerning whether certain extraordinary events should be viewed as miracles are all questions of historical rather than

nomological science and it is in these areas that one encounters appeals to supernatural agency.

Once this distinction is recognized, it becomes clear that the success nomological science has had in finding natural explanations cannot automatically be taken as inductive warrant for adopting methodological naturalism in historical sciences. Indeed, any inductive argument regarding such questions points to supernatural agency. Progress in science no longer permits one to view the universe as eternal or the structure of living cells as relatively simple. Our best cosmology reveals a finely tuned universe that came into existence without any natural cause,[27] and the complexity of living organisms is such that James Tours, one of the top-ranked chemists in the world, is prepared to say that there presently exists no naturalistic account of life's origin that is even faintly plausible.[28]

Similarly, regarding events which have traditionally been understood as miracles, the advance of science has diminished rather than enhanced the prospect of explaining such events naturalistically. Advances in our knowledge of chemistry and physiology have not made it less but rather more, difficult to provide an explanation of how water could turn into wine, or a dead person come back to life, at the spoken word of Jesus.[29] Indeed, it is the difficulty of providing a natural explanation of these events that leads many critics to deny that they occurred. It is hardly a recommendation for methodological naturalism if its effect is to dismiss such events as unhistorical on the sole basis that they defy naturalistic explanation.

Might it be argued that methodological naturalism is justified as a tentative working hypothesis, the assumption being that supernatural agents, if indeed they exist, should not be thought to intervene continuously on the natural order? Prima facie such a proposal appears reasonable. Few theists would deny the operation of natural secondary causes within the physical universe or the legitimacy of investigating their operation.

There are, nevertheless, two serious problems with such a suggestion. The first concerns a point upon which we have already touched—namely, that it does not fit well with how methodological naturalism is typically employed. Far from functioning as a tentative working hypothesis, the effect of methodological naturalism in its actual practice is to rule out as illegitimate any appeal to supernatural causes as operative in nature.

The second is that this suggestion does not take into consideration that there may be contexts in which methodological naturalism does not function as the most rationally plausible working assumption. Faced with events such as water turning into wine, or a man dead returning to life at the spoken word of Jesus, it seems more plausible, dare I say natural, to take as a working assumption that such events have a supernatural rather than natural cause.[30] Similarly, in seeking to explain the origin of a structure as complex and

apparently designed as the cell, it appears unreasonable—again I am tempted to say unnatural—to insist that the only legitimate working assumption excludes any appeal to actual design by a supernatural agent.

It bears emphasis that it is not simply the case that such phenomena resist explanation in terms of natural causes, but that they display characteristics which in our experience are the product of intelligent agency. We are familiar with the fact that intelligent agents routinely bring about phenomena that would not otherwise occur and that information-rich structures are reliable evidence of such agency. It is therefore no surprise that there are scientific disciplines where design inferences are routine. Cryptologists can distinguish code from randomness, archaeologists are able to identify primitive tools on the basis that what they are looking at bears the type of structure we know to be produced by intelligence, and scientists once engaged in the SETI project were looking to see if there exist signals from space that exhibit a pattern requiring intelligence to explain. These appeals to design appear to be accepted because they are not presumed to challenge a naturalistic account of how conscious intelligent agents originated.[31] It is only when the design in question would most plausibly be attributed to a supernatural intelligent agent that it is judged to be only apparent and not genuine. This, however, is to ignore the fact that the question of whether an object is the product of intelligent agency is distinct from the question of the identity of the designer. Given that the recognition of design is distinct from the question of the designer's identity, it will not do to reject what appear to be instances of design on the basis that, if recognized as genuine, they constitute evidence for a supernatural designing agent.

A further attempt to justify methodological naturalism is to argue that, for various reasons, it is the only game in town regarding scientific practice. These reasons include claims that supernatural causation would involve violating the laws of nature, that supernatural causes are not empirical and therefore cannot be considered by science, that supernatural causation is not scientifically testable, and that explanations in terms of supernatural agency are not genuine explanations. None of these claims justifies the adoption of methodological naturalism.

The charge that supernatural causation would violate the laws of nature is a common one. It is nevertheless false. It may be a law of nature that masses attract one another, but this in no way implies that if an intervening cause moves an object away from the earth's surface that the law of gravity has been violated. This is true whether the intervening cause is natural or supernatural.[32]

The charge that supernatural causes are not empirical and cannot on that account be considered by science is also specious. That supernatural causes are nonempirical does not imply the impossibility of legitimately postulating

them on the grounds of empirical evidence. Many of the entities of physics are not themselves directly observable; their existence is arrived at via empirical observations of effects of which they are taken to be the cause. There is no reason why this cannot be true in the case of supernatural causes.[33]

The claim that supernatural causation is not scientifically testable has little to recommend it. Entities that are not directly observable may be postulated on the basis of empirical evidence, but this is not a haphazard, anything goes, process. If their postulation is too ad hoc or a different cause is better able to explain the empirical evidence then this constitutes reason to reject postulating such entities. An example of how this works is provided by William Dembski in his reply to the charge that intelligent design is not scientifically testable. He writes,

> If it could be shown that biological systems that are wonderfully complex, elegant and integrated . . . could have been formed by a gradual Darwinian process . . . then intelligent design would be refuted on the general grounds that one does not invoke intelligent causes when undirected natural causes will do. In that case Ockham's razor would finish off intelligent design quite nicely.[34]

One sometimes meets the claim that explanations in terms of supernatural agency are not genuine explanations. Robert Pennock, for example, insists that the supernatural must be conceived as so "other-worldly" that any attempt to talk of a supernatural agent, much less attributing purposes and intelligence to such a being is incoherent.[35] "God may simply . . . zap anything into or out of existence . . . any situation, any pattern (or lack of pattern) of data is compatible with the general hypothesis of a supernatural agent unconstrained by natural law."[36] On Pennock's view there appears only one type of explanation, namely explanation in terms of natural causes.

Such extreme apophasis, however, is unwarranted. First, as Draper notes, moral perfection is part of the theistic hypothesis such that some facts about nature might constitute good reason to think that theism is more probably true than is metaphysical naturalism, just as some facts about nature might constitute good reason to think that metaphysical naturalism is more probably true than is theism.[37] For example, "junk" in the human genome would seem to be more plausibly explained on metaphysical naturalism than on theism. If, however, as the ENCODE project has been finding, there is little or no junk in the human genome, then this would seem to count in favor of theism.

Second, it is far from clear that all explanations must be in terms of law or that the concepts of explanation and prediction can be equated. If one takes seriously the possibility of agents with libertarian free will—if God exists He would surely qualify as having such free will—then certain events might well be explained not in terms of laws and predictability, but rather by

reference to an agent's choices and purposes. This scarcely implies, however, that on the hypothesis of theism, "God may simply zap anything into or out of existence." Theists hold that what God wills is free but that it is nevertheless in accordance with his nature and thus not purely arbitrary or irrational.

Third, it is possible to detect instances of intelligent agency in the absence of identifying the purposes of the agent. One can recognize a tool as a product of intelligence, even if one does not know its purpose or use. Prior to deciphering the Rosetta Stone, we were still able to identify it as a product of intelligent agency. The detection of intelligent agency is logically prior to identifying who the agent is and what are his purposes. Given the strong analogy between biological structures and human machines, it is unreasonable to rule out as illegitimate in principle any hypothesis which takes seriously the role of intelligent causation in the origin of such structures. This will be true even if we cannot state what the purposes of the agent were in producing such structures. Contrary to Pennock, it is possible that science might come to the conclusion that biological entities or structures are the product of nonnatural intelligent causation, even if we cannot say what the purposes of the designing agent were in producing them.[38] Indeed, the ability to recognize design, even though the purpose of the design may not be apparent, can be useful in spurring further research.[39]

METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO METHODOLOGICAL NATURALISM

If not methodological naturalism then what method is appropriate to science? Robert Delfino suggests replacing methodological naturalism with what he terms methodological neutralism. He suggests that

> scientists should simply search for causes without setting any *a priori* conditions on what ontological status those causes must have. By not setting any *a priori* conditions with respect to ontological status the principle of discovery is not jeopardized in any possible way. By not setting any *a priori* conditions with respect to ontological status we can follow the evidence wherever it might take us. Finally, by not setting any *a priori* conditions with respect to ontological status we can make any corrections necessitated by new evidence. Since the principle of methodological neutralism is more in harmony with . . . [these] three principles . . . it should be preferred over methodological naturalism within a realist conception of science.[40]

I am sympathetic to Delfino's suggestion. He is surely correct that methodology should not be allowed to trump following the evidence where it leads. I think, however, that he underestimates the practical difficulty of evaluating

empirical evidence from a neutral viewpoint. Evidence is always assessed within the context of numerous background beliefs. Consequently, we do not tend to have neutral viewpoints. Rather, we seek to interpret and fit evidence into a prior framework of belief. This is not to say that evidence cannot serve to overthrow or modify such beliefs, but it is naive to think that our prior beliefs have no influence on how evidence is evaluated. Neither is it to claim that there do not exist principles by which worldviews and evidence can be assessed.[41] It is, however, to recognize that we do not typically come to the evidence without a predisposing framework of prior beliefs.

What this means is that evaluating whether a body of data fits better within one framework of beliefs, say naturalism, rather than another, say theism, is a complex and far from instantaneous process. It seems legitimate therefore to speak, at least at a practical level, of methodological pluralism. In areas where worldviews such as naturalism and theism clash or might seem to clash, it is reasonable to allow their proponents to explore competing points of view. To do so is a necessary condition of fostering a healthy intellectual environment. Thus, for example, taking seriously the hypothesis that further scientific investigation will emphasize the inadequacy of purely natural causes to fill gaps in our understanding of biological origins hardly implies that research cannot continue regarding the possibility of demonstrating that a plausible naturalistic account of such origins can be given. Far from being a "science stopper" or encouraging intellectual laziness, such competition holds competing hypotheses to a higher standard than they would otherwise have to meet.

I do not wish to overemphasize the degree to which worldview commitments such as naturalism and theism impinge on scientific practice. As Draper has noted, nomological science needs to be distinguished from historical science.[42] John Lennox is correct when he writes that such "commitments . . . are not likely to figure very largely, if at all, when we are studying *how things work*, but they may well play a much more dominant role when we are studying *how things came to exist in the first place*."[43] Where they do play a role, however, it is important that we recognize their existence and their influence on how scientific practice is framed. Otherwise, as in the case of methodological naturalism, we run the risk of baptizing as metaphysically neutral practices which clearly are not.

CONCLUSION

I have made the case that methodological naturalism is far from metaphysically neutral inasmuch as it functions as an explanatory straightjacket that a priori rules out the possibility of ever recognizing a physical event as

having a supernatural cause. Insofar as it does this, it results in beliefs that are unnatural in the sense of being intuitively strained. Even the most ardent atheists admit, for example, that biological entities look designed, all the while attempting to demonstrate that such design is apparent, not genuine.[44]

Atheists and agnostics should refuse to adopt a methodology that does not permit recognizing the possible reality of supernatural agency in the world. Evidence may serve to overthrow our natural intuitions, but investigation cannot be honest if the method employed guarantees they are not to be taken seriously. Christian theists, for their part, should refuse to adopt a methodology that does not allow them ever to appeal to empirical evidence that supports the naturalness of belief in direct supernatural agency in creation.

NOTES

1. Ronald Numbers writes that the term "methodological naturalism" seems to have been coined by the philosopher Paul de Vries, then at Wheaton College, who introduced it at a conference in 1983 in a paper subsequently published as "Naturalism in the Natural Sciences," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15 (1986): 388–396. De Vries distinguished between what he called "methodological naturalism," a disciplinary method that says nothing about God's existence, and "metaphysical naturalism," which "denies the existence of a transcendent God." Ronald L. Numbers, "Science without God: Natural Laws and Christian Beliefs," in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 320, note 2. Ted Davis, however, notes the earlier use of the term, most notably by Edgar Brightman. Ted Davis, "Reading the Book of Nature," *Biologos*, https://biologos.org/blogs/ted-davis-reading-the-book-of-nature/science-and-the-bible-intelligent-design-part-3.

2. Nancey Murphy, "Phillip Johnson on Trial: A Critique of his Critique of Darwin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 45, no. 1 (1993): 33.

3. Eugenie Scott, "Darwin Prosecuted: Review of Johnson's Darwin on Trial," http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/9481_darwin_prosecuted_review_of_j_12_15_1993.asp.

4. Kathryn Applegate, "A Defense of Methodological Naturalism," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 65, no. 1 (2003): 37.

5. Michael Ruse, "Methodological Naturalism under Attack," in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock, 363–386 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 365.

6. Steven Cowan, "God, Libertarian Agency, and Scientific Explanations: Problems for J.P. Moreland's Strategy for Avoiding the God of the Gaps," *Philosophia Christi* 4, no. 1 (2002): 125. Davis offers a similar formulation, defining methodological naturalism as "the belief [requirement] that science should explain phenomena only in terms of entities and properties that fall within the category of the natural, such as natural laws acting either through known causes or by chance" (www.reading-the-book-of-nature/science-and-the-bible-intelligent-design-part-3).

7. See, for example, Ernan McMullin, "Plantinga's Defense of Special Creation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (September 1991): 57.

8. Ruse, "Methodological Naturalism under Attack," 365.

9. Ibid., 366.

10. Howard Van Till, "Science and Christian Theology as Partners in Theorizing," in *Science and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Richard F. Carlson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 234.

11. I was having dinner with Van Till on the evening of September 16, 2000. At that time, I asked him whether he would view Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Lk. 9:12-17) as the result of a "fully gifted creation" or as the result of divine intervention into nature. His response was to say that if he thought the event had really occurred he would view it as divine intervention, but that he did not think that the Gospel writers intended their readers to take the account literally. One wonders on what grounds Van Till asserted this. The suspicion arises that his methodological naturalism motivates him to rule out as unhistorical events which cannot be explained naturalistically.

12. See, for example, W. S. Harris, M. Gowda, J. Kolb et al. "A Randomised, Controlled Trial of the Effects of Remote, Intercessory Prayer on Outcomes in Patients Admitted to the Coronary Care Unit," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 159 (1999): 2273–2278.

13. Del Ratzsch, *Science and Its Limits: The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 105.

14. Del Ratzsch, *Nature, Design, and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 119.

15. Ruse, "Methodological Naturalism Under Attack," 365–366.

16. See, for example, Larry Laudan, "The Demise of the Demarcation Problem," in *But Is It Science? The Philosophical Question in the Creation/Evolution Controversy*, eds. Michael Ruse and Robert Pennock (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008), 337–350. Also, Paul Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William Wainwright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

17. Del Ratzsch, "Natural Theology, Methodological Naturalism, and 'Turtles All The Way Down,'" *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (2004): 441.

18. Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism," 290.

19. See, for example, Stephen Meyer's *Signature in the Cell* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), and his *Darwin's Doubt* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2013).

20. Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism," 290.

21. E. A. Burtt, commenting on the presumption that methodology need have no links to metaphysics, notes that

> there is no escape from metaphysics, that is, from the final implications of any proposition or set of propositions. The only way to avoid becoming a metaphysician is to say nothing. . . . If you cannot avoid metaphysics, what kind of metaphysics are you likely to cherish when you sturdily suppose yourself to be free from the abomination. Of course, it goes without saying that in this case your metaphysics will be held uncritically because it is unconscious; moreover, it will be passed on to others far more readily than your other notions, inasmuch as it will be propagated by insinuation rather than by direct argument.

> . . . The history of mind reveals pretty clearly that the thinker who decries metaphysics will actually hold metaphysical notions of three main types. For one thing, he will share the ideas of his age on ultimate questions, so far as such ideas do not run counter to his interests or awaken his criticism. . . . In the second place, if he be a man engaged in any important inquiry, he must have a method, and *he will be under a strong and constant temptation to make a metaphysics out of his method, that is, to suppose the universe ultimately of such a sort that his method must be appropriate and successful.* (*The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*. rev. 2nd edn. [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932], 224–226 [emphasis added]).

22. Even in such instances its adoption is questionable, since what is proposed is a methodology that, by its refusal to countenance the legitimacy of ever postulating a nonnatural cause for a physical event, precludes any marshaling of evidence in favor of supernatural causes. For an elaboration of this point see Stephen Dilley, "Philosophical Naturalism and Methodological Naturalism," *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 1 (2010): 118–141.

23. Elliot Sober, "Why Methodological Naturalism," in *Biological Evolution: Facts and Theories: A Critical Appraisal 150 Years after The Origin of Species*, eds. G. Aulette, M. LeClerc, and R. Martinez (Rome: Gregorian Biblical Press, 2011), 375. For a similar defense see Maarten Boudry, Stefaan Blancke, and Johan Braeckman, "How Not to Attack Intelligent Design Creationism: Philosophical Misconceptions About Methodological Naturalism," *Foundations of Science* 15 (2010): 227–244.

24. Michael Ruse, "Witness Testimony Sheet," in *But Is It Science?* eds. Michael Ruse and Robert Pennock (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 300–301.

25. Eugenie Scott, "Creationism, Ideology and Science," *Annals of the NY Academy of Science* 775 (June 24, 1995): 518.

26. Richard Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," *New York Review of Books* (January 9, 2017), http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1997/01/09/billions-and-billions-of-demons/.

27. See, for example, Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 13–74.

28. James Tour, "The Origin of Life: The Inside Story." *Pascal Lectures* 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zQXgJ-dXM4.

29. John 3:1–10 and John 11:1–44, respectively.

30. As observed earlier, it will not do to deny the occurrence of such events simply on the basis that they resist explanation in terms of natural causes. The point being made in the present context is conceptual. If such events occurred as described, it seems more reasonable to take as a working assumption that they have a supernatural rather than natural cause.

31. Anyone familiar with contemporary philosophy of mind and what naturalist philosophers term the "hard problem of consciousness" will realize it is far from clear that any plausible naturalistic account of consciousness can be given.

32. For a refutation of the charge that such intervention would violate the Principle of the Conservation of Energy see Robert Larmer, *The Legitimacy of Miracle* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), 41–46.

33. Ratzsch, *Nature, Design, and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science,* 106.

34. William Dembski, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions About Intelligent Design*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 281.

35. Robert Pennock, "Can't Philosophers Tell the Difference Between Science and Religion? Demarcation Revisited," *Synthese* 178 (2011): 189–190.

36. Robert Pennock, "Naturalism, Evidence, and Creationism: The Case of Phillip Johnson," in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 89.

37. Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism." 295.

38. Pennock, "Naturalism, Evidence, and Creationism: The Case of Phillip Johnson," 93–94.

39. An example already noted is that taking seriously the hypothesis that DNA is the product of design would lead to the prediction that what has tended to be understood as "junk" elements would upon further research be seen to have important function. This prediction has been largely borne out by the ENCODE project. For a readable account of the importance of what was formerly viewed as "junk" in the human genome, see Nessa Carey's *Junk DNA: A Journey through the Dark Matter of the Genome* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

40. Robert Delfino, "Replacing Methodological Naturalism," *Global Spiral* (May 2007), http://www.metanexus.net/Magazine/tabid/68/id/10028/Default.aspx.

41. See, for example, Robert Larmer, *Water into Wine?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1996), 75–92.

42. Draper's distinction between nomological science and historical science is often made in terms of distinguishing between operation science and origin science. See, for example, Norman Geisler and Kerby Anderson, *Origin Science: A Proposal for the Creation-Evolution Controversy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987).

43. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2007), 37.

44. Thus, for example, Richard Dawkins writes that "biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 4.

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Part IV

AXIOLOGY AND NATURALISM

Chapter 7

Alienating Humanity

How Evolutionary Ethics Undermines Human Rights

Angus Menuge

The Holocaust and many other instances of man's inhumanity to man provided a major impetus for the modern human rights movement. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) captures the idea that human beings have a special moral status and therefore deserve a high level of legal protection. The preamble demands "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family."[1] On this understanding, human rights are based on the *intrinsic* nature shared by *all* human beings *equally*, and so they are not dependent on such extrinsic factors as wealth or class, or on physical or psychological powers that not all human beings have, or have in differing degrees.

It is because these rights are inherent that they are also inalienable: the state has no authority to remove them, no matter how expedient that might be; nor can these rights be lost simply because of external changes in social organization. Thus, if a society adopts a totalitarian form of government that criminalizes dissidence or comes to depend on slavery for its "way of life," these practices remain human rights abuses.

This robust understanding of human rights (ably defended by Montgomery[2]) must be clearly distinguished from a common political understanding, according to which an aggrieved group may petition the state to *grant* it "human rights." These are not human rights in the robust sense, precisely because they are conferred by the state. In the robust understanding, human rights are "natural rights" of the sort affirmed by John Locke[3] and the US Declaration of Independence, and they therefore precede the state: the state's only legitimate role is to recognize and protect them.

While there are many controversies about human rights, it is arguable that most people agree, or can be brought by experience and argument to see, that human beings have an elevated moral status and special rights of some sort—rights they would not extend to trees, toasters, and rocks, for example. But how can this be? Biblical theism has a clear answer: humans have inherent, universal, equal, and inalienable rights because they are specially made in the image of God to be stewards of the rest of creation. By contrast, naturalistic evolutionary ethicists maintain that human characteristics, including physical and psychological capacities, are the result of undirected, causal processes (such as natural selection) that did not have them in mind. Is it possible for naturalistic evolutionary ethics (EE) to provide an equally compelling account of the basis of human rights in the robust sense?[4]

A significant number of philosophers, including ethical naturalists as well as theists, have argued that the answer to this question is probably "no." This is because robust human rights assume moral realism (there are real moral rights and obligations) and there are several versions of the "Evolutionary Debunking Argument" (EDA) against moral realism. I will first outline one of these arguments, suggested by Goetz and Taliaferro,[5] and developed in Menuge,[6] that provides a dilemma for EE. Next, I lay out Erik Wielenberg's recent response to this sort of argument.[7] Finally, I will show that Wielenberg's ingenious account fails to undermine the dilemma for EE.

THE DILEMMA FOR EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

For Darwin, the moral sense is a faculty that inevitably develops in any animal provided two conditions are met: (1) there are strong social instincts to do what is best for the society of creatures to which the animal belongs; (2) there is an ability to understand moral obligations and duties.[8] But what is best for an animal's society, or at least, what is instinctively and consciously believed best, will depend on how that society is organized, which is contingent on the process of natural selection. Applying this to human beings, it follows that had human social organization been sufficiently different, our social instincts and moral sense would also be different. This is a conclusion that Darwin drew explicitly:

> If . . . men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering. Nevertheless, the bee, or any other social animal, would gain in our supposed case . . . some feeling of right or wrong, or a conscience. For each individual would have an inward

> sense of possessing certain stronger or enduring instincts, and others less strong or enduring. . . . In this case an inward monitor would tell the animal that it would have been better to have followed the one impulse rather than the other. The one course ought to have been followed, and the other ought not; the one would have been right and the other wrong.[9]

Sharon Street gives similar examples, suggesting that our moral sense would be radically different had we developed like lions (male lions routinely kill the offspring of other males and it is not resented), bonobos (who engage in almost any sexual relationship), or social insects (for whom individuals are always expendable for the collective good).[10]

Darwin does not carefully distinguish two different conclusions one might draw from his hive-bee scenario, depending on the nature of the connection believed to obtain between natural history and morality. On one view, "Strong EE," *both* our moral sense and the moral facts depend on natural history. Thus, for strong EE, it follows that if we had been raised like hive-bees, we would not only instinctively feel that fratricide and female infanticide were duties, they would also *be* duties. On another view, "Weak EE," natural history explains only our moral sense (moral psychology), not the moral facts. So, for weak EE, it follows that if we had been raised like hive-bees, we would instinctively feel that fratricide and female infanticide were moral duties, whether or not they actually were.

Now the robust view of human rights we sketched is committed to: (a) a strong version of moral realism (human rights are part of the furniture of reality, not merely opinions, feelings, or constructions, as in various relativist or noncognitivist schemes); and (b) a non-skeptical view of morality, that insists that human rights (and human rights abuses) can be recognized (known). But these commitments appear to conflict with the claims of EE. It does not matter whether Strong EE or Weak EE is affirmed, as both face serious objections. Strong EE seems to imply that human rights do not exist, while Weak EE seems to imply that even if human rights do exist, we cannot know them. That is the dilemma for EE.

First, suppose Strong EE is affirmed: if we had been raised like hive-bees, fratricide and infanticide would have been moral duties. Then there cannot be *inalienable* human rights, because natural or artificial changes in biological history (genes and/or the environment) can abridge or even withdraw those rights. It could be that humans just happened to develop with similar cognitive powers (including a moral sense), but a different social organization, one like that of hive-bees. Or it could be that a statist tyrant decides to compel all human beings to be raised like hive-bees, using artificial hives. Either scenario conflicts with the basic human right to life (noted in article 3 of the UDHR), since that right includes brothers and female infants. According to Strong

EE, there are possible natural or artificial histories in which these humans have no such right, because fratricide and female infanticide are moral duties. It follows that there is no such thing as an inherent, universal, equal, and inalienable human right to life. Such a right exists only if it is inconceivable that someone is a human and lacks that right, but granted EE, it seems easy to conceive of scenarios where many humans would not have a right to life.

Now suppose Weak EE is affirmed: although being raised like a hive-bee would not make fratricide a duty, our moral sense would tell us that it was. This leaves two alternatives: either our moral beliefs are based on our instinctive moral sense or they are not. If they are, then these beliefs clearly do not provide reliable access to moral reality, since (counterfactually) we might naturally believe fratricide was right even though it was not. Our belief that brothers and female infants have a right to life might be true, but this is a lucky coincidence, since if we had been raised like hive-bees, we would not believe this. So, for Weak EE, even if our actual moral beliefs are true, they are not justified: it is like getting the time from a broken clock that happens to be right. If so, then while there might be some inalienable human rights, we cannot claim to know them.

On the other hand, if our moral beliefs are not based on our moral sense, but arise instead from reason or intuition, then since these provide access to universal truths (such as the laws of logic, and, if Kant is right, the categorical imperative, which is valid for rational beings as such) which transcend the accidents of natural history, it follows that these truths are not derived from the evolutionary process, even if that process produced the faculties which make knowledge of those truths possible. Either way, Weak EE fails to account for moral knowledge.

So, the basic dilemma for EE is this. If EE is correct then either: (1) human rights do not exist; or (2) they are unknowable or knowable via means which make EE irrelevant.

However, Erik Wielenberg has advanced a position he calls "godless normative realism," and he offers an evolutionary account of *both* the existence of human rights and our ability to know them. Wielenberg therefore qualifies as a proponent of Strong EE, and since his is arguably the best response to the dilemma for EE developed to date, it merits close examination.

WIELENBERG'S RESPONSE TO THE DILEMMA

Wielenberg recognizes that any version of ethical naturalism that embraces moral realism must face the strong arguments to show that moral properties: (a) are not reducible to natural properties; and (b) therefore have no causal

power (they are epiphenomenal). He grants both of these arguments and acknowledges that they make it prima facie puzzling how moral properties (and hence human rights) could exist and be knowable. He concedes that merely to assert that moral properties supervene on nonmoral properties is not explanatory and accepts the need to provide an account of why our moral beliefs reliably reflect moral reality.

Wielenberg's defense of godless normative realism depends on four major elements. First, he agrees with G. E. Moore that moral properties are sui generis, and are nonnatural in the sense that they are not identical with, or reducible to, natural properties.[11] Yet, maintaining compatibility with naturalism requires that moral properties are at least determined by, or supervene on, nonmoral properties: there can be no moral difference without a nonmoral difference. But why does moral supervenience obtain? Why, for example, does the moral wrongness of an action supervene on its nonmoral property of being cruel? Wielenberg's answer is the *making* relation: "The natural fact that an act is a piece of deliberate cruelty makes that act morally wrong."[12] He proposes that making is a "particularly robust" type of causation,[13] which does not require a natural law linking cause and effect, where cause and effect are simultaneous, and where the cause metaphysically necessitates the effect. Wielenberg concedes that the making relation is a brute fact, but argues that every account appeals to brute facts sooner or later.[14]

Yet these two points of ontology leave Wielenberg with a major epistemological problem. He recognizes that to maintain consistency with naturalism, moral properties must be epiphenomenal. None of the sciences uncovers a means by which moral properties could interact with natural properties, and if they did, this would violate the causal closure of the natural world. But if moral properties are epiphenomenal, how can we come to know them? In response to this challenge, the third major element of Wielenberg's account is a reliabilist model of moral knowledge. Drawing on important recent work in psychology, Wielenberg distinguishes two major cognitive systems, "System 1" (the adaptive unconscious) and "System 2" (the conscious mind). He points out that our conscious (System 1) moral classifications of actions as right or wrong plausibly depends on unconscious (System 2) nonmoral classifications of those actions, for example, as kind or cruel. And he proposes that in general, if the fact that x instantiates some nonmoral property N makes x instantiate moral property M, a subject S can know that x is M provided the following conditions are met:

1. System 1 reliably classifies x as N;
2. This classification causes S to have the System 2 belief that x is M;

3. The process type is reliable (that is, it generally produces correct results);
4. S has no undefeated defeaters for the belief that x is M.[15]

On this account, even though M is epiphenomenal, S can come to know that x is M because x's being N both makes it the case that x is M and reliably causes S to believe that x is M. In that sense, x's being N serves as a common cause or "third factor" that accounts for the correlation between the moral fact that x is M and S's belief that x is M.

Wielenberg recognizes that it might seem a bit of a fluke that our moral beliefs so reliably track moral reality, particularly in light of the evolutionary debunking arguments of Gilbert Harman,[16] Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson,[17] Sharon Street,[18] Richard Joyce,[19] and others. He is most concerned about the argument that naturalistic evolution undermines our confidence in morality, because it gives an account of our moral beliefs in terms of what is genetically useful which at no point depends on there being any moral facts.[20] The fourth component of Wielenberg's view is a rebuttal of this argument, using human rights as his test case. First, he suggests that shared genetic interests account for our sense of a moral barrier surrounding ourselves and other kin, and that this barrier can be extended to nonkin by applying the "Likeness Principle," which leads us to suppose that humans that are similar in their known properties are also similar in their unknown properties.[21] Second, Wielenberg argues that we can account for both the existence of human rights and our knowledge of them without appealing to any moral truths. He proposes that another "third-factor," our cognitive faculties, helps to "secure a correlation between moral rights and beliefs about moral rights because [these faculties] *entail* the presence of moral rights and *generate* beliefs about such rights."[22]

If Wielenberg is right, neither horn of the dilemma for EE is sound. On his proposal, evolutionary naturalism plausibly explains the existence of human cognitive faculties, including our moral sense, which make it the case that we have special human rights; so the first horn fails: EE does not show that human rights do not exist. And it is reasonable to think that these faculties enable us to know that we have human rights; so the second horn fails as well: EE does not show that knowledge of human rights is unlikely or impossible.

However, I will argue that each component of Wielenberg's ingenious account is problematic. If we take seriously what a godless world means, there are strong reasons to doubt that Wielenberg has grounded human rights in that world. And, even if human rights exist, in a godless world, it is highly unlikely that we could acquire knowledge of them. If I am right, the dilemma for EE stands.

VINDICATING THE DILEMMA

The Existence of Human Rights

Regardless of the details of naturalistic evolution, there is a more general concern that human rights are not a good fit for a godless world, casting doubt on Wielenberg's account of moral supervenience and the making relation. Wielenberg claims that x's having an appropriate natural, nonmoral property N can make it the case that x has some moral property M. But in a godless world, there is no underlying *telos* (such as a divine will) according to which some natural properties conform to the way the world is supposed to be, while others do not. In this world, an action which exhibits the natural property of kindness is no more supposed to happen, that one which exhibits the natural property of cruelty. In that context, it is arbitrary to assert that an act's being kind makes it right, or that an act's being cruel makes it wrong.

The situation bears a strong resemblance to the "hard problem" of consciousness for physicalism in the philosophy of mind. David Chalmers pointed out that, holding fixed the totality of physical facts, there are conceivable worlds in which no one is conscious ("zombie" worlds) or in which, when we experience red or pleasure, our physical duplicates experience green or pain ("invert" worlds).[23] Likewise, holding fixed the totality of godless natural facts, there are conceivable worlds in which there are no moral values, or in which an act of kindness is wrong and an act of cruelty is right. One way to put this is that the set of all natural truths about a godless world does not entail the existence of any moral truths, or that moral properties are distributed in the way that they are. After all, this is why David Hume noted the logical gap between indicative statements of natural fact and moral truths.[24]

In this context, Wielenberg's proposal of a making relation seems deficient for three reasons. First, we do not have good evidence that the making relation obtains, since we cannot deduce any moral truths from our knowledge of natural truths. At best, Wielenberg would have to issue a promissory note, asserting that we will one day see the connection. But just as the gap between the physical facts and consciousness has grown no smaller due to advances in neuroscience, it is hard to see how having more natural facts could close the gap between nonmoral and moral truths. Second, supervenience cannot be appealed to as something requiring an explanation, because our Chalmers-style scenario suggests that the moral facts do *not* supervene on the nonmoral facts. In addition to those facts, one needs some teleological principle that tells us how the world is supposed to go. And third, even if moral properties do emerge from natural properties, the making relation gives no explanation of the *particular* correlations that obtain. Since making is a brute fact,

Wielenberg's account has no resources to explain the error of a stubborn immoralist who insists that cruelty makes an action right.

Even if these general concerns can be overcome, Wielenberg's specific proposal for grounding human rights is also highly problematic. The gist of this proposal is that at some point, natural selection has endowed human beings with special cognitive faculties, ones that enable them to understand moral concepts, and the possession of these faculties makes it the case that human beings have an elevated moral status and hence human rights.

However, we just saw that in a godless world, it is not clear why any natural properties of an entity make it instantiate moral properties; so why should the possession of particular cognitive faculties make it the case that humans have rights? One major concern is that on naturalism, it is hard to see why human beings have any special significance deserving enhanced moral protections. This becomes clear by considering the wide variety of views philosophers have about the locus of value in environmental ethics.[25] Peter Singer asserts that value revolves around sentience, and therefore declares that the whole idea of human rights is a "speciesist" form of chauvinism since there are other sentient creatures, and an adult pig or dog may feel more pain than a newborn human infant.[26] By contrast, biocentrists think that Singer's view unfairly privileges some creatures, excluding nonconscious animals and plants that are equally deserving of moral consideration. And yet others, like Aldo Leopold, embrace an eco-centric ethic, which affirms the value of both living and nonliving elements of the environment. Just how, given a godless world, are we to adjudicate this dispute? Why should not human rights be seriously undermined due to equal or greater obligations to other sentient creatures, to life in general, or to the health of ecosystems?

And Holmes Rolston III points out that natural science cannot help us to answer these questions. Even a complete scientific account of the natural world would not tell us whether anything had value, or why we should value some things more than others. Given that account, we still do not know what we ought to desire:

> Our enlightened self-interest? Our genetic self-interest? More children? More science? The conservation of biodiversity? Sustainable development? A sustainable biosphere? The love of neighbor? . . . After science, we still need help deciding what to value; what is right and wrong; good and evil.[27]

It is precisely for this reason that Rolston concludes that ethics is autonomous from natural science, and we need religion to tell us what to value, and how much.

Further, on specifically evolutionary grounds, human cognitive faculties reflect ways in which humans have adapted to their environment, but

it is fallacious to argue that because these faculties give us greater levels of intelligence or consciousness, they are more morally valuable adaptations. As James Rachels pointed out, "We are not entitled—not on evolutionary grounds, at any rate—to regard our own adaptive behavior as 'better' or 'higher' than that of a cockroach, who, after all, is adapted equally well to life in its own environmental niche"[28] In a godless world, a serious case can be made that a moral Copernican revolution is required: if man is not made in God's image, we should embrace a principle of moral indifference, according to which human beings enjoy no special privileges.

A further difficulty is that, regardless of the details, cognitive faculties are insufficient to ground robust human rights. This is because, in common with many other natural powers and capacities, these cognitive faculties are not universally present in human beings, and they come in degrees. Thus some of the unborn, and those afflicted with developmental problems, various forms of brain damage, physical and psychological disabilities like Alzheimer's disease, the irreversibly comatose, and so on may not possess functional cognitive faculties of the relevant sort, and so they would not qualify for human rights protections at all. This would have the bizarre consequence that if one kills someone incrementally, first by causing brain damage that renders the individual's cognitive capacities nonfunctional, and then by causing death, the brain damage is, but the killing is not, a human rights abuse, but if one kills the individual immediately, then killing *is* a human rights abuse. Further, it is obvious that even among those who have the relevant cognitive faculties, there is wide variation in cognitive powers and capacities. Human rights are supposed to be equal, but it is implausible for the naturalist to claim that all of these human beings would have the same human rights: if cognitive powers and capacities come in degrees, so would human rights. Thus, if x has cognitive powers and capacities PC to degree n, and y has CP to degree m, where n is much less than m, Wielenberg's account makes it reasonable to suppose that this would *make* x to have inferior human rights to y. After all, if the degree to which one has functional cognitive capacities is irrelevant, why is it relevant whether one has them at all? And, as J. P. Moreland asks, on naturalism, "Why should we treat all people equally in any respect in the face of manifest inequalities among them?"[29] Wielenberg's account seems to conflict with both the universality and the equality of human rights affirmed by the UDHR.

Finally, the first horn of the dilemma for EE presses the point that there cannot be robust human rights if our rights are contingent on natural history. Wielenberg's response is that there may be a close tie between how humans have developed and their possession of human rights, such that rights-bearers like us could not have had radically different modes of living:

> It takes a lot of cognitive complexity to form moral beliefs—the sort of cognitive complexity that plausibly requires an extended developmental period during which the moralizer-to-be is relatively helpless. . . . Consequently, it's plausible that the young of such moralizing species require extended periods of care from multiple care-givers, not just mothers.[30]

But there does not seem to be a sufficiently close connection between having the right cognitive faculties to make moral judgments and a particular social organization. In a hive-like context, it could still be an advantage for the hive of humans as a whole if selected humans (e.g., brothers and female infants) were regarded as expendable. That extended care is required to nurture sophisticated cognitive faculties does not show that this care must be extended to *all* human beings or that all human beings should be accorded *equal* care. Further, even in the actual world, human societies have developed that depend on slavery, apartheid, the caste system, and so on. Since these human rights abuses are recent and ongoing, there is no plausibility in claiming they arise from a genetic difference in cognitive faculties. The fact is that functional cognitive systems do (and a fortiori could) coexist with modes of social organization that depend on systemic human rights abuses. To protest, rightly in my view, that these social differences depend not on genetics but on worldview differences will only reinforce the irrelevance of EE to human rights.

I conclude that Wielenberg has not shown that human rights are ontologically grounded in a godless world, and so the first horn of the dilemma for EE remains unscathed.

Knowledge of Human Rights

Now let it be granted that human rights do exist. Still, Wielenberg does not succeed in showing that we could know them. Most fundamentally, it is problematic that on his account, moral properties are epiphenomenal, and that we are caused to believe they are present by our cognitive faculties recognizing the nonmoral properties that make them obtain. Suppose my System 1 recognizes that an act A is kind, and that this both makes A right and causes a System 2 belief in me. How likely is it, though, that I would believe that A is right? The most fundamental problem is that moral rightness is epiphenomenal. As a result, moral rightness can play no role in shaping my concept of the act. This makes it unlikely that I would even have the concept of rightness, in which case I could not believe that anything is right. But even if I did somehow acquire the concept, the lack of a causal connection to rightness itself would seem to preclude a Kantian "deduction" of the category of rightness: I would not be entitled to think that the concept of rightness carved

reality at the joints; it might simply be a useful fiction. The latter problem is made worse by the argument that the genetic usefulness of beliefs about moral rightness gives a plausible explanation of those beliefs which nowhere requires rightness to exist.[31]

There is also a technical problem with Wielenberg's account. He thinks that I could know an act A of kindness is right provided A's being kind makes it right, and my System 1 classification of A as kind reliably causes my System 2 belief that A is right. The problem is that there is no reason to think my cognitive processes will parallel the making relation. Just because A's being kind makes it right is no reason to think that my classifying A as kind will cause me to *believe* that A is right. Given the difficulties in seeing how I could even have a valid moral concept, it is most likely that I would not form a moral belief at all: I might just *consciously* believe that A is kind (or has other nonmoral properties) or develop noncognitive feelings without making a moral judgment. But if I do form a conscious moral belief, we have been given no reason to think I am more likely to believe that A is right rather than wrong or morally neutral.

Wielenberg wrestles with why we should recognize the rights of all human beings if our biological interest is confined to our kin. Echoing James Q. Wilson,[32] he suggests that we come to include nonkin as rights-bearers using the Likeness Principle: because kin and nonkin have the same known properties, we assume they share the same unknown properties, and thus "attribute to all human beings the same underlying essence."[33] But the Likeness Principle is not adequate for moral knowledge of universal and equal human rights. There is the obvious problem that likeness comes in degrees and respects so that some humans may be at least as like some non-humans in at least many respects, a point pressed by Peter Singer. In terms of many cognitive faculties, there may be more in common between an adult human and an adult chimp than there is between an adult human and a human infant.

But a deeper problem is whether a proponent of EE is entitled to believe that the Likeness principle is true or reliable. If in fact moral value depends on genetic relatedness, then my inability to distinguish between kin and nonkin would not show that they are equally valuable even if I naturally believe this. This may just be a false belief I have because the biological cost of giving me the fine-grained ability to tell kin from nonkin was too great. But in any case, it is implausible that it is impossible to distinguish kin and nonkin: ethnocentric and tribal societies seem to do just that, and with increasing scientific sophistication, the sort of scenario depicted by the movie *Gattaca*, which ruthlessly enforces genetic discrimination, looks quite feasible. The important question is this: whether now or in the future, if someone can reliably distinguish kin and nonkin, just why, on evolutionary grounds, is that person

wrong to favor the former over the latter? On evolutionary naturalism, a species might certainly evolve with this ability, with or without technological help, and there seems no evolutionary basis for thinking it would be wrong for that species to practice genetic apartheid and deny the rights of nonkin.

Matters are made worse by Wielenberg's claim that on the basis of similar surface properties, we attribute to humans the same underlying *essence*. Supposing it is a fact that we do this does not make that attribution true: it could be a genetically useful fiction. And, on strictly evolutionary grounds, there is good reason to think it is a fiction. As the great evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr pointed out, modern evolutionary theory denies that there are any essences that fix boundaries between species: "Essentialist philosophies . . . are incompatible with evolutionary thinking."[34]

The general concern is that EE cannot ground *knowledge* of human rights on the basis of principles that are not reliable, that may reflect contingent cognitive limitations we can supersede, or that depend on metaphysical assumptions rejected by evolutionary theory itself.

On Wielenberg's "third-factor" account of human rights, having the right cognitive faculties simultaneously makes us have human rights and reliably causes our belief that we do. He claims that evolutionary debunkers have only shown that it is possible that our faculties are not oriented toward moral truth, not that we have good reason to think so, and therefore these arguments fail to provide a defeater for our natural moral beliefs. He further appeals to an all-in-the-same-boat principle, according to which we should not press the problem that we are lucky to have faculties oriented toward moral truth too hard because "there is no good reason to believe that moral knowledge on my account involves a kind of luck significantly different from the sort of luck that afflicts many of our non-moral beliefs."[35]

However, I think Wielenberg is mistaken on both counts. First, naturalistic evolution does give us a good reason to doubt the reliability of our moral beliefs. This is because natural selection, as Wielenberg admits, is not truth-tracking. Beliefs themselves are not directly "visible" to natural selection, which is only concerned to preserve genetically useful behavior. The evolutionary value of a belief, therefore, reduces to its tendency to produce useful behavior: whether or not that belief is true is irrelevant. Moral beliefs are selected because they confer some advantage, and that advantage is conferred by useful behavior, such as cooperation. That advantage remains the same whether or not it is true that cooperation is right, and whether or not we believe that it is. We would survive just as well by cooperating even if it were morally wrong, and even if we believed it was morally wrong but did it anyway. Joyce is surely right to insist that learning that our moral beliefs would be exactly the same even though there were no moral facts, or the moral facts were radically different than

they actually are, constitutes a defeater for the moral beliefs that we have. For this clearly shows that the process that generated those beliefs is not reliable, and as we saw, even if natural selection had favored the sort of cognitive system proposed by Wielenberg, that still would not provide moral knowledge.

To be sure, Wielenberg is right that "even if evolution itself is not a truth-tracking process . . . it [may] . . . have given us *proximate cognitive processes* that are truth tracking."[36] But though possible, this seems unlikely, given what evolutionary psychologists tell us about human faculties. Steven Pinker argues that on an evolutionary view, the mind is a collection of specialized modules, "designed by natural selection to solve the kinds of problems our ancestors faced in their foraging way of life."[37] However, what constitutes solving a problem is not (or not necessarily) getting the right answer (one that is true), but adopting a behavioral strategy that enhances survival and reproduction. Thus, Pinker says, "our brains were shaped for fitness, not for truth."[38] On similar grounds, evolutionary psychologist Lewis Wolpert concludes that "our brains contain a belief generating machine, an engine that can produce beliefs with little relation to what is actually true."[39] These considerations support the well-known argument from reason against evolutionary naturalism.[40] This argument undermines Wielenberg's all-in-the-same-boat response because it makes the case that evolutionary naturalism provides a reason to doubt *all* of our cognitive faculties. Being all in the same boat is no comfort if every plank is leaky.

CONCLUSION

Evolutionary naturalism does not appear compatible with human rights in the robust sense because, in a godless world governed by natural selection, it is most likely that human rights do not exist or are unknowable (the dilemma for EE). Erik Wielenberg's ingenious response fails to overcome this dilemma. What it vitally lacks are convincing reasons to think human beings have special dignity and the cognitive powers to know that they do.

Biblical theism fares better. It is no accident that a God of love makes beings that are, despite their fall into sin, especially like him in their goodness (hence their special dignity) and in their capacity to love others, which requires recognition of the human rights of all image-bearers. That image is inherent (it reflects how we are made), universal (no humans lack it), equal (not a matter of degree), and inalienable (since endowed by God, the state cannot take it away). Biblical theism provides a far more solid grounding for the existence and knowledge of robust human rights than evolutionary naturalism.[41]

NOTES

1. United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Paris: 1948), accessed March 1, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html.

2. John Warwick Montgomery, *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Dallas, TX: Probe Books, 1986).

3. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Everyman, 1993).

4. Note that this argument does not target divinely guided evolution or other theories, like Intelligent Design, which acknowledge intelligent (goal-directed) causation of natural processes.

5. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), Chapter 4.

6. Angus Menuge, "Why Human Rights Cannot Be Naturalized: The Contingency Problem," in *Legitimizing Human Rights: Secular and Religious Perspectives*, ed. Angus Menuge (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013).

7. Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

8. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 101.

9. Ibid., 102–103.

10. Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 2 (2006): 120–121.

11. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

12. Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 16.

13. Ibid., 18.

14. Ibid., 24.

15. Ibid., 94.

16. Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

17. Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, "Moral Philosophy as Applied Science," *Philosophy* 61 (1986): 173–192.

18. Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 2 (2006): 109–166.

19. Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

20. Ibid., 219.

21. Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 137–142.

22. Ibid., 155, emphasis in original.

23. David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

24. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 521.

25. Louis Pojman and Paul Pojman, *Environmental Ethics*, Sixth Edition (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2012).

26. Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

27. Holmes, Rolston III, *Genes, Genesis and God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 161–162.
28. James Rachels, *Created From Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 70.
29. J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 144.
30. Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 170.
31. Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, 183.
32. James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 44.
33. Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 142.
34. Ernst Mayr, *Population, Species, and Evolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 4.
35. Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 173.
36. Ibid., 164.
37. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 21.
38. Ibid., 305.
39. Lewis Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast: The Evolutionary Origins of Belief* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 140.
40. See Alvin Plantinga's "Is Naturalism Irrational?" Chapter 12 of his *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), his *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Chapter 10 of his *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Victor Reppert's *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) and his "The Argument from Reason," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and Angus Menuge's "Beyond Skinnerian Creatures: A Defense of the Lewis/Plantinga Critique of Evolutionary Naturalism," *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003): 143–165.
41. For an extended defense of the advantages of biblical theism over naturalism as a foundation for ethics, see Paul Copan, "Grounding Human Rights: Naturalism's Failure and Biblical Theism's Success," in *Legitimizing Human Rights: Secular and Religious Perspectives*, ed. Angus Menuge.

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Chapter 8

Divine Commands and the Euthyphro Dilemma

Some Naturalist Misperceptions

Matthew Flannagan

"If God does not exist, everything is permitted."[1] Ivan Karamazov's famous dictum expresses a thought which strikes many people as natural and obvious: that in the absence of God, there cannot be things like moral requirements. However, despite the ubiquitous appeal of this line of thought, Karamazov's quip would be dismissed out of hand by many contemporary philosophers particularly, by those philosophers who self-identify as "naturalists" and contend that no supernatural beings or causes exist. Naturalists often respond to the Karamazov intuition by contending it involves acceptance of a divine command theory of meta-ethics (DCM). This itself, they think, is enough to discredit it. This is because, it is widely contended, divine command theories were refuted over 2000 years ago by a line of argument pressed by Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue.

In this chapter, I will defend a divine command theory of ethics against such dismissals. I make two primary points. First, I will set out what modern divine command theories of ethics typically contend, and I will distinguish this from some common naturalist misunderstandings and mischaracterizations. Second, I will discuss the Euthyphro style arguments which are often thought to be decisive objections to DCM. I will argue that these objections are not the conclusive rebuttals they are often assumed to be.

WHAT IS A DIVINE COMMAND THEORY?

Recent philosophy of religion has seen a resurgence of interest in DCM. This revival began with the seminal work of Robert Adams[2] and Phillip Quinn.[3]

However, a plethora of philosophers have followed them—notably, William Alston,[4] William Craig,[5] and Stephen Evans.[6] Adams defines DCM as the thesis that ethical wrongness *is* (i.e., is identical with) the property of being contrary to the commands of a loving God.[7] Later he adds that it is important not just that God is loving but also that he is just. Craig defines the view as "our moral duties are constituted by the *commands of a just and loving God*."[8] Alston and Evans defend similar views, crediting Adams as their inspiration. As the words "loving" and "just" suggest, such theories presuppose a particular conception of God. God is understood traditionally as necessarily existent, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, and just, immaterial person who created and providentially orders the universe.

COMMON NATURALISTIC MISPERCEPTIONS

We can now turn to my first observation: when one examines many common and important criticisms of DCM, it is extremely common to find critics mischaracterize or misperceive their target. I will give four examples.

First, opponents of DCM often claim DCM offers an account of moral *goodness*. Louise Antony writes, "It [divine command theory] says that what is good, is good only because God has commanded it."[9] Similarly, Michael Heumer takes DCM to be a theory about "all evaluative properties."[10]

This is a mischaracterization. Divine command theorists offer an account of the nature of moral *requirements* or *obligations*, not an account of what is good to do. The concept of what is good and what is obligatory is distinct. It may be good—even saintly—to donate a kidney to a needy stranger, but we are not obligated to do this.[11] To be obligatory, an action must be more than just good or praiseworthy. Obligatory actions are actions we are required to do; we have to do them. Someone or something demands them of us, and failure to do them renders us blameworthy. It's appropriate to feel guilty and for others to censure us and even punish us for doing them. It is these features of morality which motivate the idea that they are law-like and command-like.

That divine command theories are almost always offered as accounts of the nature of moral obligations or requirements is evident from the writings of defenders of such theories. Quinn,[12] Adams,[13] Alston,[14] Craig,[15] Edward Wierenga,[16] John Hare,[17] and Alvin Plantinga[18] all present a divine command theory of *obligation*, not goodness per se. This isn't unique to modern divine command theories either; older divine command theorists such as William Paley,[19] John Locke,[20] George Berkeley,[21] and Francisco Suarez[22] typically limited divine command theories to accounts of moral obligations, not to goodness in general.

Second, naturalist critics of DCM often claim that DCM is the view *that you can't know what is right and wrong unless you first know about what God has commanded; as such, DCM entails that atheists are immoral people*. This mischaracterization occurs prominently in criticisms posed by Patrick Nowell-Smith,[23] Louise Antony,[24] Walter Sinnott-Armstrong,[25] James Cornman and Keith Lehrer.[26] Consider another example, Paul Kurtz: "If God is essential then how can it be that millions of people who do not believe in God, nevertheless behave morally. On (Craig's) view they should not and so (Craig's) God is not essential to the moral life."[27]

Kurtz' argument hides a subtle equivocation. When Kurtz refers to the idea that God is "essential to morality," he could mean one of at least two things. He could mean (a) that belief in God is essential to being able to know and competently live in accord with what is right and wrong. Or he could mean (b) that the existence of moral requirements depends on God's commands.

These are distinct claims. On the one hand, (a) expresses a claim of *epistemological* independence; it contends that one's *beliefs* about right and wrong can be known and justified independently of any beliefs one has about God's commands. On the other hand, (b) expresses a claim of *ontological* independence: it affirms that moral properties such as right and wrong can *exist* independently of God's commands. It's possible for two things to be epistemologically independent of each other, without those two things being ontologically independent. To use a standard example: the property of being water is identical with the property of being H_2O as such H_2O and water are not ontologically independent. Yet for thousands of years, people could perceive water, drink it, detect it, use it without knowing anything about atomic theory. So water and H_2O are epistemically independent. One can know something is water without believing in the existence of H_2O.

Kurtz argues that "millions of people who do not believe in God, nevertheless behave morally" shows people can *know* what their moral requirements are and live competently in accord with them without believing in God's commands. It shows only "God is not essential to morality" in sense (a); however, divine command theorists don't deny that God is epistemologically independent of morality. What they deny is independence in sense (b): divine command theorists claim that wrongness is (i.e., is identical with) the property of being contrary to God's commands.

A third common misperception is that *divine command theorists contend the word "good" is synonymous with the word "willed by God."* James Rachels says that "(divine command theory) essentially says that 'morally right' means 'commanded by God.'"[28] Peter Singer states, "Some theists say that ethics cannot do without religion because the very meaning of 'good' is nothing other than 'what God approves.'" He adds, "But these theists are caught in a trap of their own making, for what can they possibly mean by the

assertion that God is good? That God is approved by God?"[29] Antony states, "Good for the divine command theorist is *synonymous* with commanded by God; we are supposed to lack any conception of what it would be to be good or bad independently of our knowledge of what God has commanded."[30]

However, as we have already observed, divine command theorists propose a synthetic identity claim. They offer an explanation in terms of what Mark Murphy calls informative identification, such as when "we explain the nature of water by identifying it with H_2O or explain the nature of heat by identifying it with molecular motion."[31] But there is no reason to assume that because two properties are identical, that the terms which refer to them are synonymous. Craig's example illustrates this "light is a certain visible range of the electromagnetic spectrum. But obviously, that isn't the meaning of the word 'light.' People knew how to use the word 'light' long before they discovered its physical nature."[32]

A final misconception is that divine command theories contend *that morality is based on the Bible or some other sacred text like the Qur'an*. Richard Carrier has objected to divine command theories stating: "Within the Bible, there is a vast plethora of not only contradictory moral advice but many moral commandments that we now all deem fundamentally immoral."[33] Antony,[34] Sinnott-Armstrong,[35] Jerry Coyne,[36] and Huemer[37] offer similar criticisms.

While I disagree with Carrier's take on the Bible, even if one grants it, what he says is entirely compatible with DCM. Even if the Bible records God commanding something immoral, that does not entail that God actually did command something immoral. That conclusion requires the further premise that whatever the Bible teaches is true. While some divine command theorists do believe this further premise, some do not. It is not part of or entailed by a divine command theory itself, and one could consistently be a divine command theorist without holding this further premise. So as a critique of DCM per se, Carrier's argument fails. Carrier's claim does create a problem if the acceptance of a divine command theory is combined with a commitment to biblical inerrancy. However, then the problem would be with biblical inerrancy, not with DCM. So this kind of objection to divine command theories really just changes the subject.

EUTHYPHRO OBJECTIONS

The upshot of all this is that a lot of naturalist critiques of divine command theory attack straw men. No doubt this observation will strike many as pedantic because they believe that DCM is problematic even if accurately construed. It's widely claimed that divine command theories were refuted over 2000 years ago by a line of argument pressed by Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue.

However, ironically, Plato's original argument is somewhat obscure, and it's hard to find a compelling argument in it.[38] Most people, who attack a divine command theory today, ignore the original dialogue and instead appeal to three arguments which are loosely associated with Plato's dialogue. These are what I call the "horrendous-deeds objection," "the arbitrariness objection," and "the vacuity objection." Below, I will argue they all fail.

HORRENDOUS-DEEDS OBJECTION

A common objection, often incorrectly attributed to Plato's *Euthyphro*, is that a DCM has the counterintuitive implication that anything action at all could be morally right, no matter how horrendous. This objection looms large in the criticisms of DCM raised by Rachels[39] Michael Tooley,[40] David Brink,[41] and Sinnott-Armstrong.[42] Brink's articulation is typical:

> We might also notice a counterintuitive implication of voluntarism. Voluntarism implies that all moral truths are contingent on what God happens to approve. . . . Thus, for example, had God not condemned genocide and rape, these things would not have been wrong, or, if God were to come to approve these things, they would become morally acceptable. But these are awkward commitments, inasmuch as this sort of conduct seems necessarily wrong.[43]

This argument can be construed as follows:

(P1) If divine command meta-ethics is true, then if God commanded us to rape, we would be required to rape.
(P2) It is absurd that we could be required to rape.
(P3) God could command us to rape.
(C1) Therefore, divine command meta-ethics is absurd.

The key premise here is (P2). However, (P2) seems dubious. Divine command theorists do not contend that moral obligations are identified with the commands of just anyone. They explicitly identify them with the commands of *God* understood as an all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, just, immaterial person who created the universe. So (P3) holds only if it is possible for such a fully informed rational loving and just person to knowingly command rape. This is unlikely. The very reason people like Tooley, Brink, and Garcia cite examples of rape is because they view it as a paradigm of an action that no virtuous person could ever knowingly entertain. However, suppose, for the sake of argument, that (P3) is true—that it is possible for a just, loving, and omniscient person to command rape. It would follow there are possible

situations where a just and loving person, aware of all the relevant facts, could endorse rape, and under these circumstances, it is hard to see how (P2) could be maintained. Consequently, it is hard to see how both (P3) and (P2) can be true; hence, this objection contains at least one false premise.

Response #1: Impossible Counterfactuals

Recently, Sinnott-Armstrong and Antony have attempted to defend the horrendous deeds objection against the kind of response I have just made. Armstrong concedes that "Assuming God is good, *of course* he would command us not to rape."[44] He suggests a corrective: "Moreover, *even if God in fact never would or could* command us to rape, the divine command theory still implies the counter-factual that, if God did command us to rape, then we would have a moral obligation to rape. That is absurd."[45] Armstrong here appeals to a counterfactual with an impossible antecedent. He takes it that such counterfactual is "absurd." This is contrary to the standard view in modal logic, whereby a conditional with a logically impossible antecedent is *true*. Despite this Armstrong states that the falsehood of the counterfactual "seems plausible to most people regardless of technical details about impossible antecedents"[46]

Antony makes a similar point:

> In standard modal logics, any counterfactual with an impossible antecedent is true. . . . Results like this are widely regarded as regrettable, in so far as one looks to formal modal logic to reconstruct ordinary reasoning with counterfactuals. I am going with ordinary intuitions, which do not treat all counterfactuals with impossible antecedents as true.[47]

This is problematic. Antony's and Armstrong's rejoinder rules out not just a divine command theory, but every substantive meta-ethical theory.[48] Consider utilitarianism: even if rape never would or could maximize utility, utilitiarianism still implies the counterfactual, that if rape did maximize utility, then it would be obligatory. Similarly, with Kantianism: even if rape never would or could be categorically required by reason, Kantianism implies the counterfactual that if reason categorically required rape, then it would be obligatory. The same is true with virtue ethics. Even if a perfectly virtuous person never would or could commit rape, virtue theories imply the counterfactual that if a virtuous person were to rape, then rape would be permissible, and so on. If it's absurd that rape could be permissible even if a perfectly rational, loving, just, omniscient person commands it, then it must be absurd that rape could be obligatory if it's required by reason, compatible with virtue, or maximizes happiness. So unless one wants to declare all meta-ethical

theories as arbitrary, the claim that these counterfactuals are obviously absurd needs to be reconsidered.

Response #2: The Objection from Omnipotence

Erik Wielenberg has suggested another attempt to defend the horrendous-deeds objection. Wielenberg observes that the "version of divine command theory that is one of the most commonly discussed in contemporary philosophy has it that for an act to be morally wrong is for it to be forbidden by God, . . . where God is understood to be a being that is, among other things, omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect."[49] This, however, creates a problem for DCM:

> The horrendous deeds worry for such a theory is that because God is omnipotent, He has the power to command that Hitler's deeds be performed and hence there is a possible world in which Hitler's deeds are commanded by God. So, according to perfect being command theory, Hitler's deeds are morally obligatory in such a world (which presumably entails that they are morally right and praiseworthy in that world).[50]

The problem is that while divine command theorists do typically accept that God is "omnipotent," they *also* accept that God is essentially good and that he has certain character traits such as being loving, impartial, and just, essentially. Hence they don't think that God's possessing omnipotence means it is possible for God to act in a manner that is capricious, malicious, unjust, and so on. If omnipotence is understood to entail the possibility of God issuing such a command, then it's impossible for God to be both omniscient and essentially good. He is either one or the other. Wielenberg's argument, therefore, turns on how one understands or defines omnipotence and its relationship with other divine attributes such as essential goodness. Defining omnipotence has proven to be a very difficult and technical task in recent literature. Fortunately, all we need to do here is note various options.

One option is to deny that omnipotence and essential goodness are incompatible. Freddoso and Flint[51] have offered rigorous accounts of omnipotence in terms of God actualizing logically possible states of affairs. They argue that because there is no possible state of affairs where God commands something abhorrent, his failure to do so does not contradict God's omnipotence.

Ironically, one could appeal to Wielenberg himself on this score. Elsewhere Wielenberg has argued that omnipotence and essential moral goodness are compatible. Wielenberg stresses omnipotence involves the *power* to do what is logically possible. While it's not logically possible for God to issue malicious commands, this is not because he lacks the power to do so,

but because in no possible situation does he choose to exercise this power.[52] So Wielenberg explicitly rejects the inference that because God "has the power to command that Hitler's deeds be performed and hence there is a possible world in which Hitler's deeds are commanded by God."

A more fruitful line for Wielenberg would be to argue that omnipotence and essential moral goodness are incompatible. This position has been advanced by Wes Morriston, whom Wielenberg references in his paper. If omnipotence and essential goodness are incompatible, then God will either not be essentially good, or he will not be omnipotent. Suppose then we grant that goodness and omnipotence are incompatible attributes. Does this create a problem for divine command meta-ethics? Not necessarily. It will create a problem if the divine command theorist responds to this dilemma by denying God is essentially good while embracing his full omnipotence. If the divine command theorist takes this horn, then it will be possible for God to command evil, and thus the divine command theorist will be forced to embrace (P2) and (P3). But, nothing in Wielenberg's argument entails he must resolve the dilemma in this way.

An alternative is for the divine command theorist to qualify the claim that God is omnipotent. The divine command theorist could replace the claim that God is omnipotent with something weaker—namely, the claim that "God has as much power as is compatible with essential goodness." Morriston himself notes that even on this weaker claim God is still

> very powerful indeed—powerful enough to create the world, powerful enough to perform all sorts of (good) miracles. Powerful enough to ensure that evil will finally be defeated, that world history will have a wonderfully good outcome, that virtue will not go unrewarded, and that innocent suffering will not go uncompensated. Such a being would have enough power to satisfy our deepest longings for love and peace and justice. In sum, it would have enough power not to detract in any way from God's greatness or make Him unworthy of unconditional worship and devotion.[53]

So, even if God's omnipotence were incompatible with essential goodness, the divine command theorist could escape Wielenberg's objection by merely qualifying omnipotence.

THE ARBITRARINESS OBJECTION

Closely related to the "horrendous deeds objection" is the objection that DCM makes morality arbitrary. If DCM is true, God can have no reasons for commanding as he does. Oppy argues:

> Could it have been, for example, that murder, rape, lying, stealing and cheating were good because God proclaimed them so? Surely not! But what could explain God's inability to bring it about, that murder, rape, lying, stealing and cheating are good by proclaiming them so, other than its being the case that murder, rape, lying, stealing and cheating are wrong quite apart from any proclamations that God might make?[54]

However, this seems implausible. If God has certain character traits such as being essentially loving, and just, then God can and would have reasons for prohibiting actions like rape, murder, or cheating, quite apart from whether these actions are antecedently wrong. Consider Oppy's examples of "murder, rape, lying, stealing, and cheating." Prior to any command on God's part, these actions won't have the property of being morally prohibited. But they could still have other properties such as being cruel or harmful or unjust or detrimental to human happiness—or being expressions of hatred, for example. And a loving and just God could prohibit these actions because these actions have these nonmoral properties.

Sinnott-Armstrong and Russ Shafer-Landau pose a different line of argument. Sinnott-Armstrong writes:

> Let's assume that God commanded us not to rape. Did God have any reason to command this? If not, his command was arbitrary, and then it can't make anything morally wrong. On the other hand, if God did have a reason to command us not to rape, then that reason is what makes rape morally wrong. The command itself is superfluous. Either way, morality cannot depend on God's commands.[55]

Similarly, Shafer-Landau argues:

> Either there are, or there are not, excellent reasons that support God's prohibitions on (say) torture and rape. If there are no such reasons, then God's choice is arbitrary, i.e. insufficiently well supported by reason and argument. . . . If God is, in fact, issuing commands based on excellent reasons, then it is those excellent reasons and not the fact of God's having commanded various actions, that make those actions right. The excellent reasons that support the requirements of charity and kindness are what make it right to be charitable and kind.[56]

We can summarize this argument as follows:

(P1) Either (a) God has a reason for prohibiting rape, or (b) God has no reason for prohibiting rape.
(P2) If God has no reason for prohibiting rape, then God's commands are arbitrary.

(P3) If God has a reason for prohibiting rape, then that reason is what makes rape morally wrong.
(P4) If something distinct from God's commands is what makes rape morally wrong, then the divine command theory is false.
(C1) Either morality is arbitrary, or the divine command theory is false.

This argument commits the fallacy of equivocation. Schafer-Landau and Sinnott-Armstrong state that if God has reasons for his commands, then those reasons—and not the command—*make* the commanded action right. Stephen Sullivan has noted the word "make" can, in this context, be used in two very different senses.[57] Sometimes we use the word "make" to refer to what Sullivan calls a *constitutive* explanation: On a hot day, I pour a glass of water with the aim of drinking it and quenching my thirst. There is a legitimate sense in which I can say that what makes me pour a glass of water is the fact that I am pouring a glass of H_2O. When I do this, I use the word "makes" to refer to a relationship of identity. I am explaining one thing (the pouring of the water) by citing the existence of another thing which I take to be identical with it. The second sense is what Sullivan calls a *motivational* explanation, such as when I state that what makes me pour a glass of water is the fact that I am thirsty. Motivational explanations don't explain an action by referring to something taken to be identical with it; instead, they attempt to tell us why an agent acted the way they did by giving us the reasons and/or motivations the agent acted upon.

Whichever of these two senses of the word "makes" is meant by Sinnott-Armstrong and Schafer-Landau, their argument fails. Let's look at the first option, that the word "makes" is being used in a motivational sense:

(P1) Either (a) God has reasons for prohibiting rape, or (b) God doesn't have reasons for prohibiting rape.
(P2) If God doesn't have reasons for prohibiting rape, then God's commands are arbitrary.
(P3)' If God has reasons for prohibiting rape, then those reasons *motivationally explain* why rape is morally wrong.
(P4)' If something distinct from God's commands motivationally explain why rape is morally wrong, then a divine command theory is false.
(C1) Either morality is arbitrary, or the divine command theory is false.

On this interpretation of the argument (P3)' is plausible. If God has reasons for issuing the commands he does, and the property of being wrong is identical with the property of being contrary to God's commands, then these reasons do provide a motivational explanation as to why rape is wrong. The problem is that, on this interpretation, (P4)' is false.

The claim that something other than God's commands *motivationally* explains why actions are wrong is compatible with a divine command theory. When divine command meta-ethicists propose that God's commands make some action right or wrong, they are offering a constitutive explanation of the nature of wrongness. They claim that wrongness is identical with the property of being contrary to God's commands. It's only in this constitutive sense of the word "makes" that they deny anything other than God's commands "make" actions wrong.

An obvious solution is to interpret the word "makes" in the constitutive sense. So interpreted, the argument goes like this:

(P1) Either: (a) God has reasons for prohibiting rape, or (b) God doesn't have reasons for prohibiting rape.
(P2) If God doesn't have reasons for prohibiting rape, then God's commands are arbitrary.
(P3)" If God has reasons for prohibiting rape, then those reasons are identical with the property of moral wrongness.
(P4)" If something distinct from God's commands is identical with the property of moral wrongness, then a divine command theory is false.
(C1) Either morality is arbitrary, or the divine command theory is false.

Now (P4)" is plausible, if something distinct from God's commands is identical with wrongness, then God's commands cannot be identical with wrongness. However, now (P3)" turns out to be implausible. Why should the fact that God has reasons for issuing a command mean that those reasons are identical with the property of being morally wrong? The objector here seems to assume the following inference: *If A is identical to B, and someone has reasons r for bringing about B, then A is identical with r.*

However, this inference is invalid. Consider the following counterexample. Billy prefers to be unmarried because he hates women. The property of being an unmarried man is identical with the property of being a bachelor. Consequently, the inference entails that the property of being an unmarried man is identical with the property of hating women. This is obviously silly. Billy's hatred of women might give him reasons to remain unmarried, but his hatred isn't identical with his being a bachelor; after all, there are many bachelors who like women.[58]

Sinnott-Armstrong's and Shafer-Landau's argument appears sound only because the phraseology of "making" something right or wrong is loose and vague. Once we realize that divine command theorists use this phrase to refer to a synthetic identity relationship, the argument's plausibility evaporates.

VACUITY OBJECTION

Finally, critics press what's known as the vacuity objection. A divine command theory entails that "the doctrine of the goodness of God is rendered meaningless."[59] Oppy puts the objection forcefully: "It cannot be . . . that God's commands, or decisions determine what is morally good because God is morally good *prior to* the giving of those commands or the making of those decisions."[60] If God is essentially good, he must be good prior to issuing any commands. However, this means that goodness can't depend upon the existence of Gods commands, if it did, goodness would exist prior to itself.

However, as I pointed out above, DCM is not an account of moral goodness; it is an account of moral requirements, not an account of goodness in general. Consequently, when divine command theorists say God's commands determine what is good, he means only that the existence of *moral obligations* or *moral requirements* depends upon God. (Remember the example of a person who donates a kidney to a stranger. This act is *good*, but it is not a duty or moral obligation. Moral duties are at best subcategory of goodness or value; they are not identical to it.) By contrast, when a divine command theorist says God is good, he means by this that God has certain *character traits*: God is loving, just, impartial, faithful, in all possible worlds.

But the question of whether someone has certain character traits is distinct from the question of whether she has moral requirements to behave in a certain way. Consider a nihilist, who denies the existence of objective moral requirements. This nihilist could, if he wanted, choose to live in accord with the norms of justice and could choose to be a faithful, loving, and impartial person. What he couldn't do is claim that there exists any moral obligation to live this way.[61] This distinction removes the sting from Oppy's objection. God's commands determine the existence and content of moral requirements. This doesn't mean his commands determine the existence of certain character traits. Consequently, God can have these character traits prior to giving any commands.

CONCLUSION

The "horrendous-deeds," "arbitrariness," and "vacuity" objections, therefore, all fail. This is significant because these are the three reasons commonly given for rejecting DCM. When naturalist philosophers dismiss DCM, they almost always cite one of these three objections as decisive. If these objections fail, so does much of the naturalist's case against DCM.

Divine command meta-ethics provides an attractive account of the nature of moral requirements. DCM explains how things like categorical

requirements, prohibitions, and demands can both exist and be objective—and how something independent of human institutions can condemn and prohibit certain actions I perform independently of goals I may presently have. Because God is essentially just, committed to our welfare, rational, and fully informed, and will hold us accountable for our actions, DCM explains how moral requirements constitute weighty reasons for action and also why moral wrongness supervenes upon certain types of natural property. DCM also has massive explanatory scope; if God exists, this explains not only the nature of moral requirements but also potentially the origin of the universe, the existence of contingent beings, the nature and existence of natural law, and a whole host of other phenomena.

In light of this, it is not enough for naturalists to simply dismiss the claim that moral requirements cannot exist without God. They need to show what's wrong with theories that make morality dependent on God, and they need to show that better secular theories exist which aren't plagued by even more serious problems.

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Chapter 9

Beauty

A Troubling Reality for the Scientific Naturalist

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophical discussion of naturalism has exploded in recent years. New questions, problems, and perspectives are emerging. A few naturalists now recognize the need to explain our aesthetic sensibilities and, in particular, our judgments of beauty.[1] Apparently, some naturalists are discomfited by the standard evolutionary story when applied to human aesthetic experience and judgment. Can our aesthetic capacities be explained in terms of natural selection? Is it enough to say that our appreciation of beauty, not to mention the capacity for artistry, emerged because it was somehow crucial to the survival of our species? And what about our capacity for artistry? Is that the result of adaptation by natural selection to an environment hostile to the survival of primates?

There is, in addition, a question about beauty itself—a question that naturalists have generally neglected. In this chapter, we state this question in precise terms and explain how it constitutes a problem for naturalism.

THE MEANING OF NATURALISM

It is not at all easy to say what naturalism is. Ernest Nagel wrote, "The number of distinguishable doctrines for which the term 'naturalism' has been a counter in the history of thought is notorious." That was in 1958![2] Doctrines and distinctions associated with the term "naturalism" have multiplied since then.

There is, to begin, the much-advertised distinction between *metaphysical* naturalism and *methodological* naturalism. Immediately the question arises: Is there a sense of "naturalism" that each has in common?

Various other adjectives are frequently used to modify the term "naturalism": *scientific* naturalism, *philosophical* naturalism, *materialist* naturalism, *physicalist* naturalism. If you know your Berkeley, you may be hesitant to equate the "materialist" variety with the "physicalist" variety. But maybe they do denote the same thing. Isn't it, in any case, redundant to speak of "materialist *naturalism*" or "physicalist *naturalism*"? Why not just say "materialism" or "physicalism"?

Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro list other designations for this or that sort of naturalism: "liberal naturalism," "more open-minded or expansive naturalism," "nonscientific naturalism," and "pluralistic naturalism." Then there's "restrictive naturalism" and "puritanical naturalism," apparently standing in for "scientific naturalism," where the designation "puritanical" is doubtless used pejoratively.[3]

Goetz and Taliaferro add to the heap of labels using "broad naturalism" to cover those "more expanded conceptions of the world."[4] They write:

> The crucial element uniting most of these broader forms of naturalism is that they reject the view that there is anything in the world that cannot (ultimately) be accounted for in terms of the sciences, *including* psychology, history, and so on. Broad naturalists allow for more than physics, chemistry, and biology, but they retain a stern resistance to appeals to any force beyond the natural world such as a transcendent God to account for the existence and character of nature.[5]

In other words, if you believe that some things that exist cannot be explained in terms of the sciences, including physics, chemistry, and biology, also psychology, history, and the like, then you are not a naturalist, even in the broad sense.

The fundamental point can hardly be missed: naturalism is essentially anti-supernaturalist. Theism entails that some form of supernaturalism is true; so if you're a theist, you cannot be a naturalist. We are theists. Our conviction that theism is true is grounded in evidence. Some evidence points directly to the reality of God. Other evidence makes theism attractive because it is much more difficult for competing worldviews to account for the evidence. There are problems that arise for naturalism, for example, that do not arise for theism. And though there are nonnaturalistic alternatives to theism, deep problems for naturalism challenge the most socially entrenched alternative to theism. For some, naturalism is attractive because it is an alternative to theism. But if naturalism promises more than it can deliver, theism cannot be set aside with complete indifference.

Reasons to be a theist, then, are reasons not to be a naturalist. But there also are good reasons not to be a naturalist *no matter what you make of theism*. In this chapter, we offer a direct argument against naturalism and an indirect argument for theism from beauty. We argue, in the first instance, from beauty against naturalism. This anti-naturalist argument from beauty sets a problem for naturalism. Naturalists should have something plausible to say in response. The problem, as you'll see, is one of explaining something that needs explaining. If naturalism cannot explain something that needs explaining, and some form of supernaturalism can explain it, then that counts both as evidence against naturalism and in favor of supernaturalism.

A Note about Explanation

Inference-to-the-best-explanation arguments depend on these two conditions: (1) agreement about the reality and proper description of that which is to be explained, and (2) agreement that something falling under that description must be explained. Competing explanations differ only with regard to the second condition, and the comparative values they have as explanations (given the satisfaction of the first condition).[6]

Meeting the first condition often depends on clarifying the concept of what is to be explained, and then affirming the reality of something that falls under that concept; alternatively, it may depend on affirming the reality of something, and then clarifying the concept under which that thing falls. Having thus determined what is to be explained, the real business of explanation can begin.

A partisan of some particular worldview may anticipate difficulty in explaining the reality of something that makes trouble for her worldview. Anticipating trouble, she may object to a description of the reality that is to be explained. This is her prerogative. But proper description is not, in general, a matter of arbitrary preference. This means that there is the real possibility that advocacy of a particular worldview places one in the awkward position of having to deny the existence of—or the most plausible description of—the thing in question. When this happens, such resistance can signal trouble for the partisan's worldview—trouble that is apparent to the partisan, trouble that explains the partisan's reluctance. This reluctance is especially noteworthy when the object as described is generally and most naturally thought to be real.

So when you begin with a broadly and naturally accepted phenomenon, and you affirm a commonsense (or natural) description of the phenomenon, if the advocate of an alternative worldview refuses to accept the reality and description of that phenomenon, you already have an argument against that worldview.

This claim attributes considerable significance to common sense. For some, this is itself a mark of naïveté. We favor the attitude, however, that a common sense view of something common to human experience is the view one ought, epistemically, to accept—barring severe difficulties for the view. It is the default view.

This has a nontrivial bearing on our project. We'll present what we believe to be a common sense conception of aesthetic values and, in particular, of beauty. This conception, we'll later argue, challenges naturalism. If a naturalist responds with a denial of the common sense conception of aesthetic values, then that naturalist must not only offer a viable alternative conception (one that is at the very least logically possible, say), but also demonstrate that his alternative conception is more plausible than the common sense conception. Obviously, under these strictures, the common sense perspective begins with an advantage. We don't apologize for that.

All of this to say that if the naturalist's rejoinder to our argument is to deny the common sense conception of aesthetic values (a conception for which we argue), then the naturalist has thereby aided and abetted our general argument against naturalism.

AESTHETIC PROPERTIES AND THE NATURE OF BEAUTY

Let us turn now to the concept of beauty and the broader category to which it belongs, the aesthetic. Aesthetic properties are typically defined in terms of their association with human sensory and emotional responses. That is, an aesthetic property is any feature of an object the perception of which requires a certain sentiment or taste on the part of the observer. Examples of aesthetic properties include "delicate," "gaudy," "serene," "intense," "elegant," and "sublime," as well as the property of being "beautiful." Aestheticians debate many issues pertaining to aesthetic properties, such as: (1) whether aesthetic properties are reducible to non-aesthetic properties (e.g., "slender," "rough," "noisy," "complex," "bumpy," and "bright"), (2) whether the experience of aesthetic properties demands a certain kind of perceptual ability, and (3) whether or to what degree the ability to perceive aesthetic properties can be taught. But the question most pertinent to our discussion is this: Are aesthetic properties *real* properties of objects themselves or are they merely features of our personal *responses* to objects? In other words, if we describe the *Mona Lisa* as "delicate" or "somber," are we describing the painting or are we describing some aspect of our response to the painting?

Three Arguments for Aesthetic Realism

There are two general perspectives regarding this question—*aesthetic realism* and *aesthetic non-realism*. The aesthetic realist claims that aesthetic properties are indeed real properties of objects, be they artworks (e.g., paintings, sculptures, musical compositions and performances, buildings and bridges) or natural objects (e.g., conifers, lakes, antelope, and seashells). And in calling such properties "real," the aesthetic realist means, minimally: (1) aesthetic properties are genuine *attributes of the object*, and (2) aesthetic judgments ("X is gaudy," "X is sublime," etc.) *describe the object*. The aesthetic non-realist, on the other hand, maintains that aesthetic properties are not real properties of objects. Rather, (1) aesthetic properties reflect or refer to an observer's *response* to the object, and (2) aesthetic judgments express this response in some way. There are varieties of aesthetic anti-realism, including aesthetic subjectivism, aesthetic emotivism, and aesthetic prescriptivism. These differ in the way each analyzes or "translates" aesthetic judgments.

Aesthetic Subjectivism:	"X is gaudy"	=	"X disturbs me"
	"X is sublime"	=	"X inspires me"
Aesthetic Emotivism:	"X is gaudy"	=	"X, Yecch!"
	"X is sublime"	=	"Hurrah for X!"
Aesthetic Prescriptivism:	"X is gaudy"	=	"Avoid X"
	"X is sublime"	=	"I recommend X"

So which broad perspective is correct, aesthetic realism or aesthetic non-realism? Are aesthetic properties real properties of objects or not? We affirm aesthetic realism for several reasons. While, the realist thesis deserves a more elaborate defense, we find three lines of argument especially compelling.

First, aesthetic realism most naturally accounts for aesthetic disagreement and debate. For example, is van Gogh's painting *Starry Night* gaudy or sublime (or neither)? And should Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* be considered lovely or kitschy (or neither)? Art and literary critics debate such questions, both at the general theoretical level and in reference to particular works of art. And when they engage in such arguments, they share an assumption: there are the objects, the artifacts, and these objects are not to be conflated with the viewers' or readers' responses to them. Gaudiness, sublimity, loveliness, and kitschiness are properties of artworks. They are in no way aspects of audience responses to artworks. If they were, then disagreement about the aesthetic properties of objects would be pointless and debate would be a waste of time. Real disagreement would not be possible since ascriptions of these properties would be entirely relative to the mental states of viewers,

readers, and listeners. If the non-realist is correct, then we could no more disagree about the sublimity of *Starry Night* than we can disagree about whether walnuts are bitter. And it would be no more reasonable to debate whether *The Road Not Taken* is kitschy than it would be to argue about whether chocolate truffles taste better with milk or with wine. But clearly our customary debates about artworks are reasonable, just as critics' disagreements about the aesthetic properties of objects are real. And these common sense observations tend to confirm aesthetic realism.

Second, aesthetic realism accounts for aesthetic training and expertise. A literary critic must learn to identify elegant or tawdry uses of language, and some literary critics are better than others at distinguishing tedious or extravagant prose from what is admirably challenging or exotic. If non-realism was true, then all such training would be a waste of time, and no literary critics would be more skilled than any others when judging works of art. For, given aesthetic non-realism, literary elegance or tawdriness is entirely a matter of reader response, and there is no sense in which a literary work is elegant or tawdry in itself. This, of course, defies common sense. What is true of literary evaluation is true also of other domains of aesthetic evaluation.

Finally, aesthetic realism accounts for uniform or universal aesthetic experiences associated with particular works of art. For instance, viewers tend to laugh rather than cry when watching the films like *Tommy Boy* and *The Incredibles*, while *Manchester by the Sea* and *La La Land* elicit very different emotional responses from viewers. And films like *Psycho* and *The Shining* inspire neither laughter nor tears, but rather terror. While such uniformity among viewers' responses to films surely has something to do with human emotions and aesthetic sensibilities, these psychological facts about viewers are not sufficient to explain their responses. Responses of delight, sorrow, and fear are *consistently associated* with these films. This strongly suggests that there are qualities in these artworks which reliably elicit these responses. That is, such properties as "humorous," "poignant," and "terrifying" are real qualities of films and other artworks. And statements such as "*Apocalypse Now* is intense" and "*The Wizard of Oz* is enchanting" describe the films themselves, while also revealing audience responses to them.

Much more could be said in defense of aesthetic realism, but these three points are central.[7]

"Beauty" as an Aesthetic Property

Now let us turn to the particular aesthetic property "beauty." To describe an artwork or natural object as beautiful is to offer aesthetic praise of an especially strong kind. That is, *beauty* is an aesthetic term that denotes a certain aesthetic excellence, just as an opposing aesthetic property, such as ugliness,

denotes a significant lack of positive aesthetic quality. Thus, we may say that these qualities, the beautiful and the ugly, *admit of degrees*. That is, objects may be more or less beautiful or aesthetically excellent. Some objects register at the extreme ends of the spectrum between the beautiful and the ugly. Other objects fall somewhere between the extremes. At the midpoint on this continuum, objects seem to be no more beautiful than ugly and are properly judged aesthetically mediocre.

Second, we may say that beauty/ugliness is a *value*. To call an object beautiful or ugly is to give it a positive or negative overall aesthetic evaluation. In this respect, judgments of beauty about works of art or natural objects parallel moral judgments about the *goodness* of an act or person. To judge the beauty of an object, one might say, is to assess it in terms of its overall aesthetic goodness.

Third, our assessment about the beauty/ugliness of an object may be more or less *correct*. In a sense parallel to ethical appraisals, with regard to the degree to which the object judged really is beautiful or ugly, there is a public truth of the matter. And one may judge an object to be beautiful, when it is, in fact, rather ugly, or vice versa. Moreover, the variance of subjective (whether cognitive, conative, or emotional) responses to artworks is consistent with there being objective truth about the status of the object as beautiful or ugly.

We affirm a realist perspective about beauty, as we do about aesthetic properties generally. And the arguments we have presented in favor of aesthetic realism can be applied to beauty as follows. First, beauty realism accounts for disagreement and debate over the excellence of artworks. Not only do music critics and film reviewers dispute the aesthetic excellence of songs and films; lay people or non-specialists do as well. And, as we all know, these disagreements are very real. When we differ over whether, say, U2's *The Joshua Tree* or Radiohead's *OK Computer* is the better album, we disagree about those albums themselves. And if someone declares that *The Dark Knight* is aesthetically superior to the *Godfather*, this is liable to ignite a debate because, again, we recognize that this claim concerns the films themselves and not merely one's response to them.[8]

Second, beauty realism accounts for the fact that some people are more skilled than others when it comes to making judgments about beauty. Aesthetic experts in various fields have a certain acknowledged authority, even though their judgments are fallible and prone to distorting influences by reigning artistic trends and aesthetic paradigms. Their expertise depends on skills that come only with training—years of study and experience in dealing with artworks. Because of their training, these specialists develop superior powers for *recognizing* the aesthetic qualities of objects. If beauty was merely a matter of personal preference, then expertise would be neither necessary

nor even useful when it comes to making judgments of beauty. And expertise would not be possible were it not for the fact that a person can be educated in the skills of recognizing what is or is not beautiful. The expert educates us and *directs our attention* to aspects of a work of art that we might not otherwise see. We come to *appreciate* what is true of an object.

Third, the fact that certain artworks are universally recognized as superior within their genres makes sense only given the truth of beauty realism. All educated people *agree* that Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Michaelangelo's *David*, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, and Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal are aesthetically excellent. This uniform conviction is evidence that the works themselves are beautiful. Their beauty is not, as the popular but unserious saying goes, merely "in the eye of the beholder."[9] In fact, the subjectivist viewpoint reduces to absurdity. If beauty really is entirely in the mind of the beholder, then it follows that the paintings by Rembrandt and Leonardo da Vinci are not *in themselves* superior to a three-year-old child's doodlings that are so admired by her parents. Nor are the compositions of Bach and Mozart aesthetically superior to the random prancing of a lively kitten on the family keyboard. According to a non-realist perspective, such as aesthetic subjectivism, no artworks are inherently better than any others. But this defies our most basic intuitions about art and creativity. It is clear, then, that beauty (as well as ugliness) is a real quality of things.

We emphasize the fact that judgments of beauty and ugliness are distinctive in that they are evaluative in nature. Some aesthetic judgments are descriptive, such as when we call a sunset "exquisite" or we speak of a "magnificent" tiger, a "terrifying" eclipse, or a "comical" ostrich. In such judgments it appears that aesthetic properties supervene on natural, non-aesthetic properties.[10] That is, what makes the thing "exquisite," "magnificent," "terrifying," or "comical" can be analyzed in terms of qualities such as size, color, and proportion. But aesthetic judgments pertaining to beauty (or ugliness) cannot be so analyzed or reduced to natural properties. When someone says *Slumdog Millionaire* is a "gorgeous" film, Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is a "lovely" book, or Brahms' "Variations on a Theme from Haydn" is "beautiful" music, these are positive evaluations or assessments of value; they are *attributions* and not *merely subjective reports*. Similarly, when someone says, "This velvet painting of a Harley Davidson Fatboy is ugly" or "that cross-stitched Confederate flag is hideous," these are aesthetic evaluations, though of a negative sort. And although we can usually point to observable properties in such objects to justify our judgments, the judgment of beauty (or ugliness) is not fully analyzable in these terms. This is because, as statements of value, these judgments imply an appeal to certain *standards* or *norms* for what counts as excellent within an artistic genre. Some artworks, such as *Paradise Lost* and *The Four Seasons*, admirably meet or satisfy these

standards, while (at least most) velvet paintings, cross-stitchings, and children's doodlings fall far short.

Our point is that judgments of beauty (when understood in the realist sense of referring to objects themselves) imply transcendent aesthetic norms. That is, if beauty is a real quality of things, independent of any human preference or feeling, then this implies some sort of objective standard for beauty or aesthetic goodness, in reference to which natural objects and artworks may be judged or assessed.

BEAUTY AS EVIDENCE AGAINST NATURALISM

It's critical to keep in mind that on a naturalist worldview the concept of objective aesthetic norms presents serious difficulties. Absolute norms or "oughts" which transcend all persons are *prescriptive*, whereas inquiry into the physical world, such as by science or history, is inherently *descriptive*. And as Hume observed in the context of moral inquiry, prescriptions cannot be derived from simple descriptions of the physical world. You cannot get an "ought" from an "is." This means that, given naturalism, there is no real beauty or ugliness in the world, since these properties are intelligible only vis-à-vis a standard for aesthetic excellence. But as we have seen, there are compelling reasons to believe that beauty and ugliness *are* real properties of objects in the world. So, to the extent that this commonsense belief about beauty or ugliness is reasonable, naturalism is undermined.

It should be noted that our anti-naturalist argument from beauty is structurally parallel to one type of argument from morals for the existence of God. A prominent moral argument notes the reality of ethical norms or moral prescriptions and seeks to demonstrate the failure of naturalism to account adequately for them. Though parallel in some ways to this type of moral argument, our argument from beauty is unique inasmuch as it is concerned with aesthetic rather than ethical norms. The strong parallel does not, however, suggest that our argument is merely a trivial adaptation. This is because the category of beauty is significant and sui generis. Our experiences and judgments of beauty constitute an important aspect of our lives, independent of our experiences and judgments in the moral sphere. If successful, our argument reveals another broad domain about which naturalism lacks explanatory power, and it provides indirect evidence for some form of supernaturalism.[11]

In addition, in the present context, aesthetic qualities are properties of physical objects. Not so for moral properties. Agents and their actions may be evaluated morally, but neither agents nor their actions are strictly public objects. This difference in ontology between moral and aesthetic properties suggests a corresponding difference in modes of presentation and grounds

for knowing. Indicators of the presence of moral and aesthetic qualities differ. A person's privately accessible mental states, such as feelings of guilt or anxiety, may be evidence that the person's own actions or character fall short of the moral ideal. In the case of aesthetic judgments, objects of evaluation are not generally apprehended by introspective means. It is noteworthy, also, that moral judgments are performed by moral agents, whereas aesthetic judgments may be made at some level of competence by persons who never create works of art. And the products of creative activity are not part of the creator in the way that moral properties of agents and their actions are. In the realm of the aesthetic, naturalism is confronted with sui generis phenomena, akin in some respects to moral properties, but different in marked ways, as well.

Furthermore, although similar in the sense that both beauty and moral goodness are values (or facts which involve a complex relationship between objects/persons and transcendent prescriptive standards), for all we know there might be some naturalists who affirm the objective reality of beauty while denying that moral values have any absolute truth value. Our argument thus has the potential to pose a strong challenge for any aesthetic realist who might object to moral realism.

Our argument invites careful attention to the specific character of aesthetic properties. And perhaps most important, one characteristic attempt by scientific naturalists to account for moral sensibilities—namely, explanation in terms of evolved interest in species preservation—seems unavailable in the attempt to account for aesthetic sensibilities.

As noted earlier, we emphasize that the argument we have presented here is aimed at undermining naturalism rather than providing direct support for theism. But it is noteworthy that aesthetic considerations do provide some potentially fruitful lines of argument in support of a theistic worldview (which is one form of nonnaturalism).

AN ARGUMENT FROM THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO AESTHETIC VALUES

The argument just recited is at the very least a threat to any form of naturalism that refuses to allow description and explanation of aesthetic properties—such as beauty—in terms beyond the resourcefulness of science, however broadly construed. Again, theism is a likely beneficiary of this polemical challenge to naturalism, especially if the challenge is framed within a cumulative evidential case for theism.

Here is another type of anti-naturalist argument from aesthetics. Its focus is the human response to aesthetic values.

1. Some objects have aesthetic properties.
2. The presence of aesthetic properties in objects coincides with the existence of transcendent aesthetic norms or values that determine the aesthetic character of such objects.
3. In their awareness of the aesthetic properties of objects, human persons are responsive to their corresponding aesthetic values.
4. If human subjects are responsive to these aesthetic values, then there must be some *causal link* between these values and the capacities of human subjects to respond to them.
5. So, there must be some causal link between these values and the capacities of human subjects to respond to them.
6. But objective, transcendent aesthetic values are causally inert.
7. If objective, transcendent aesthetic values are causally inert, then human responsiveness to aesthetic values must be explained in terms of the human constitution to recognize and respond fittingly to aesthetic values (without being caused by those values to respond in the way humans rightly respond).
8. So, humans must be constituted in such a way as to recognize and respond fittingly to aesthetic values (without being caused by those values to respond in the way humans rightly respond).
9. If naturalism cannot account for the human capacity to recognize and respond fittingly to aesthetic values, then some form of creative supernaturalism is true (or is needed to account for this aspect of the human constitution).
10. Naturalism cannot account for this aspect of the human constitution.
11. Therefore, some form of creative supernaturalism is true (or is needed to account for the causal link between [a] aesthetic values and [b] the capacity to respond to those values with aesthetic appreciation by human persons).

Earlier in this chapter we argued in support of premise (1). Premise (2) holds that if objects have aesthetic properties, then there are peculiar aesthetic values that determine that such objects have properties of that sort. The aesthetic character of an object cannot be reduced to the physical constitution or organization of the object. If we ask, "What makes an object of this or that physical constitution to have the aesthetic properties that it has?" we invoke the idea that these properties are metaphysically linked to a realm of abstract entities that are essentially aesthetic, namely, aesthetic values. These values "transcend" the realm of physical objects that have the corresponding properties. Because these values determine the aesthetic character of concrete objects, we may call them normative, and so speak of aesthetic values as aesthetic norms.

Human awareness of the aesthetic properties of physical objects is awareness of what is aesthetically valuable about those objects. Thus arises human responsiveness to aesthetic values (premise 3). As we have noted, humans make aesthetic judgments; humans are moved by objects of beauty; the human emotional register is altered through contact with objects that have aesthetic properties.

Premise (4) expresses the need to explain this human response to the aesthetically real. Scientific naturalists, at least, should be amenable to the demand for a *causal* explanation. And premise (5) follows by modus ponens from premises (3) and (4).

Premise (6) notes that the explanation sought in premise (5) cannot be given in terms of the causal powers of objective, transcendent aesthetic values. This is because these values are inherently abstract and can have no causal powers. They do not, then, cause human capacities to respond aptly to aesthetic realities. Human responses to the aesthetic are just that—*responses*.

Human responsiveness to aesthetic reality must be captured in terms of human capacities for fittingly responding to the aesthetic. That is, humans must be so constituted that they may become aware of aesthetic reality and respond fittingly to that reality. This is the point of premise (7).

Premise (8) follows by modus ponens from premises (6) and (7). And premise (9) is plausible on the grounds that some explanation for the human capacity for aesthetic judgment is needed, and this explanation must be either natural or supernatural. We use the term "creative supernaturalism" to denote a form of supernaturalism that incorporates the notion of a creative agent acting purposively in causing an event or bringing something into existence.

Premise (10) is crucial. At the very least, there does not seem to be a plausible naturalistic explanation for the human capacity to recognize and respond fittingly to the presence of aesthetic properties in objects and to recognize the correlation of these properties with aesthetic norms that are objective, transcendent, and causally inert. For how would any organism in the natural world come to have such a capacity? Scientific naturalism must search for a causal explanation. But there will be no direct causal link between aesthetic values and human organisms that accounts for human responsiveness to the aesthetic dimensions of concrete objects. The naturalist must find some other way to account for the distinctively human attitude toward aesthetic reality. The standard evolutionary story is no help here. Scientific naturalists are themselves generally committed to a thoroughly causal story of human constitution and interaction with the environment. So we ask, what is that causal story with respect to human aesthetic judgment, which does not distort the character of such judgment?

The specific conclusion expressed in statement (11) follows directly, by modus ponens, from premises (9) and (10).

In previous sections of this chapter, we argued that scientific naturalism is hard pressed to explain the existence of aesthetic properties. In this section we have argued that scientific naturalism must strain to explain why aesthetic reality *matters* to human persons—how humans happen to have the relevant capacities. These are arguments against naturalism. Questions remain. What sort of supernaturalism provides the best explanation for these facts? And could the arguments developed here contribute to a cumulative case for theism? If so, what variety of theism?

Perhaps the existence of aesthetic values and their bearing on human experience make it likely that God exists. Perhaps theism provides the best explanation for a set of phenomena too often taken for granted and overlooked in naturalistic accounts of the world, or even theistic accounts, for that matter. These phenomena may include aesthetic values or norms as such, aesthetic properties of objects, and human subjects who (rightly) make objective aesthetic judgments.

Any best-explanation argument is an invitation to the unconvinced to proffer an alternative explanation argument that is at least as plausible—preferably more so.

There are indicators that naturalists have noticed the problem and feel some responsibility to develop an explanation. Denis Dutton, for example, has unequivocally acknowledged the need for an explanation. In his book *The Art Instinct*, Dutton confidently develops an account that appeals to the adaptive mechanism of natural selection. This is the scientific naturalist's usual recourse. But the details of the story must be worked out. It will not do simply to declare authoritatively that there must be an evolutionary explanation. When details, such as they are, are produced, they are speculative (they cannot be independently corroborated by direct empirical support) and they often evince a doctrinaire posture that simply assumes that naturalism is true.

It's appropriate to reflect on the faculties we have for aesthetic discovery, awareness, and judgment. Dutton rightly wants to know how we can have these faculties. His basic answer is that we have an "instinct" for aesthetic appreciation that is tied to our interest in species survival.

Dutton's ardor leads step-by-step to an anti-climactic conclusion: natural selection is ultimately responsible for our capacities for aesthetic enjoyment, but we have no idea how. He seems to think that his analysis does all the work that is needed, that the *how* is irrelevant. Moreover, his account completely ignores the problem of explaining how beauty and other aesthetic properties can be real qualities in the world. Clearly, naturalists have more work to do.[12]

TRIVIALIZATION OF THE BEAUTIFUL

The naturalist strategies adopted by Dutton and others are hardly triumphant on behalf of the beautiful. On the contrary, these strategies trivialize beauty. Suppose the evolutionary naturalists are right. Then in our aesthetic responses, we humans do not link up with anything aesthetically transcendent. Our experiences "of the beautiful" may be as rapturous as you like. But we were not made for rapture, and the catalyst for evolving "aesthetic faculties" has nothing to do with there being aesthetic qualities. The beauty of any object is constituted by its fitness for eliciting the responses that we call "aesthetic." But this is to deny that the object is beautiful. As a result, aesthetics is demeaned. Its value for humanizing culture is also diminished (if not completely torn away). The beautiful is brought low, to consort with the physically evolved organism that we call "human." Humans themselves are diminished by this analysis, since there is nothing objectively ennobling in aesthetic experience that can be attributed to the encounter with something as necessarily transcendent as objective aesthetic values or norms. This is the dehumanizing effect of naturalistically "humanizing" aesthetic experience.

Such a perspective also means that *all* aesthetic experience is false in the sense described earlier. And this violates our natural sense of aesthetic experience and judgment. To vindicate the commonsense view that some aesthetic experiences and judgments are objectively true, there must be objective, transcendent aesthetic values with which to reckon. There must also be subjects capable of authentic aesthetic experience and judgment. In this subject-object relation, made manifest in aesthetic experience, both the subject and the object have about them an unmistakably nonnatural metaphysical status. In *addition*, the relation itself betokens a nonnatural requirement. The realm of abstract, autonomous aesthetic values and the world of contingent human experience are brought together.

What grounds the possibility of this relation? It might be a coincidence that humans with the "art instinct" emerge and happen to be suitable subjects for aesthetic experiences—experiences that are constituted as aesthetic in part because they link up with abstract, autonomous aesthetic values or norms. But it would be a most remarkable coincidence, defying any attempt to measure its remote probability. Natural selection does not "intend" the emergence of species with faculties that coordinate with abstract values, and abstract values are bound to be causally inert. There is, then, no adequate causal explanation for the existence of subjects with powers of aesthetic sensitivity or awareness, unless . . . yes—unless, we are tempted to say, God exists and created humans with the capacity for recognition and fitting response to aesthetic reality.

The existence of aesthetic properties is peculiar enough. The significance of their transcendence vis-à-vis our capacities for aesthetic appreciation are also deeply puzzling.

CONCLUSION

We suspect that the popularity of subjectivism about aesthetics is motivated for many by the necessity to harmonize aesthetic judgment with a naturalism that denies the transcendent. This suggests that burden-of-proof issues are not as straightforward as subjectivists might think. It is an anomaly that the realist view we have described is so often and immediately resisted, despite commonsense dispositions. Even theists are tempted by subjectivist non-realism. There are reasons for thinking that Christian theists should, of all people, acknowledge the objective reality of aesthetic properties and norms. But why, in any case, think that objects do not have aesthetic properties? Are there good reasons, independent of any naturalistic assumptions, for believing this? Whatever the reasons are for endorsing such an account of aesthetic experience, the reasons do not amount to any strong objection to our argument. They are at best defensive moves to preserve a theory that is preferred over supernaturalism.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010).

2. Ernest Nagel, "Naturalism Reconsidered," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 28 (1954): 16; quoted in Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1.

3. See Goetz and Taliaferro (*Naturalism*, 8), who refer readers to Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

4. Goetz and Taliaferro, *Naturalism*, 8.

5. Ibid.

6. Agreement about the description of a thing whose reality is to be explained is important insofar as the reality to be explained is picked out by a description of it. It sometimes happens that agreement about the existence of a thing occurs without agreement about the description of that thing—which complicates matters when

comparing competing explanations for the existence of some thing. An inference-to-best-explanation argument is most effective when there is agreement about the proper description of the thing to be explained. Otherwise, such an argument must include support for whatever description is crucial to the argument.

7. For an excellent defense of aesthetic realism, including an elaboration of some arguments we use here, see Eddy M. Zemach, *Real Beauty* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1997), especially chapter 3.

8. Of course, film viewers disagree about other aspects of particular films, without direct consideration of their aesthetic properties. For further discussion of the qualities of film, see R. Douglas Geivett and James S. Spiegel, eds., *Faith, Film, and Philosophy: Big Ideas on the Big Screen* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

9. This phrase first appeared in Margaret Wolfe Hungerford's 1878 novel *Molly Brown* (New York: A. L. Burt). But the subjectivist aesthetic it crudely expresses predates Hungerford by centuries. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, one of Shakespeare's characters declares, "Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye" (Act II, Scene I). Later, David Hume echoed this notion: "Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them" (from "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller [Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985], 230).

10. To say that aesthetic properties supervene on non-aesthetic properties does not imply that the former are rule-governed by the latter in the sense that the presence of certain non-aesthetic features guarantees the presence of certain aesthetic properties (e.g., if an object has non-aesthetic properties A, B, and C, then it will also have aesthetic property X). For more on this point, see Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *The Philosophical Review* 68, no. 4 (1959): 421–47.

11. A fully developed argument from the objective character of aesthetic properties might resolve into support for a comparatively narrow form of theism.

12. See Dutton, *The Art Instinct*. For a more concise statement of his position, see Denis Dutton, "Aesthetics and Evolutionary Psychology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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Part V

NATURALISM AND EXISTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chapter 10

Existential Arguments for Theistic Belief

Clifford Williams

When Andrea was five, she became frightened one night when a thunderstorm pounded her house. She needed to feel that someone was in control of it, and she knew that her mother could not be that person. Her mother told her the story of Jesus calming a storm when his disciples were in a boat. That made sense to her, and she believed God could give her peace.

This true story embodies what I call an existential argument for believing in God. Andrea's reasoning went like this:

1. I need peace.
2. Believing in God gives me peace.
3. Therefore, I am justified in believing in God.

The general idea in this argument is that one is justified in believing in God if doing so satisfies a need.

Many people, however, believe that the satisfaction of needs should play little or no role in acquiring belief in God. For them, only reason and evidence can tell us that such belief is justified. Satisfying needs has little or nothing to do with the correctness of any beliefs, and it is the correctness of belief in God that should be the basis of the belief.

Other people believe that belief in God should be acquired through the satisfaction of needs. For these people, believing in God would be barren, disconnected from what matters most to us, if it were not based on satisfaction of needs. They point out that many Christians have come to believe in God because it satisfies deep needs, not just fleeting feelings or wild desires, but emotional and spiritual needs that all humans share.

My view is that the ideal way to come to believe in God is through both the satisfaction of need and the use of reason.

This is a middle-of-the-road assertion. It steers between those who emphasize the importance of reason and those who emphasize the importance of emotion and need in coming to believe in God. I want to emphasize both. My aim is to defend the legitimacy of acquiring belief in God through a blend of satisfaction of need and the use of reason. Satisfaction of need legitimately draws us to such believing, but reason must be involved in this drawing.

I shall begin by unpacking the existential argument for believing in God and explaining how it differs from evidential arguments based on need. Then I shall explain how it can be blended with reason and also why an appeal to satisfaction of need is required to support believing in God. I shall end by suggesting that believing in God is like acquiring friends and that the former is as natural as the latter.

THE EXISTENTIAL ARGUMENT FOR BELIEVING IN GOD

What are the needs that believing in God purports to satisfy? Sigmund Freud asserted that there is just one such need—the need for cosmic security, in particular, the need for a strong, cosmic father.[1] N. T. Wright stated that there are four basic needs that believing in God satisfies: "The longing for justice, the quest for spirituality, the hunger for relationships, and the delight in beauty."[2]

A more complete description of needs that are pertinent to believing in God include the need to have a meaningful life, the need to be loved, the need to have a more expansive life, the need to live beyond the grave in a state of perfect goodness, plus the needs to love others and to experience awe. Some of these are self-directed, such as the need to have a meaningful life, and some are other-directed, such as the need to love. The existential argument for believing in God does not say that believing in God satisfies just one need, as Freud asserted, but an array of needs. So it can be expanded beyond Andrea's childhood argument in this way:

1. We need cosmic security. We need to know that we will live beyond the grave in a state that is free from the defects of this life, a state that is full of goodness and justice. We need a more expansive life, one in which we love and are loved. We need meaning, and we need to know that we are forgiven for going astray. We also need to experience awe, to delight in goodness, and to be present with those we love.
2. Believing in God satisfies these needs.
3. Therefore, we are justified in believing in God.[3]

THE INITIAL APPEAL OF THE ARGUMENT

The existential argument for believing in God is initially appealing to a number of people. They experience some of the needs mentioned in the argument, they want these needs satisfied, and they find that believing in God satisfies the needs. They are propelled toward belief in God for the same reason anyone is propelled toward satisfying needs, namely, because having an unfulfilled need is unpleasant.

Writers on Christian spirituality have used the satisfaction of need to try to convince others to acquire belief in God or to draw them to a deeper faith in God. Their doing so means that they think that the satisfaction of need is a legitimate basis for acquiring or deepening faith. Thomas à Kempis, in his well-known *Imitation of Christ*, writes, "When Jesus is near, all is well and nothing seems difficult. When he is absent, all is hard. When Jesus does not speak within, all other comfort is empty, but if he says only a word, it brings great consolation."[4] When Jesus is near, Thomas says, we experience comfort and consolation. When he is far or does not "speak within," we experience empty comfort and little consolation. In these statements Thomas is clearly presupposing that we need comfort and consolation and that it is legitimate to let Jesus get near us in order to acquire comfort and consolation.

Jesus himself explicitly appeals to need in one of his most well-known invitations: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30). Here Jesus declares that he will give rest to those who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens if they come to him. "Coming to Jesus" no doubt involves having faith or trust in Jesus. We can infer that Jesus believes that it is legitimate to have the trust because it satisfies the need for rest. So there is something like the existential argument for believing in God in this invitation.

EXISTENTIAL AND EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENTS BASED ON NEED

The existential argument for believing in God needs to be distinguished from evidential arguments for believing in God, especially in cases in which evidential arguments are based on need in some way. An existential argument does not give evidence for thinking that God exists. Rather, it says that believing in God is justified solely because it satisfies certain needs. An evidential argument, however, states that one is justified in believing in God because of what one takes to be good evidence for doing so. When that evidence consists

of the presence of certain needs in humans, then one believes in God because doing so provides an explanation of those needs. The needs are used as evidence in the evidential argument, but not in the existential argument. A person who is convinced of an existential argument says, "I believe because I am satisfied when I do." A person who is convinced of an evidential argument says, "I believe because there is a good reason to do so."

C. S. Lewis, in his well-known *Mere Christianity*, uses a need-based evidential argument to support belief in God: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction of those desires exists. . . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[5] The tip-off that this is an evidential argument is that Lewis appeals to the idea of an explanation. Existential arguments contain nothing of an explanation in them, whereas evidential arguments do. The role of need in an existential argument is simply to move one to believe, whereas the role of need in an evidential argument is to provide a fact that needs explaining. In Lewis' argument, the fact that needs explaining is that humans have certain desires, and the explanation he gives of this fact is that humans were made for another world. In my terminology, he is using reason to justify believing in God and is not appealing simply to the satisfaction of needs or desires in the way the existential argument does.

Writers on apologetics have not always distinguished clearly the existential argument for believing in God from Lewis-type evidential arguments based on needs. It is important to do so, however, because someone might be convinced by the latter but not by the former. In what follows, I will present considerations that support them both. To get at these considerations, I need to describe a few objections to the existential argument.

OBJECTIONS TO THE EXISTENTIAL ARGUMENT FOR BELIEVING IN GOD

The first objection states that satisfaction of needs does not guarantee truth. This is the classic Freudian objection. Freud writes, "We call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfilment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality."[6] Freud makes it clear that he does not mean that a belief is false just because it is derived from a desire, but only that we cannot infer that it is true: "We disregard its relations to reality."[7] Our wishes, desires, and what we take to be needs, could lead us to believe in something that does not exist, such as an invisible friend who accompanies us wherever we go. They could also lead us to believe in something that does exist, but their doing so would be an illegitimate way of coming to the belief.

A second objection follows closely on the first—if someone felt that she needed a malicious cosmic protector, wouldn't she be just as justified in believing in one as the person who uses the existential argument to justify belief in a good cosmic protector? And, third, what about the person who finds that the needs mentioned in the existential argument are satisfied by believing in a Hindu or Buddhist way of living, or, fourth, by nonreligious ways? Why couldn't someone say that she finds human love satisfying, and that she does not need to believe in God to delight in goodness or experience awe?

The customary response to these objections is to dismiss the existential argument without further consideration. This was Freud's response, and it has been the response of both believers and nonbelievers in God. However, need has been such a driving force for believing in God that we should look for some way to legitimize that force. The way to do so, I believe, is to add the use of reason to the existential argument. As it stands, it is purely a satisfaction of need argument: I believe in God because doing so satisfies my need for meaning, love, awe, and other existential needs.[8]

ADDING REASON TO NEED

One way in which reason can be added to the existential argument for believing in God is to conjoin it with the evidential argument based on need. Here is how this might work: One wonders how humans can have so many of the needs mentioned in the existential argument for believing in God without there being a God who has given humans those needs. One then feels some of those needs, for example, for meaning, love, forgiveness, and goodness, and one imagines how believing in God would satisfy those needs. Finally, one begins to believe in God.

Consider an example, the reasoning of the factory girl in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *North and South.* The factory girl says:

> I think if this should be the end of all, and if all I have been born for is just to work my heart and life away, and to sicken in this dree place, with those mill-stones in my ears forever, until I could scream out for them to stop and let me have a little piece of quiet, and with the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath of the clear air, and my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and of all my troubles,—I think, if this life is the end, and that there is no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes, I could go mad![9]

One might read this passage as a pure satisfaction of need argument, that is, as an existential argument for believing in a life beyond the grave in which

God will make all right: "I think, if this life is the end, and that there is no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes, I could go mad!" But suppose for a moment that the factory girl is doubtful about God. She has undergone so much misfortune and grief that she wonders whether there really is a God who cares for her. She gets to thinking: "Why do I have a need to be free from worry and woe? Why do I want to live after I die in a place where it will be quiet and where no one will hassle me? Maybe there is a God who put this desire for a better place into me so that I would believe in it. I certainly do need to believe in a better place, for I have had more than my share of trials and tribulation. So I am going to believe in God."

In this scenario, the factory girl is reasoning both evidentially and existentially. She comes to believe that there is a God who put the need for a better place into her heart. In this, she is using need evidentially. She also is badly wanting to believe in a better place, for she imagines herself going mad if she does not. In this, she is using need existentially. If she were to use need just existentially, we would respond that one cannot rightly believe in something just because they want to or think they need to. But we could not respond in this way to her evidential use of need.

Let us look a bit more closely at how this combined reasoning would go. Consider again the needs I mentioned in the first premise of the existential argument for believing in God: for awe, cosmic security, meaning, love, plus others. Several facts about these needs are conspicuous. The first is that there are thirteen of them. This fact is significant because objections to need-based arguments, both existential and evidential, almost always mention only one need. The question these objections pose is, could you not feel a need for meaning even though there is no God to give meaning? However, this rhetorical question has some plausibility partly because only one need is at stake. But if more than a dozen needs are at stake, the question loses most of its force. It becomes: Could you not feel a need for meaning, cosmic security, love, life beyond the grave, and an expansive life even though there is no God to give you these needs? The answer to this question is, Yes, that is possible, but it would be a very odd fact about human nature if it had all of these needs and there were no God. The presence of so many needs cries out for an explanation, and the evidential argument based on need says that the best explanation is that there is a God who has given humans the needs.

This is the best explanation, the evidential argument continues, because of three more facts about the needs. One is that they are all connected to God in some way, some more obviously so than others. Another is that they are connected to each other; they are not simply isolated, stand-alone needs. Still another is that everyone, or nearly everyone, has felt at least some of the needs at some point in their lives, and many people have felt most of them, or even all of them.

When this evidential reasoning is combined with the existential argument for believing in God, the first objection above is met—satisfaction of need draws us to belief in God and the presence of needs in humans provides an evidential support for that belief.

Something like this combined argument may be what some people have in mind when they appeal to need as a basis for believing in God or Christianity. Here is an example from William James: "In what did the emancipating message of primitive Christianity consist but in the announcement that God recognizes those weak and tender impulses which paganism had so rudely overlooked?"[10] One of these weak and tender impulses, James says, is repentance: "Christianity took it, and made it the one power within us which appealed straight to the heart of God."[11] The argument that James is attributing to primitive Christianity looks as if it is an appeal both to reason and the heart. It is an appeal to reason because it says that Christianity is true and paganism false because Christianity's conception of human nature is more accurate than paganism's. Paganism overlooked the need to repent. So it has less evidence in its favor than Christianity has. In addition, the argument appeals to the human heart because, it says, by repentance one could go straight to the heart of God. The assumption here is that humans dearly want to please God. So the need for repentance has both an evidential and an existential function in primitive Christianity, according to James, if my reconstruction of his comments is right.

FURTHER WAYS TO ADD REASON TO NEED

Another way to add the use of reason to the existential argument for believing in God is to apply reason to the needs mentioned in the first premise. The second objection to the argument wonders why someone could not just as legitimately justify belief in a cosmic torturer by appealing to the "need" for people to suffer. The answer is to apply what I am going to call "the need criteria" to the thirteen needs. The need criteria assert five things:

1. Needs must be felt by many others.
2. Needs must endure.
3. Needs must be significant.
4. Needs must be part of a constellation of connected needs.
5. Needs must be felt strongly.

These five criteria rule out the "need" for people to suffer as a basis for an existential argument, because it is not felt by many people, does not endure, and is not part of a constellation of connected needs. The criteria themselves

are justified because similar criteria are used in a number of other circumstances—in assessing reports of unusual phenomena, in courtrooms to assess evidence, and by psychologists who construct personality theories. In assessing reports of unusual phenomena and evidence presented in courtrooms, we look for information that is corroborated by other witnesses, that has been obtained in optimal conditions, and that is connected to other information. In constructing personality theories, psychologists use all five criteria—they do not say that the driving force of humans is an afternoon whim that is unconnected to other human desires. The need criteria are, accordingly, independently acceptable. And, here is the point—they are a way of using reason to assess the existential needs. This fact shows that reason and need can be combined in the existential argument for believing in God.

The third and fourth objections to the existential argument wonder why someone could not just as legitimately say that believing in some nontheistic way satisfies the thirteen needs, such as believing in a nontheistic religion or in a nonreligious way of living. The answer is to use what I call "the restlessness test," "the obstacle test," "the value test," and "the satisfaction test." In the restlessness test, one tries to determine whether one is still restless after having satisfied the existential needs. In the obstacle test, one tries to determine whether there are any noncognitive obstacles to one's believing in God. In the value test, one tries to determine the value of the emotions that one has when satisfying the existential needs. And in the satisfaction test, one assesses the satisfying emotions for their endurance, significance, and connectedness to other satisfying emotions. Each of these tests is, again, a way of combining the use of reason with the satisfaction of need in order to validate the satisfaction.

Applying the need criteria to the existential needs and employing the four tests to appraise one's method of satisfying the existential needs are, to be sure, slippery. There is no absolutely sure way to answer the four objections to the existential argument for believing in God. But this fact does not show that the need criteria and the four tests have no value at all. They do. They can be used to make a convincing case for a number of truths. They show that a life of compassion satisfies the need for meaning and love better than a life of watching television four hours a day. They show, in like manner, that believing in a God who loves and forgives satisfies the need for cosmic acceptance better than a life of uncertainty and anguish about one's inability to be good all the time.

What I call "existential apologetics" is just these sorts of showings. It consists of showing that believing in God is justified because it satisfies certain emotional and existential needs. Based on my view that both need and reason are important for securing belief in God, the claim I want to make about existential apologetics is that it is both a legitimate and needed enterprise. It is a

legitimate enterprise when it combines the use of reason with the satisfaction of need. And it is a needed enterprise because we humans are both reason and need creatures. To believe in God only through reason, or only via satisfaction of need, is to have a truncated belief. To reinforce this point, I need to explain the difference between beliefs that are connected to the satisfaction of need and beliefs that are not so connected.

BELIEFS THAT ARE CONNECTED TO THE SATISFACTION OF NEED

Some beliefs have little or no connection to human needs, and some beliefs have a great deal of connection. Those that have little or no connection require only evidential reasoning to make them convincing, but those that have a great deal of connection require both evidential and existential reasoning to make them convincing.

An example of a belief that has little or no connection to human need is the claim that light bends as it travels past large astronomical objects, such as the sun. An example of a belief that has a great deal of connection to human need is the claim that an emotional hermit would have a richer life with love in it. An emotional hermit is one who has shut herself off from feeling love. She distances herself from those who want to display affection toward her, and she rarely displays affection toward anyone. How could we go about showing such a hermit that her life would become richer if she allowed herself to feel connected to other people? The strategy most of us would use is to show her what love is like. We would describe love. We would have the hermit read about love in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. And, most importantly, we would show the hermit actual instances of love, including ones directed to her, perhaps even giving such love to her ourselves. We would get her to feel what love is like, so that she could recognize that she herself needs it.

Using the existential argument for believing in God to try to convince someone to believe in God is like adopting this strategy to convince the emotional hermit that she needs love. This is because believing in God, like the emotional hermit's recognition, involves the satisfaction of need.

BELIEVING IN GOD

Believing in God is not like believing a fact of astrophysics, because God is a person like us. If God simply served abstract metaphysical functions, such as in most deist conceptions, then believing in God would not be connected to the satisfaction of needs, or at least not to the satisfaction of very many needs.

But a God who is a fully personal being and who has lovingly created the universe and continues to be involved with it can connect to human needs. Such a God would have both thoughts and emotions. This being would know the daily affairs of humans and would care about what they do and what happens to them. Humans could connect to such a God in the same way they connect to each other, namely, through reason, need, and emotion.

Believing in such a God would be like the emotional hermit's believing that she would have a richer life with love in it. Neither of these believings is simply cognitive. The emotional hermit's believing is cognitive, to be sure, but it also contains feelings and desires, among them an attraction to love. Believing in a personal God, too, is partly cognitive and partly noncognitive. It contains the beliefs that such a God exists and that this God has certain qualities. It also contains feelings and desires, including an attraction to the qualities and feeling glad because God satisfies certain needs. This is why appealing to satisfaction of need is required to evoke the believing—the believing consists in part of that satisfaction. So an appeal to satisfaction of need is required to produce this different kind of believing. This is the function of the existential argument for believing in God.

BELIEVING AND THE SATISFACTION OF NEED

If satisfaction of need is the origin of believing in God, then believing in God actually consists of satisfaction of those needs. A comparison to reason makes this truth evident. Suppose the origin of believing in God were solely the reasons the person had for believing in God. These reasons might include a philosophical argument, an appeal to the miracles recorded in the Bible, or C. S. Lewis' well-known argument that Jesus must be divine, all of which are evidential arguments.[12] If these arguments are what prompt someone to believe in God, their belief would consist of assent, that is, a belief that God exists and that Jesus is who he said he was. The origin of the belief determines what the belief consists of. In a similar way, if satisfaction of needs is the origin of believing in God, then belief in God consists of it. And if both satisfaction of need and evidential argumentation contribute to one's belief, then such belief consists of both satisfaction of need and assent. This, I believe, is the best way to believe in God.

Moreover, if believing in God consists in part of satisfaction of need, it consists in part of emotion, since the satisfaction of certain needs is an emotion. When, for example, the need for cosmic security is met, I have an emotion, because I have a feeling that construes reality in a certain way. I construe reality as a safe place to be, I construe God as making it safe, and I construe myself as dependent on God for my safety. And, of course, I feel safe. I also

have an emotion when I satisfy my need for meaning by believing in God. I construe God, not simply as a vast energy that animates the galaxies, but as a being who loves and feels. I believe that this being has made people for a purpose and that part of this purpose is to love well. And I feel something like safety in knowing that I am attempting to fulfill this purpose, along with a sense of inclusion in something larger than myself.

So, then, my thesis that the ideal way to come to believe in God is through both the satisfaction of need and the use of reason entails that ideal believing in God consists of emotion and assent. This conception of believing makes it integrate with more parts of who we are than would be the case with just a need or reason conception of belief. As tied to need, believing in God satisfies the cravings that matter most to us, which makes it deeply comforting. As tied to reason, believing in God satisfies our need to be truly connected to what is real. This, too, is deeply comforting. Believing in God needs both kinds of comfort in order to be compelling.

In sum, though the existential argument for believing in God by itself is a deficient source of believing in God, so are evidential arguments. Both are needed to have genuine belief.

LIKE ACQUIRING FRIENDS

Miguel de Unamuno declares, "I believe in God as I believe in my friends, because I feel the breath of his affection, feel his invisible and intangible hand, drawing me, leading me, grasping me."[13] I want to suggest, with Unamuno, that coming to believe in God is like acquiring friends. We are drawn to friends through satisfying our need for affection and intimacy, just as we are drawn to God through satisfying some combination of the thirteen existential needs. At the same time, we employ reason to weigh a new acquaintance's values and character traits. Reason tells us that being with an acquaintance and receiving her affection fit with how we want to conduct our lives. It also sees that the acquaintance handles our confidences with trustworthiness. It concludes that she is worthy of being a friend. In the typical case, both reason and the satisfaction of need combine to justify coming to have a friend.

It is the same for coming to believe in God. Rarely are people drawn to God through only the satisfaction of need. More typically, people combine satisfaction of need with one or more of the uses of reason I have described. Even in cases in which satisfaction of need is prominent, such as the one I cited at the beginning of this chapter, reason is used in some way or other, even if only minimally. For Andrea, it "made sense" that Jesus could protect her in the thunderstorm that was pounding her house, because she believed

that he had calmed a storm when the disciples were in a boat. "Making sense" is a cognitive state; so Andrea's believing that God would give her peace came both from her desire for peace and from the belief that Jesus could control the thunderstorm.

NATURAL

If believing in God is like acquiring friends, then it is also as natural as acquiring friends. Acquiring friends is natural for us humans because we have the capability of having friends and because we desire to have friends. Acquiring friends is a disposition we find ourselves having, one which develops in the ordinary course of events. In the same way, believing in God is natural for us humans because we have the capability of believing in God and because we desire to satisfy some or all of the thirteen existential needs by believing in God. Believing in God is a disposition we find ourselves having, one which develops into full-fledged believing if no cognitive or noncognitive obstacles prevent us from doing so. The existential argument for believing in God, when combined with the use of reason, is designed both to rouse and to justify that development.

NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion," in *The Freud Reader,* ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 697, 699.

2. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), x.

3. Quoted from Clifford Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires and Emotions for Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 32.

4. Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ,* trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1952), Book II, Chapter 8, quoted in *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology,* ed. John R. Tyson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 199. Thomas lived 1380–1471 and was an Augustinian monk.

5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), "Hope," Book III, Chapter 10, 136–37. Lewis' argument in this passage is often called "the argument from desire."

6. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 704.

7. Freud states, "An illusion is not the same thing as an error, nor is it necessarily an error." *The Future of an Illusion*, 704.

8. It is not quite right that reason plays no role in the existential argument, for feeling a need involves having concepts about the need. However, reason does not play any role of the sort I will be describing.

9. Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South,* quoted in John Henry Newman, *The Grammar of Assent* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1955), 247.

10. William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 331.

11. James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," 331.

12. For Lewis' argument, see "The Shocking Alternative," in *Mere Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 3, 51–52.

13. Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life,* trans. J. E. Crawford Flitch (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 194.

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Chapter 11

The Psychology of Atheism

From Defective Fathers to Autism to Professional Socialization and Personal Convenience

Paul C. Vitz

The topic of this chapter, psychological factors contributing to atheism, may seem strange to some readers.[1] Certainly, some of my colleagues in psychology have found it odd, and, I might add, a little disturbing. After all, since its founding roughly a century ago, modern psychology dealing with the person has often focused on the opposite topic, namely, the psychology of religious belief. Indeed, in many respects the origins of modern psychology are bound up with theorists who explicitly proposed psychological reasons for the belief in God.

Given the rather close relationship between the founding of psychology and the critical interpretation of religion, it should not be surprising that many psychologists view with some alarm any attempt to propose a psychology of atheism. Such a project certainly puts many psychologists (and other intellectuals) on the defensive, and gives them a small dose of their own medicine.

SOME QUALIFICATIONS

In these pages I show that the psychological concepts used to interpret religion are two-edged swords that can be used also to interpret atheism. Before beginning, I wish to make three important points.

First, I am assuming that the most common barriers to belief in God are not rational, but psychological. I do not wish to offend the many distinguished philosophers and scientists, both believers and unbelievers, who might disagree with that position. But I think that for every person strongly

swayed by rational argument, there are countless others more convinced by nonrational, psychological factors. The human heart: no one can truly fathom it or know all of its deceits, but at least it is the proper task of the psychologist to try.

My second point is that all arguments, and especially all worldviews, rest on certain fundamental assumptions that are not open to proof. Since all people start their understanding of anything with basic assumptions, the question of why certain assumptions were chosen raises the issue of their possible psychological basis—not just for believers, but for everyone. That is, the so-called ad hominem argument bears on why thinkers start with the assumptions they do.

Some atheists have been explicit about basic assumptions, at least for their own position. Friedrich Nietzsche, a famous nineteenth-century atheist, was surprisingly clear about this when he wrote, "I have absolutely no knowledge of atheism as an outcome of reasoning, still less as an event: with me it is obvious by instinct."[2] He also wrote, "It gradually became clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir."[3] Nietzsche's personal psychology behind this position will be addressed later.

A prominent recent philosopher Thomas Nagel[4] described his rejection of belief in somewhat similar terms,

> In speaking of the fear of religion, I don't mean to refer to the entirely reasonable hostility toward certain established religions and religious institutions, in virtue of their objectionable moral doctrines, social policies, and political influence . . . I am talking about something much deeper—namely the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself. I want atheism to be true and I am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I am right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.[5]

I know nothing about Nagel's father or his early years, but his remarkably candid statement certainly suggests psychological factors might be at play in his atheism.

My third point as qualification is that, in spite of serious psychological barriers to belief, all of us have a free choice to accept or to reject God. This qualification is not a contradiction to the first. Some people as a consequence of their particular past or present environment may find it much harder than most to believe in God. But presumably, at any moment, certainly at many times, a person can choose to move toward or away from belief in God. Some may not chose to move toward God at all; another person may start with so

many barriers that even after many years of slowly choosing to move toward belief he or she may still not be there.

We assume they will be judged, like all of us, on how far they traveled and how well they loved others, on how well they did with what they had. Likewise, another person without any serious psychological difficulties is still free to reject God, and no doubt, many do. Although the ultimate issue is one of free will, it is still possible to investigate those psychological factors that predispose one to unbelief and make the road to belief in God especially long and hard.

DEEP PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS FOR ATHEISM

I will start with an interpretation of some of the serious or deep psychological reasons for being an atheist. I have much more sympathy with such people, even though they often are the most passionate of the atheists. They are not just casual atheists but people for whom it makes a big difference and who often very aggressively push the atheist position. (Later I will discuss the common superficial reasons for unbelief.)

Freud's Ideas about Belief in God

To begin, it is important to briefly discuss Sigmund Freud's own interpretations of religious belief because Freud is a surprisingly helpful theorist for developing a psychology of atheism.

Freud proposed that people's belief in God could not be trusted because of its psychological origin. Freud took this psychological argument and made it a very popular and influential one. He didn't argue the truth value of the belief; he just argued that you couldn't trust religious beliefs because of their source in a person's psychology. He proposed this position most thoroughly in a short book, *The Future of an Illusion*.[6] Of course, the illusion was religion. He didn't consider religion true or false, he just considered it a psychological illusion that arose from our primitive needs for protection. Our basic infantile unconscious desires a father who would look after us and to satisfy these needs we create the illusion of God.

Freud claimed that one of the oldest psychological needs of the human race is that for a loving, protecting, all-powerful father, or divine providence. However, this claim of Freud's is quite unconvincing because many religions don't have such an understanding of God, particularly many of the pre-Christian or pre-Jewish religions in the Mediterranean area. The gods of many pagan religions are gods that you fear and must be placated. (See Fustel de Coulanges, who wrote, "Neither did the gods love man, nor did man love

his gods. He believed in their existence, but would have wished that they did not exist.")[7]

Furthermore, there are major religions that either have no God (e.g., Buddhism), an impersonal Ultimate Reality (e.g., Brahman of Advaita Vedanta Hinduism), or whose understanding of God is quite different (e.g., Islam, where the notion of God as father is strongly rejected). So, Freud's assumption that there was a universal need of this kind which explained the Christian and Jewish belief in God is not very convincing, or we would find the same kind of religion in many other places.

Let us put this weak point aside and look at his projection theory. There are two important contextual issues here. First, Freud didn't invent his position at all. A well-known German philosopher/theologian named Ludwig Feuerbach (1957)[8] first made this argument in the 1840s. Feuerbach wrote, "What man misses—whether this be articulate and therefore conscious, or an unconscious need—that is his God."[9] He wrote, "Man projects his nature into the world outside himself before he finds it in himself,"[10] and "To live in projected dream-images is the essence of religion. Religion sacrifices reality to the projected dream."[11] Note that Feuerbach uses such "Freudian" terms as *unconscious need* and *projection* and shares his concern with dreams. When Freud was writing the *Future of an Illusion* in the 1920s, he was essentially updating Feuerbach. Second, Freud's interpretation is not part of psychoanalysis. Many people think that somehow Freud's understanding of people's psychology was the basis of his projection theory. But Freud is on record as saying that his position in *Future of an Illusion* is *not* part of psychoanalysis and that it is not connected to psychoanalysis in terms of its basic language and conceptual framework.[12]

Also, Freud had, as a psychoanalyst, very little experience—maybe none at all—with people who believed in God. Not one of Freud's published case histories was that of a person who believed in God at the time of his or her psychoanalysis.

Strangely enough, however, Freud did inadvertently give us a psychological theory for understanding why people should *not* believe in God, why people would be atheists. Let us look briefly at one of Freud's central ideas, namely the Oedipus complex. One interesting thing about the Oedipus complex is that Freud said it is universal. There is, in fact, no good evidence for this, but Freud argued that it was universal and unconscious, and in the case of the male child, the unconscious desire was to kill his father, or at least to remove him, and to have some kind of erotic possession of the mother.[13]

What does this mean for the young male child? It means that every boy should have an unconscious intense need to kill his father, either in fantasy or in fact, and to possess his mother. In addition, Freud linked our understanding

and attitudes about our own father to God. He said God was a father figure, and that our attitude toward God and our father would be very similar.

As a result Freud's theory means that all men—especially young men—have an unconscious desire to kill God, to be independent of God, especially a God who is anything like a father. Freud has proposed a theory that explains an atheist as someone with an unresolved Oedipus complex. Normally the child resolves the Oedipus complex by discovering that his father is too big to kill and he can't get away with it. Instead the boy identifies with the aggressor, his father, and represses these aggressive and sexual desires. Nevertheless, even when it is resolved, the oedipal desires remain in the unconscious where they theoretically continue to have psychological effects.

However, as we noted there is little evidence that the Oedipus psychology is very common, much less universal. Let us therefore, reject that particular formulation and move to a simpler and broader explanation for atheism.

THE THEORY OF THE DEFECTIVE FATHER

What I propose is the "Defective Father Theory." Curiously enough, Freud himself[14] stated something like it when he wrote: "Psychoanalysis, which has taught us the intimate connection between the father complex and belief in God, has shown us that the personal God is logically nothing but an exalted father and daily demonstrates to us how youthful persons lose their religious belief as soon as the authority of their father breaks down."[15] This statement makes no assumptions about unconscious sexual desire for the mother, or even about universal competitive hatred focused on the father. Instead, it makes a simple and easily understandable claim that once a child is disappointed in, and loses respect for his or her earthly father, then belief in a heavenly father becomes difficult or impossible.

There are, of course, many ways that a father can lose his authority and seriously disappoint a child. Some of these ways, for which clinical evidence will be mentioned shortly, are that the father can be present but obviously weak, cowardly, or unworthy of respect even if he is a rather pleasant guy. Or the father can be present—but physically, sexually, or psychologically abusive. The father can also be absent through death, or by abandoning or leaving the family. It is important to note that young children usually interpret the death of a parent as abandonment. Children often see death as the person choosing to go away. All these proposed determinants of atheism provide the basis for the Defective Father hypothesis. To support this approach, I will provide much case history material dealing with the father in the early lives of prominent atheists, and compare it to the father relationships of equally prominent theists in the same historical contexts.

Examples of Atheists with Defective Fathers

We start with two very famous atheists, Frederick Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud himself.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

I begin with Nietzsche because he is probably the world's most famous atheist. In particular, he dramatically rejected Christianity and the Christian God. His best-known pronouncement, "God is dead," is familiar to millions. He was deeply preoccupied with religion all his life, and he repeatedly and obsessively denounced Christian ideas and those who believed them. As noted earlier, Nietzsche himself provided the basis for investigating his personal psychology: "Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir. . . . In the philosopher, conversely, there is nothing whatever that is impersonal; and above all, his morality bears decided and decisive witness to *who he is*."[16] Recall Nietzsche's claim: "I have absolutely no knowledge of atheism as an outcome of reasoning, still less as an event; with me it is obvious by instinct."[17]

Nietzsche was born in a small village in Prussian Saxony (Germany) on October 15, 1844, the son of a Lutheran pastor. On both sides of his family there had been numerous clergymen. One of his biographers notes that although Nietzsche did not learn to speak until he was two-and-a-half, "by then he had an extremely close relationship with his father, who even allowed him in the study while he was working."[18]

Friedrich's father, Pastor Ludwig Nietzsche, died on July 30, 1849, two or three months short of Nietzsche's fifth birthday. Ludwig Nietzsche had been sick for the previous year from a brain disease. (The postmortem spoke of a "softening," affecting as much as a quarter of his brain.) Prior to his death, and even before his illness, he occasionally suffered from what appeared to have been small epileptic seizures that were of concern to his young wife. Nietzsche often spoke positively of his father—and of his death as a great loss which he never forgot. As one biographer has put it, Nietzsche was "passionately attached to his father, and the shock of losing him was profound."[19] When he was in his early teens, Nietzsche wrote recollections of his childhood—*Aus meinem Leben* ["From my life"]—which included an account of the day his father died:

> When I woke up in the morning I heard weeping all round me. My dear mother came in tearfully, wailing "Oh God! My dear Ludwig is dead!" Young and innocent though I still was, I had some idea of what death meant. Transfixed by the idea of being separated forever from my beloved father, I wept bitterly. The

> ensuing days were taken up with weeping and with preparation for the funeral. Oh God! I had become an orphan and my mother a widow!—On 2 August my dear father's earthly remains were consigned to the earth. . . . The ceremony began at one o'clock, accompanied by the tolling of the bells. Oh, I shall always have the hollow clangour of those bells in my ears, and I shall never forget the gloomy melody of the hymn *Jesu meine Zuversicht* ["Jesus my confidence"].[20]

In this same early autobiography, the young Nietzsche expressed strong religious feeling and identified God with his dead father. When he was twenty-four, Nietzsche wrote that his father "died all too soon. I missed the strict and superior guidance of a male intellect."[21] But other comments of Nietzsche's make it clear that although he loved and admired his father, he also saw him as weak and sickly, lacking in the "life force." He wrote in July 1888, six months before the nervous breakdown from which he never recovered, that he is suffering "under the pressure of nervous exhaustion (which is in part heredity—from my father, who also died from the consequences of a pervasive lack of life force)."[22] Nietzsche made the connection equally clear when he wrote: "My father died at the age of thirty-six; he was delicate, lovable and morbid, like being destined to pay this world only a passing visit—a gracious reminder of life rather than life itself."[23]

The general weakness and sickness of his father was for Nietzsche also associated, naturally enough, with his father's Christianity. Nietzsche's major criticism of Christianity—of its morality, of the Jesus of Christian theology, and of the whole meaning of the Christian God—was that it suffered from an absence, even a rejection, of "life force." The God that Nietzsche spoke positively of was Dionysius—a strong pagan expression of the life force. It is therefore not hard to view Nietzsche's rejection of God and Christianity as a rejection of the weakness of his father. Nietzsche's own philosophy, with its emphasis on the "superman" (or *Übermensch)*, on the "will to power," on "becoming hard," on the "blond beast," as well as his well-known denigration of women. (He remarked, for example, "You are going to see a woman? Do not forget your whip!" and "The happiness of man is 'I will.' The happiness of woman is 'He will.'")[24] All this can be seen as further expression of his attempt to identify with a masculine ideal that his father and by association his father's religion were never able to provide.

His search for masculinity was further undermined by the domination of his childhood, after his father's death, by his mother and female relatives: he lived in a very Christian household with his mother, his younger sister, his paternal grandmother, and two paternal aunts until he went away to school at the age of fourteen. It is not surprising, then, that for Nietzsche, Christianity and its morality was something for women—a sign of weakness, a "slave" mentality, as he put it.

His rather weak physicality aroused teasing at the local school he attended as a young boy, where Nietzsche had difficulty relating to other boys. They mocked him as "little pastor" for his serious, self-controlled, pious manners. Because of his myopia, his physically passive temperament, and his frequent illness even as a child, he did not participate in boyhood games. To compensate for his social deficiencies, Nietzsche, even at his young age, emphasized his will, indeed, he had a real desire for self-mastery. He once demonstrated his courage to other children by taking a handful of matches, setting them alight, and holding them in the palm of his hand until a bystander forcibly knocked them to the ground. His hand was badly burned.[25]

Many have noted the strong discrepancy between Nietzsche's harsh, dramatic, and very masculine philosophy—a kind of fantasy persona which he created—and his actual temperament and behavior. He wrote, "I am by nature warlike. To attack is among my instincts."[26] But in person he was reserved and intellectual, frequently ill with headaches, stomach pains, and other assorted physical problems, including symptoms of syphilis. His health was so bad that he was often bedridden and nursed by his younger sister and his mother, whom, as adult, he strongly disliked.

His philosophy can be interpreted as an intense intellectual struggle to overcome the weakness of his Christian father, a weakness that often seemed to haunt him, as in a dream, which he had a young boy in 1850, six months after his father died.

> I heard the church organ playing as at a funeral. When I looked to see what was going on, a grave opened suddenly, and my father arose out of it in a shroud. He hurries into the church and soon comes back with a small child in his arms. The mound on the grave reopens, he climbs back in, and the gravestone sinks back over the opening. The swelling noise of the organ stops at once, and I wake up. In the morning I tell the dream to my dear mother.[27]

In short, in Nietzsche we have a strong, intellectually, forcefully male reaction against a dead, very Christian father who was loved and admired but perceived as sickly and weak, a representative of what might be called a "death force"—the very opposite of the Superman figure. Nietzsche's life can be seen as a permanent "quest for identity" with the Superman interpreted as Nietzsche's idealized father figure.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

That Sigmund Freud's father, Jacob, was a serious disappointment to his son is generally agreed upon by his biographers. Jacob Freud was a weak man, unable to provide for his family. The money to support them seems to have come from his wife's family. Moreover, Freud's father was passive in

response to anti-Semitism—which was quite disturbing to Sigmund. Freud recounts an episode told him by his father, in which Jacob allowed an anti-Semite to call him a "dirty Jew" and knock his hat off. Young Sigmund, on hearing the story, was ashamed of his father's failure to respond strongly. Sigmund Freud was a complex man, but all agree that he was a courageous fighter and that he greatly admired courage in others. As a young man, Sigmund several times physically stood up against anti-Semitism, and of course he was a great intellectual fighter.

Jacob's defectiveness as a father, however, seems to have gone deeper than incompetence and weakness. In two of his letters as an adult, Freud writes that his father was a sexual pervert and that the children suffered as a result. We should also recall that in proposing the Oedipus complex, Freud placed hatred of the father at the center of that psychology. It is not unreasonable to assume that this expressed, at the least, his strong unconscious hostility to, and rejection of, his own father.

Jacob's connection to God and religion was also present for his son. Jacob was involved in a kind of reform Judaism when Sigmund was a child; the two of them spent hours reading the Jewish Bible together, and later Jacob became increasingly involved in reading the Talmud and in discussing Jewish scripture. In short, for Sigmund this weak, rather passive "nice guy" was clearly connected to Judaism and God, and also to a serious lack of courage, to sexual perversion and to other weaknesses very painful to young Sigmund. It is not surprising then that we owe to Freud the autobiographical insight: "Psychoanalysis . . . daily demonstrates to us how youthful persons lose their religious belief as soon as the authority of the father breaks down."[28]

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872)

Let us return to the aforementioned philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, who was one of the first prominent atheists. Feuerbach had very obvious reasons for why his father hurt him and hurt him deeply. His father, Anselm, was a distinguished jurist and early criminologist who was known for his stormy relationships with colleagues and was known in his family as "Vesuvius," the volcano.[29] A dramatic event of Ludwig's life must have been his father's open adulterous affair with Nannette Brunner, the wife of one Anselm's friends. Anselm left his wife and family and lived openly in a nearby town. There Nannette bore Ludwig's father a child whom they named Anselm. This was a public rejection and humiliation of Ludwig's mother and of the family. This affair lasted from 1813 to 1822, when the mistress died and Anselm came back to live with Ludwig's mother.[30] This all took place when Ludwig was between the ages of nine and nineteen, crucial years for learning to respect and to love your father and at an historical time when this would have been a

serious and humiliating public scandal for Ludwig and his family. Ludwig's life surely supports the Defective Father hypothesis as providing a psychological basis for atheism.

Other Prominent Atheists

We turn now to very brief summaries of the father-son relationships of other important atheists.[31] David Hume's father died when he was two, and he had no subsequent substitute father. A number of Hume scholars maintain that Hume was an anemic deist. However, he became a well-known skeptical philosopher, whose arguments have been appropriated by atheists. His overall argumentation was critical of "metaphysics" and his arguments essentially undermine theistic belief. Bertrand Russell's father died when he was four, and he was raised by a puritanical Christian grandmother nick-named the "Deadly Nightshade" and, here again, there was no father substitute. Jean-Paul Sartre's father died when Sartre was a baby, and he spent years preoccupied with and repudiating fatherhood.[32] Albert Camus lost his father in World War I, and near the end of his life he began searching for what his father might have been like. Arthur Schopenhauer hated his mother and had a modest but weak bond with his father, who committed suicide when the boy was sixteen. He became an atheist shortly afterward. Seriously abusive or weak fathers are also found in the lives of Thomas Hobbes, Voltaire, Jean D'Alembert, Samuel Butler, and H. G. Wells.

Political atheists with nasty fathers include Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and Mao Zedong. Among the so-called New Atheists of recent years Richard Dawkins was abused as a boy by an Anglican priest; Daniel Dennett's father died when he was five; Christopher Hitchens was very close to his mother and attributed his mother's death to a former Anglican priest, who apparently set-up a mutual suicide pact with her that both carried out. Hitchens also felt rather distant from his own father and apparently blamed him for pressuring his mother to abort a sibling which Hitchens very much wanted to have.[33]

Prominent Theists and their Fathers

In contrast, important theists, during the period from Hobbes to the twentieth century, had positive fathers or occasionally positive father substitutes. These theists and their fathers can be considered a kind of "control" group to be compared with the atheists. The list of prominent theists with good fathers or father substitutes includes Blaise Pascal, George Berkeley, Joseph Butler, Thomas Reid, Edmund Burke, Moses Mendelssohn, William Paley, William Wilberforce, François René de Chateaubriand, Friedrich Schleiermacher, John Henry Newman, Alexis de Tocqueville, Samuel Wilberforce,

Søren Kierkegaard, Baron Friedrich von Hügel, G. K. Chesterton, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Buber, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Abraham Heschel.[34] The comments and understanding of psychologically insightful Kierkegaard come close to stating the present position about the relevance of one's father-relationship to belief in God. Søren grew up in a religious family with an especially strong believing, somewhat puritanical father. During his college years Søren broke from his father and intensely rejected religion and God. He commented, "It is so difficult to believe because it is so difficult to obey." His rebellious rejection lasted a few years and then, in large part because of his father's actions, Søren had a moving and powerful reconciliation with his aged father. He then recognized that his rebellion against his father implied rebellion against God. An especially salient comment is: "I have, quite literally, lived with God as one lives with one's father."

In any case, it is the contrast between the fathers of major theist and atheist types of intellectuals that constitutes the best evidence for the "Defective Father Hypothesis."

Madalyn Murray O'Hair (1919–1995)

Let us jump hundred years or so and look at the life of what was once one of America's best-known atheists, Madalyn Murray O'Hair. Maybe you don't know who she was, but she was the woman who brought the lawsuit in the 1960s to get prayer taken out of the public schools—and she was a militant atheist. Here I will quote from her son's book on what life was like in his family when he was a child growing up with his mother, Madalyn. The book opens when her son is eight years old. "We rarely did anything together as a family. The hatred between my grandfather and my mother barred such wholesome scenes." He writes that he really didn't know why his mother hated her father so much, but hate him she did. The opening chapter records a very ugly fight in which she attempted to kill her father with a ten-inch butcher knife. Madalyn failed to do this but she screamed, "I'll see you dead, I'll get you yet, I'll walk on your grave." Whatever the cause of Madalyn's intense hatred of her father, it was clearly deep, that it went back into her childhood. Psychological and possibly physical abuse are plausible sources for this hatred.

Other Recent Examples of the Defective Father

My wife has said I can mention this one which concerns her. She was a fairly religious child, grew up in the Midwest and she was close to her father, in part because she would go to church with him and she enjoyed singing hymns with him. She had done this from her childhood up through her early teenage years.

When she was sixteen years old at school, she was taken home to find he had committed suicide. Shortly afterward she became an atheist. Only since she came back to belief in God and to the faith has she recognized that her father's suicide was the reason for this.

Another example, concerns a famous clinical psychologist, Albert Ellis. He developed an approach using behavioral techniques called Rational Emotional Therapy (RET). Some years ago I was on a podium with him where I outlined my theory about atheism and defective fathers in my talk. Ellis just before my talk gave a critique of religion from a psychological point of view where he was very critical of religion, and used coarse and often gutter-level language to describe believers. (It was not rhetorically effective because he was talking to a largely Baptist audience!)

He then heard me give my interpretation of the Defective Father. Afterward he said to me "Well, I got along fine with my father." I replied, "Well, a psychological theory can't be right all the time." We are lucky in psychology if it's right, 60 percent of the time—that's doing very well.

When I got back to New York City, I had a phone conversation with a friend who was an editor for a publishing company in New York. I mentioned my talk. He asked for a copy of the talk which I sent him. About a month or so later, he called and as we were chatting, he said, "Paul, did you know your theory fits Albert Ellis perfectly?" Quite surprised I said, "Oh come on, the paper you were reading is one he heard me read and he told me it didn't fit him." My friend then told me that the company he worked for was publishing Albert Ellis's biography, that he had read the page proofs that night and Ellis's early life supported the Defective Father theory.

Reading Ellis's biography,[35] I found the following facts about his childhood and early years. Ellis grew up in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s. His mother had some emotional problems, and his father was frequently unfaithful to the mother, and then he abandoned the family. There were two boys—Albert and a slightly younger brother—and a still younger sister. The mother was unable to provide for them because of her mental condition, and the two boys survived on the streets of New York on their own. Now and then Ellis ran into his father in New York City at a party or on the street or at some gathering. The relationship there was apparently pleasant.

But can you imagine how a child would feel? We're talking about the 1920s and 1930s—when more or less everybody else had a father—and his family was struggling to survive. Earning their own living, everything on their own, and this "father" was around but doing nothing for them. I think this explains the incredible energy and personal venom that he expressed toward God and religion.

By now, the psychology, I hope, is reasonably clear: a dead or abusive father or one who abandons his children lays the emotional basis for atheism. After all, if your own father is absent, or weak, or abandons you even if by dying, or is so untrustworthy as to desert, or is so terrible as to abuse and to deceive you in various important ways, it's not hard to see your heavenly Father in the same way and to reject God.

We turn now to a very different interpretation of how atheism arises from nonrational conditions. Here the issue of an inadequate relationship is still central but the father plays no psychological part in setting it up, instead the difficulty is with the child, usually a boy.

AUTISM, ATTACHMENT OR RELATIONSHIP, AND ATHEISM

In the last few decades, autism has become a familiar pathology to many, and its description is now rather well standardized.[36] For present purposes, I will focus on the commonly noted tendency of autistic individuals to have serious interpersonal difficulties, that is, they fail to develop normal attachments. The common interpretation of autistic children is that they have serious difficulty understanding that other people really have minds, and they have serious difficulty establishing relationships with their parents, caretakers, and others. Autistic people have trouble interpreting others as having intentions and as having emotions. They tend to see others as objects and are unable to recognize other people's mental life. This failure to understand and relate to other people is often described as "mind blindness," in that the normal understanding that other people have minds, which naturally develops in most children, does not seem to occur in the seriously autistic child.

The tendency to see the world as made up of objects rather than people, has recently been described as the major "difference between male and female brains" by Baron-Cohen.[37] In other words, men as compared with women are typically much more interested in things or objects while women as compared to men are much more interested in people, empathy, and relationships. The autistic child is seen as suffering, if you will, from a hypermale type of brain. It is important to recognize that autistic children are very disproportionately male; it is three to four times more common in boys than in girls. A high degree of autism can be thought of as lying at the end of a spectrum that includes moderately less severe pathologies such as Asperger's Syndrome. The general term for all such persons is autistic spectrum disorder, or ASD.

Recently, a psychological interpretation has been proposed to interpret the religious beliefs of those with ASD. Thus, Deeley has written that functioning

adults who are still relatively high on the autistic spectrum are associated with a lack of religious belief and, particularly, atheism. Deeley's interpretation supports the general model of unbelief presented here.[38]

That is, a bad relationship or a weak attachment with the father may not always be caused by the father, but can be due to an inherent "mind blindness" or "relationship weakness" in the child to begin with. Clearly, autism is a precondition in the child that prohibits the establishment of a relationship or attachment with the father; indeed, relationships with anyone is difficult. Since religious belief, at least in the Christian and Jewish systems, involves a relationship with a personal God, the inability of an autistic person to have relationships would make religious belief extremely difficult if not impossible. Most Christians, for example, interpret their faith as having a strong interpersonal, experiential basis involving God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit and for Catholics often the Virgin Mary. Therefore relationship is at the center of their religious life. Just as someone who was tone-deaf would be a poor judge of the quality, importance, or even significance of music, someone who is interpersonally "tone-deaf" (i.e., "mind-blind" or severely interpersonally limited) would be incapable of understanding a personal God and religion based on such a deity.

It is interesting that many ASD adults are also very given to abstract thought and systematizing—a mental life common with scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, and so on, as well as a mental life much more common in men.[39] The psychological characteristics associated with high functioning autistics (HFA) include concrete-/literal-mindedness; discomfort with symbolic fluidity and avoidance of metaphoric interpretations; attraction to scientism and a need for sameness and predictability.[40] This understanding of atheism as linked to autism, would therefore predict a tendency for people involved in abstract, systematic thought, with a bias toward concrete meaning and a dislike of metaphoric thinking plus weak or poor interpersonal relations, to be neurologically predisposed to atheism as a consequence of their moderate to mild autistic spectrum disorder. This would also predict that atheism should be more common in men than in women since ADS is more common in men.

In short, it is not just dysfunctional fathers that predispose to unbelief, but persons with mind blindness and the associated propensities for weak or dysfunctional relationships should also be predisposed to unbelief.

Findings by Caldwell-Harris *et al.*[41] support the Deeley interpretation. They report that persons with high functioning autism (HFA) "were more likely than those in our neurological comparison group to identify as atheist or agnostic, and, if religious, were more likely to construct their own religious belief system. Nonbelief was also higher in those who were attracted to systemizing activities, as measured by the Systemizing Quotient."[42]

SUPERFICIAL PERSONAL MOTIVES AND SOCIAL MOTIVES: MY CASE HISTORY

Finally, we need to address some of the superficial but nevertheless very strong reasons of a psychological kind that push a person toward being an atheist. These can be called simple personal and social motives, and I start with my own case history. After a rather wishy-washy Christian upbringing, I became an atheist in college in the 1950s, and I remained so throughout graduate school and in my first years as a young experimental psychologist at New York University. That is, I am an adult convert, or more technically, a reconvert to Christianity and then in a few years to Catholicism, much to my surprise in my late thirties, in the very secular environment of academic New York City.

It is now clear to me that my reasons for becoming and remaining an atheist from about age eighteen to thirty-eight were intellectually superficial and largely without a deeply thought-out basis. Furthermore, I am convinced that my motives were (and still are) commonplace today among many intellectuals, social scientists, and probably students in college, which is where my atheism began.

The major factors in my becoming an atheist, although I wasn't really aware of them at the time, included various socialization pressures. One reason to become an atheist was that I desired to be accepted by the powerful and influential psychologists in my field. I wanted to be accepted by my professors in graduate school. As a graduate student, I was thoroughly socialized by the specific culture of academic psychology. My professors at Stanford, however, much as they might have disagreed about psychological theory, were, as far as I could tell, united on only two things: their intense personal ambition and their rejection of religion. As the psalmist says, "The man greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD; all his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'" In this environment, just as I had learned how to dress like a college student by putting on the right clothes, I also learned to think like a proper psychologist by putting on the right—namely, atheistic or skeptical—ideas and attitudes.

To this list of superficial, but still very strong, pressures, I must add personal convenience: the fact is it is quite inconvenient to be a serious believer in today's powerful neo-pagan world. I would have had to give up many pleasures, some money, and a good deal of time! I didn't have enough pleasures, I didn't have enough money, and I didn't have enough time to want to give up such things. It's not hard to imagine what would have to be rejected if I became a serious believer. And then the time—there would be church services and perhaps church groups and prayer and Scripture reading—all these things and, of course, time spent helping others. I was too busy trying

to help myself and becoming religious would have been a real inconvenience. Perhaps you think that such reasons are restricted to especially callow young men such as I was in my twenties. However, such reasoning is not uncommon even for "mature" people.

Let me turn to Mortimer Adler, a well-known American philosopher, writer, and intellectual, a professor at the University of Chicago, who spent much of his life thinking and writing about God and religious topics. One of his books is titled *How to Think about God: A Guide for the 20th-Century Pagan* (1980). In this work, Adler presses the argument for the existence of God very strongly, and by the later chapters seems close to accepting the living God—yet he pulls back and remains among the vast company of the religiously uncommitted. But Adler leaves the impression that this decision is more one of his will than of his intellect. As one of his reviewers Graddy noted:[43] "Adler confirms this impression in his autobiography, *Philosopher at Large* (1977). In this book, where Adler is investigating his reasons for twice stopping short of a full religious commitment, he writes that the answer "lies in the state of one's will, not in the state of one's mind."[44] Adler goes on to comment that to become seriously religious "would require a radical change in my way of life" and "the simple truth of the matter is that I did not wish to live up to being a genuinely religious person."[45] There, you have it! Here is a remarkably honest admission that being a genuinely religious person would be too much trouble, too inconvenient. (I should add that toward the end of his life, Adler moved from a "merely philosophical theology" to a personal faith in God.)[46] At any rate, I must assume that such are the reasons behind many an unbeliever's position.

Another important kind of pressure on me came from what might be called family socialization. An important influence on me in my college and graduate school years was a certain significant social unease. I was somewhat embarrassed to be from the Midwest, which seemed to me terribly dull, narrow, and provincial. There was certainly nothing romantic or impressive about being from Cincinnati, Ohio, and from a mixed German-English-Swiss background: boring and middle class. Besides escape from this background, I wanted to take part—and be comfortable—in the new exciting glamorous secular world into which I was moving at the University of Michigan as an undergraduate and later at Stanford University.

I am sure that similar motives have strongly influenced the lives of countless upwardly mobile young people in the last two centuries. Consider all of the secularized Jews, for example, who have fled the Jewish Ghettos—and Judaism itself—because they wished to assimilate and get away from the strange and embarrassing behavior of their parents. Or consider the latest young arrival in New York City embarrassed about his fundamentalist parents. This kind of socialization pressure has pushed many people away from

belief in God, and all that belief means for them. I remember a small seminar in graduate school where almost every member at some time expressed this kind of embarrassment and the desire to become part of the modern secular world. One student was trying to escape his Southern Baptist background; another student, his small town Mormon environment; another was trying to get out of a very Jewish Brooklyn Ghetto; I was the fourth. Recently I learned of an intelligent Hispanic college student whose atheism was affected by his parents' strong Pentecostalism which he found embarrassing, although he got along with his parents reasonably well.

In short, because of my professional needs to be accepted into the world of academic psychology and because of my personal needs for a pleasant and convenient lifestyle, and because of my lackluster family background, atheism seemed simply the best policy. Looking back on these reasons, I can honestly say that for me, a return to atheism has all the appeal of a return to adolescence.

Here is still another example of how atheism might arise psychologically. This is taken from the autobiography of a *New York Times* writer by the name of Russell Baker,[47] who was for many years usually on the editorial page with a humor column. In his first book of two volumes on his life, he writes that his father was taken to the hospital and died there, very suddenly, when young Baker was five years old. He wept in sorrow and then spoke to the family housekeeper Bessie. He said,

> For the first time I thought seriously about God. Between sobs I told Bessie that if God could do things like this to people, then God was hateful and I had no more use for Him. Bessie told me about the peace of heaven and the joy of being among the angels and the happiness of my father who was already there. The argument failed to quiet my rage. "God loves us just like his own children," Bessie said. If God loves me, why did he make my father die? Bessie said that I would understand some day, but she was only partly right. That afternoon, though I couldn't have phrased it this way then, I decided that God was a lot less interested in people than anybody in Morrisonville was willing to admit. That day I decided that God was not to be trusted. After that, I never cried again with any real conviction, nor expected much of anyone's God, except indifference. Nor loved deeply without fear that it would cost me dearly in pain. At the age of five I had become a skeptic.[48]

I conclude by noting that however prevalent the superficial motives are for being an atheist, there still remain, for many people, deep and disturbing psychological sources as well. However easy it may be for me to put forward the hypothesis of The Defective Father, we must not forget the difficulty, the pain, and the complexity that lie behind each such individual case. And for those whose atheism has been conditioned by a father who rejected, denied,

hated, manipulated, abandoned them, or physically or sexually abused them, there must be understanding. Certainly for a child to be forced to hate his or her own father, or even to despair because of a father's weakness or absence is a great tragedy. After all, children only want to love their father and to have a father who loves them.

For any unbeliever whose atheism is grounded in such painful experience, the believer blessed by God's love should pray most especially that ultimately, they both meet in heaven. If so, perhaps the former atheist will experience even more joy than the believer. The atheist will have that extra increment that comes from the surprise at finding himself in, of all places, his Father's house.

NOTES

1. For the most part, this chapter is derived from my book *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*, 2nd edn. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013).
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. William Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1966), 13–14.
3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* trans. Reginald John Holingdale (London: Penguin, 1979), 51.
4. Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
5. Nagel, *Last Word,* 130.
6. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion,* ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1961).
7. N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 159. Also, Walter Burkett, *Homo necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth,* trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
8. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, eds. E. Graham Waring and F. W. Strothmann (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1957).
9. Ibid., 33.
10. Ibid., 1.
11. Ibid., 49.
12. Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister, *Psychoanalysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister,* eds. Heinrich Meng and Ernest L. Freud, trans. Eric Mosbacher (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 117.
13. For more on the Oedipus topic, see Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*.
14. Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1947).
15. Ibid., 98.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1966), 13–14 (emphasis added).
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1979), 51.
18. Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 18.
19. Reginald John Holingdale, *Nietzsche* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 10.
20. Hayman, *Nietzsche*, 18.
21. Nietzsche, *Ecce,* 47.
22. Ibid., 300.
23. Ibid., 38.
24. Hayman, *Nietzsche*, 38; Janko Lavrin, *Nietzsche: A Biographical Introduction* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 51.
25. Gerald Abraham, *Nietzsche* (New York: Haskell House, 1974), 22.
26. Nietzsche, *Ecce*, 47.
27. Hayman, *Nietzsche*, 18.
28. Freud, *Leonardo*, 98.
29. Eugene Kamenka, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 20.
30. Ibid., 20–21.
31. For more details and references, see Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless*.
32. Robert Harvey, *Search for a Father: Sartre, Paternity and the Question of Ethics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
33. For documentation of the preceding claims, see Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless*.
34. Ibid., for references.
35. Daniel N. Weiner, *Albert Ellis: Passionate Skeptic* (New York: Praeger, 1988).
36. Uta Frith and Francesca Happe, "Autism spectrum disorder," *Current Biology* 15 (2005): 786–790.
37. Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
38. Quiton Deeley, "Cognitive Style, Spirituality and Religious Understanding: The Case of Autism," *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 13 (2009): 77–82.
39. S. Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
40. Catherine Caldwell-Harris, Caitlin Fox Murphy, Tessa Velazquez, and Patrick McNamara, "Religious Belief Systems of Persons with High Functioning Autism," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society* 33 (2011): 3362–3366.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 3362.
43. W. E. Graddy, "The uncrossed bridge," *New Oxford Review* (June 1982): 23–24.
44. Mortimer Adler, *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Autobiography, 1902–1976* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 316.

45. Ibid.
46. Mortimer Adler, "A Philosopher's Religious Faith," in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 215.
47. Russell Baker. *Growing Up* (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1982).
48. Ibid., 61.

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Chapter 12

The Cultural Implications of Theism versus Naturalism

Paul Copan and Jeremiah J. Johnston

INTRODUCTION

Modern science and bioethics; public education and literacy; democracy and human rights; increased freedom from colonialism; moral reforms such as abolishing widow-burning, foot-binding, prepubescent marriage, and slavery—how did these moral and social goods emerge? As it turns out, the key factor in bringing about such gains is the outflow of biblical theism being lived out in the world.

Why a chapter on this topic in a book on the naturalness of theistic belief? This book highlights a range of factors pointing toward theistic explanation. In addition to various rational arguments for God's existence from consciousness, personal agency, or objective moral values, this book also points to the naturalness of theistic belief in light of immortality beliefs, psychological factors related to belief in God and atheism, and existential reasons for belief in God rooted in deep human longings. Beyond this, it is worth considering how theism—and biblical theism in particular—is not just theoretically or intellectually sound, but it has actually been fleshed out in the realization of certain moral and social gains consistent with, and an outflow of, the teachings and example of Jesus of Nazareth.

This chapter presents something of an argument from history and culture to show how the roots of the biblical faith have yielded the fruits of beneficial changes for the flourishing of societies. Positive—often dramatic—changes in societal structures are the result of transformed Christians seeking to live out their faith consistently. They have been inspired by the life of Jesus of Nazareth—his love, impartiality, self-sacrifice, and forgiveness. The model of Jesus has prompted his followers to engage in remarkably self-sacrificial actions such as caring for the weak and vulnerable, promoting education and

beauty, promoting democracy and human rights, and carrying out multitudinous other actions to benefit humanity.

In this chapter, we offer a brief comparison of the metaphysical resources of theism and naturalism, indicating that the ontological "furniture" of theism (e.g., humans made "in the image of God") better anticipates the "manifest image" of rationality, beauty, consciousness, intrinsic human dignity, moral duties, personal responsibility, and various other commonsensical features of reality. Then we look at the biblical backdrop that builds on this theistic foundation. This backdrop offers concrete reinforcement of theism's implications, particularly as exemplified in the life, ministry, and self-giving death of Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, we point to a sampling of specific moral and societal fruits inspired by the historical Jesus: these fruits organically emerged and ripened through the righteous endeavors of Christ-followers (or those strongly influenced by him)—fruits consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus.

METAPHYSICS: NATURALISM VERSUS THEISM

Which worldview—theism or naturalism—makes the best sense of objective moral values such as intrinsic human dignity and moral duties, as well as consciousness, human volition or agency, and beauty? Certainly if we had to predict the likely emergence of these features given the respective metaphysical furniture of theism and naturalism, theism would emerge as the most suitable worldview to explain such outcomes. What's more, it's not difficult to find naturalists agreeing. For example, philosopher J. L. Mackie said that if objective moral values existed—something he denied—then they *would* serve as a strong argument for God's existence.[1] Another naturalist, the philosopher Joel Marks, shifted from his "soft atheism"—naturalism's "manifest image" of belief in morality without God. It was naturalism's logic that prompted the experience of a "shocking epiphany," which led him to abandon his "unexamined assumption"—namely, a Kantian-based optimism about morality. He became a "hard atheist," embracing the "scientific image": "without God, there is no morality."[2] Indeed, human dignity and human rights as well as moral duties are more "natural" and predictable given theism as opposed to naturalism. As cited in the Introduction, Jaegwon Kim points to the grim scenario entailed by naturalism. It is "imperialistic; it demands 'full coverage' . . . and exacts a terribly high ontological price."[3]

Why think that value should emerge from valueless processes—or rationality from nonrational processes, or consciousness from nonconscious matter, or personhood from impersonal inputs, or personal agency and volition from deterministic processes? As various essays both within this volume and

elsewhere make the case for the God-morality connection,[4] we say no more here about theism's favorable worldview context for objective moral values and human dignity.

EXPOUNDING ON THE BIBLICAL BACKDROP

We can go beyond what some might call a "bare" *philosophical* theism to a more robust and historically anchored *biblical* theism, which is anchored in the ancient Scriptures of Israel and as well as the teaching and example of Jesus. Let us first take note of the theism expressed in Israel's ancient Scriptures, which Jesus himself presupposes. Jesus does not correct or modify the theism of those Scriptures, but he does at points clarify it and sometimes apply it in new ways.

Theism in the Life and Ancient Scriptures of Israel

One way to appreciate the theism of Israel's ancient Scriptures is to compare it with the theism of her ancient Near Eastern neighbors. The theism in this time and region was polytheistic, with deities competing with one another and sometimes at war with one another. There was no one Creator, no one deity who ruled heaven. Rather, there was a god-pantheon, whose hierarchy was for the most part settled by a series of cosmic battles. Victorious gods fashioned the cosmos from the remains of the defeated gods. The creation of humanity was an accidental by-product of this epic struggle. The purpose of humanity, if we can even speak of purpose, was to serve the gods. The smoke of sacrifices offered up by humans was food for the gods, without which the gods would starve.[5]

In sharp contrast to these conceptions stands the portrait of the biblical God, the God who is Creator of the cosmos. The creation account in Genesis speaks of only one God, not several. Creation has purpose and has a goal; it was not the result of accident or misadventure. The creation process itself is systematic and orderly. At each step, God declares that it is "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The crowning achievement of creation—not its by-product—is the creation of humankind. The very world that God has created has been created for humankind. Moreover, human beings are said to have been created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26), and, in fact, both genders are said to have been made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Both of these ideas—that humankind reflects the very image of the Creator and that man and woman are equal in that *both* are made in God's image—is completely out of step with the thinking of great antiquity.

The God of Israel's ancient Scriptures is a holy and moral God. From God humanity receives a code of laws (over the course of time, climaxing in the giving of the law at Mount Sinai). The purpose of God's law is to promote justice, protect the weak, and provide for the general well-being of humanity. Indeed, God's command that humanity worship him and him alone is again for humanity's benefit. After all, the laws, if any, of the gods of pagans were not designed to benefit humanity and often permitted and sometimes even encouraged harmful behavior.

Many people today do not realize that morality and ethics were not necessarily part of pagan antiquity's religion. Nowhere is this incongruity more clearly seen than in the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, which had been buried under the volcanic ash of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. Everywhere in these well-preserved remains we find religious objects, niches for idols, temples, gods, and goddesses and yet, in marked contrast, pornography, prostitution, and brothels are ubiquitous.[6] We moderns find this religious and sexual juxtaposition strange, but it was not strange or unusual in antiquity. After all, the gods themselves were not moral or ethical. Thus, devotion to a god or goddess did not preclude or discourage indulgence in pornography, prostitution, pedophilia, and so on. Indeed, the male phallus was sometimes itself depicted in various ways as part of worship or devotion.[7] If you visit Pompeii and Herculaneum, you'll see many, many graphic displays of nudity and sexual activity, including every imaginable perversity. These scenes involve the gods as well as humans. One of the most graphic examples is the god Pan raping a goat (on display in the Naples Museum). In first-century Rome, adultery and pedophilia were not viewed as inconsistent with devotion to the gods.

People of Greco-Roman antiquity feared that if they enjoyed too much success, it might draw the unwelcome attention of a god eager to keep mortals in their place. Too much success could lead to pride and arrogance. And human arrogance could easily be seen as *hubris*, which invites disaster at the hands of the gods. In some ways the gods were super-humans more than divine beings. This is why it was so easy for the Greeks and Romans of late antiquity to imagine humans of virtue and achievement being elevated to divine status.

In the pre-Christian world, individuals and communities could not and did not look to the gods for compassion and aid. Through offerings, which were little more than bribery and appeals to a god's vanity, humans might secure favors. But in general, humans could expect little or no comfort from the gods. Indeed, in one of the Homeric hymns, we hear that humans suffer, "enduring so much at the hands of the god . . . heedless and helpless, unable to find for themselves either a cure for death or a bulwark against old age."[8]

Some of the strongest proscriptions expressed in the laws of Israel's ancient Scriptures were directed against pagan practices that permitted cruelty to animals and to humans, including child sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; 2 Kgs 17:31; Ezek. 16:21). In their desperation to gain the attention of their gods and win their support, pagans sometimes resorted to human sacrifice, even the sacrifice of their own children. Israel's Scriptures condemn the practice both by precept and by the example of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac but was prevented from doing so by God.

Another major element in the theism of Israel's faith is the closely related concepts of grace and forgiveness. Because God is a God of grace, he is willing to forgive humans who sin against him and against each other. Humans are to forgive one another as well. They are to avoid pagan practices, including revenge and retaliation. God's people are to be holy, even as God himself is holy (Levi. 19:2). These laws and principles are part of Israel's covenant with God, ratified at Mount Sinai, in the wilderness that lay between Egypt and Israel.

Closely related to the twin concepts of grace and forgiveness is the idea of redemption, a theme that runs throughout Israel's ancient Scriptures. Because God is gracious, because God is willing to forgive, his desire is for humanity's redemption, no matter how fallen or debased humanity becomes. The Bible's story of the human race, then, is a story of God's redemption and reclamation of a fallen, alienated humanity. Because humanity is made "in the image of God," it has great value, from God's point of view, and so he graciously makes provision to redeem and restore it.

In practical terms, this story was lived out in community and worship. In community the people of Israel obeyed (or at least were supposed to obey) God's laws, popularly summed up in the Ten Commandments. These commandments, such as "You shall not commit murder," "You shall not commit theft," "You shall not commit adultery," and so forth, were primarily designed to protect the weak. Even the king could not steal a man's property or a man's wife. These commandments were essential elements in Israel's covenant with God.

The story of God's redemption of humanity was lived out in worship by meeting God in the Temple (or Tabernacle, in earlier times). There either a sin offering was offered up (Exod. 29:36) or a peace offering (Exod. 29:28). It was in this sacrificial setting, with its powerful symbolism, that the Israelite was reminded of God's story and humanity's place within it. The act of offering the sacrifice restored one's relationship with God, thus continuing the story of redemption and reclamation on a personal level.[9] The point of Israel's worship, seen especially in the various sacrificial offerings, was to promote the spiritual and emotional health of God's people.

Israel's understanding of theism, whose principal distinctive in its Near Eastern setting was its monotheism (and for some Israelites, however, their monotheism might be better described as henotheism), deeply impacted society and behavior. The prophets acted as spokesmen for God and, in a sense, as enforcers of God's law, even and especially when Israel's kings failed to follow it. Not only do we find oracles condemning injustice and oppression; we find accounts of kings accosted by prophets. That prophets could confront kings, as in the remarkable case of Nathan and David (2 Sam. 12), and live to speak of it testifies to the social power of Israel's covenant with God to the restraints that this covenant placed on Israel's governing class.

The collapse of Israel's ancient state and the destruction of its sacred Temple in 586 BCE ended for many the story of God's redemption. It was the prophets, however, who kept the story alive, calling on the survivors to remember Israel's covenant with God. Israel's defeat at the hands of the Babylonians did not mean that Israel's God had been defeated. The collapse of Israel's kingdom did not mean that the gods of the Babylonians existed or that they were superior to Israel's God.[10]

The prophets reassured Israel that God's redemptive plan continued, that the promises made to the patriarchs and the prophecies spoken by the prophets would be fulfilled. However, when Israel emerged from exile and once again began to establish itself in its homeland, hope increasingly fastened itself on God as king. Many hoped for the return of a human king from the line of David, but the true Redeemer, it was believed, would in some sense be God himself. Rather than a "kingdom of David," people began to long for and anticipate a "kingdom of God."

The Theism of Jesus and the Christian Church

The theism of Jesus was no mere abstract or philosophical musing about God's existence or his attributes. Jesus' proclamation that "the kingdom of God has come" brought with it enormous implications for humanity. These implications were adumbrated in the preaching of John the Baptist, the fiery prophet of repentance who preceded Jesus. John's call for repentance called for very tangible, measurable changes in behavior:

> And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." (Lk. 3:10-14)

John's preaching called for significant, impactful change in his society. "Repentance" wasn't simply a change of thinking; it was a change in lifestyle and, especially, a change in one's relationship with others. It put into practice God's mercy.

One will also want to note the economic nature of John's advice to those who came to him for baptism. He instructed crowds who had surplus food and clothing to share with those who had none, while he gave specific instructions to those in positions to gouge and coerce not to do so. Had John's demands been followed by all in his day, the revolution that convulsed Israel in 66–70 CE and resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and her famous temple might have been avoided. If John's demands were followed today, a great deal of poverty and social disadvantage in the modern world would be eliminated.

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God (Mk 1:14-15 and parallels) presupposed John's call for repentance. It was in fact the presupposition for his proclamation. A repentant people, now committed to justice and righteous living, was a people ready to embrace the rule of God in their midst. When Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God, what he envisioned was not hypothetical or abstract; it was life-changing. This is why his miracles, including and especially exorcisms, were so important.

The miracles of Jesus were not intended to dazzle or impress; they were intended to demonstrate the reality and tangible presence of God's kingly rule, a rule and power not seen before. More than that, the miracles of Jesus were tangible demonstrations of the blessings and benefits the kingdom of God brings to humanity. These miracles included healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding the hungry, and casting out Satan.[11]

The last of these miracles, that is, the exorcisms, were especially important, for they demonstrated the reality of the kingdom of God in that it was overpowering the kingdom of Satan. Jesus makes this point explicit, when he responds to his critics by saying, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk. 11:20; cf. Mt. 12:28). The exorcisms are no mere proof of the reality of the kingdom of God; they are evidence of the very destruction of Satan's kingdom, a kingdom, says Jesus, that "has an end" (Mk 3:26, rendering the Greek *telos echei* literally). Jesus' language deliberately echoes the language in a contemporary text, fictitiously attributed to Moses, which envisioned that when the kingdom of God arose, the kingdom of the Devil "will have an end" (*Testament of Moses* 10:1, rendering the Latin *finem habebit* literally). What was envisioned and longed for in this prophecy came to fulfillment in the preaching and ministry of Jesus.

The arrival of the kingdom of God meant change, change in the way humans related to God and change in the way humans related to one another.

These relationships are the two foci of Jesus' parables. The latter parables—illustrating how humans should relate to one another—are among Jesus' most memorable. One immediately thinks of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37), a parable that defines what love of neighbor entails. Who "proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" Jesus asked the legal authority. "The one who showed mercy," was the correct reply. "Go and do likewise," Jesus instructs.

The parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) is another favorite. This parable teaches a great lesson about forgiveness. The younger, wayward, selfish son disgraces his family and sins grievously. But when he repents and returns home, his father forgives him and exhorts his older son to do likewise. The parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Man (Lk. 16:19-30) warns the wealthy not to presume upon their wealth and privilege, which are no guarantee of righteousness before God. The parable also teaches that indifference toward the poor is unacceptable and is itself an indication of ethical deficiency.

The parables also have much to say about what it means to be faithful toward God. In the parable of the Two Sons (Mt. 21:28-32), the son who says, "I will," but does nothing has not fulfilled the will of his father. In contrast, the son who says, "I will not," but then changes his mind and does what he is asked has done the will of his father. Promises and pious platitudes are not the equivalent of deeds and obedience.

Sometimes the two foci of love of God and love of neighbor come together in the parables of Jesus. The parable of the Two Debtors (Mt. 18:23-35) teaches that a debtor forgiven a great debt should in turn be willing to forgive one who owes him a small debt. The semi-allegorical parable teaches that because God has forgiven humans much, humans should be willing to forgive one another. The parable reflects the premise found throughout Scripture and throughout the teaching of Jesus: God is gracious and has forgiven us; so we humans should extend the same grace to others and forgive them.

The highpoint of human ethics is seen in Jesus' teaching regarding humility and service. He startled his disciples by teaching them that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). Jesus' teaching (and his favorite self-identification "Son of Man") flew in the face of the values of the Greco-Roman world, which regarded service as degrading and appropriate for barbarians and other inferior peoples.[12] Jesus demonstrated his ethic when he washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:3-16) and gave them the "new" commandment that they love one another (Jn 13:34). The concept of love and self-sacrifice reaches its highest expression when Jesus says to his followers: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13; cf. 1 Jn 3:16).

It must be underscored that Jesus' proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God did not mean that the world was ending, that catastrophe was around the corner. The arrival of the kingdom of God meant that the world would begin to change, that God's redemptive work was moving forward in new ways. It meant also the establishment of Jesus' community, his Church, which would continue his work through his disciples. It is important to emphasize this point because of the mistaken notion, still widely held today, that Jesus proclaimed the end of the world and that when the world did not end, the Church reinterpreted his mission and established a new agenda. On the contrary, the resurrection of Jesus confirmed his ministry and made it possible for his following to continue his ministry.[13] The kingdom of God has arrived and its life-changing, world-changing mission continues.

The single greatest contribution of Jesus' kingdom proclamation was the concept that God loved his creation and especially human beings. As we have seen, in the pre-Christian world the gods were indifferent to humanity. Indeed, sometimes the gods were jealous of humans. Humans feared the gods and tried to placate them, even bribe them. The Greco-Roman gods were jealous, petty, vengeful, easily offended, and lustful. The essence of these gods was power and immortality.[14] But Christians proclaimed that "God is love" and that God sent his Son to bring reconciliation between God and humanity. Ancient pagans had never heard of such a thing. The idea that God actually loved them and was willing to send his Son to serve humanity, even die for humanity, was almost incomprehensible.

The apostles of Jesus applied their Master's teachings to the pagan world they encountered as they traveled and evangelized. Perhaps no one captured the essence of the implications of Jesus' thought better than the Apostle Paul, who wrote in a widely circulated letter: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This provocative declaration, with which pagan culture strongly disagreed at every point, altered human culture for the better in ways never seen. The gospel of Jesus, spread throughout the world, changed the world.

History bears witness to the positive impact that the ministry of Jesus and the continuing ministry of his Church have had on human society and culture. The very pagan, corrupt police state known as the Roman Empire was transformed. Polytheism all but disappeared. Crucifixion and the cruel gladiator games were ended. Articulation, promotion, and justification of racism disappeared.[15] The revolutionary Christian message of brotherhood and equality (see Gal. 3:28) swept the Roman world and all of the West. The Greek and Roman empires were Christianized, so was Europe. Over the next millennium, there were no great philosophers or Christian theologians arguing for racism, providing justifications for it, or advocating slavery (i.e., not until the

"enlightenment").[16] There were no medieval Aristotles promoting eugenics or infanticide. The Apostle Paul's message of "neither Jew nor Greek" had taken hold, and widespread racism receded.

Conditions for slaves, children, and women greatly improved. Slavery itself was eventually abolished. Egalitarian principles and human rights became the norm in all parts of the world where the Christian faith was significantly influential. Christians protected the unwanted, the sick, and the weak. They rescued infants, often either deformed or female, who had been cast out. They founded schools, promoted literacy, established universities, and advanced science.[17] Without Jesus and his Church, the world would look nothing like it does today.

THE OUTWORKINGS OF CHRISTIAN THEISM IN HISTORY

We have begun to see that biblical theism not only has robust metaphysical resources to ground objective moral values as well as human dignity and rights. Further, the historical reality of Jesus' self-sacrificial death by crucifixion—which was brutal, barbaric, humiliating—and his bodily resurrection demonstrated how far God was willing to go to rescue and redeem fallen, broken humanity. In addition, the transformed lives of many Jesus-followers have produced dramatic moral reforms in history as well as produced significant moral and structural changes that impact all levels—personal, communal, societal, and even civilizational. This cannot be said about biblical theism's worldview counterparts, particularly naturalism.

Theism, which naturalism rejects, views humans as created "in the image of God." They possess moral, volitional, spiritual, rational, and creative capacities that distinguish them from nonhuman animals. Despite abuses and atrocities carried out in the name of the most perfect Being, such acts that are inconsistent with theism are not inconsistent with the metaphysical starting points of naturalism; naturalism's features include valueless, nonconscious, nonrational, unguided materialistic processes. Indeed, a worldview that cuts out any ontological supports from under the affirmation of human dignity could—indeed has—led to atrocities and horrors carried out in the name of a naturalistic worldview that has no obvious room for human dignity and rights.

Some may claim that Greek "democracy," the Renaissance, or the Enlightenment paved the way for modern-day democracy, human rights, and a host of moral reforms. The Greeks did not actually have democracy but rather a hierarchical society built on the backs of slaves. The Renaissance was fundamentally a Christian era with a pursuit of the humanities ("humanism") that

drew on classical sources, much like Puritan poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost* did. And the Enlightenment's ideals were largely fueled by Christian (Protestant) ideals prior to it; indeed, a number of leading Enlightenment figures like Rousseau, Locke, Grotius, Franklin, and others grew up in Protestant (Calvinistic) homes.[18] Historian Tom Holland found the world of classical antiquity "alien and unsettling" given its pervasive calloused spirit and view of the poor or weak as having no intrinsic value:

> As such, the founding conviction of the Enlightenment—that it owed nothing to the faith into which most of its greatest figures had been born—increasingly came to seem to me unsustainable. "Every sensible man," Voltaire wrote, "every honourable man, must hold the Christian sect in horror." Yet Voltaire, in his concern for the weak and oppressed, was marked more enduringly by the stamp of biblical ethics than he cared to admit.
>
> "We preach Christ crucified," St Paul declared, "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." He was right. Nothing could have run more counter to the most profoundly held assumptions of Paul's contemporaries—Jews, or Greeks, or Romans. The notion that a god might have suffered torture and death on a cross was so shocking as to appear repulsive. Familiarity with the biblical narrative of the Crucifixion has dulled our sense of just how completely novel a deity Christ was. In the ancient world, it was the role of gods who laid claim to ruling the universe to uphold its order by inflicting punishment—not to suffer it themselves.
>
> Today, even as belief in God fades across the West, the countries that were once collectively known as Christendom continue to bear the stamp of the two-millennia-old revolution that Christianity represents. It is the principal reason why, by and large, most of us who live in post-Christian societies still take for granted that it is nobler to suffer than to inflict suffering. It is why we generally assume that every human life is of equal value. In my morals and ethics, I have learned to accept that I am not Greek or Roman at all, but thoroughly and proudly Christian.[19]

Various atheist intellectuals have acknowledged this. Consider one of Europe's leading intellects—philosopher (and atheist) Jürgen Habermas. He has observed that democracy, human rights, egalitarianism, and freedom as we know it are "the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love" and that any other attempted explanation for them is "just idle postmodern talk."[20] Likewise, Jacques Derrida—another noted atheist philosopher—agrees that "the concept of crime against humanity is a Christian concept and I think there would be no such thing in the law today without the Christian heritage, the Abrahamic heritage, the biblical heritage."[21] Agnostic philosopher Luc Ferry concurs: the Christian idea of human equality was "unprecedented at the time, and one to which our world owes its entire democratic inheritance."[22]

Various scholars have ably documented the fruits of the biblical worldview in history.[23] Indeed, recent rigorous research by sociologist Robert Woodberry in particular has demonstrated the dramatic impact of specifically Protestant missionaries throughout the world. Of course, the democratizing force of Protestantism should not be surprising, given its threefold emphasis: (1) the priesthood of all believers before God; (2) the right of every believer to study the Bible for herself in her own language; and (3) the appropriateness of pursuing any honest vocation to the glory of God.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "conversionary Protestants" (i.e., missionaries) often sought to protect indigenous peoples from abusive colonial powers; they pressed for punishment of abusive military or civic colonial officials and worked to apply uniform legal standards for whites and nonwhites alike. They documented atrocities and helped mobilize protest movements. These missionaries helped create a kind of "cocoon in which non-violent, indigenous political movements could develop" to press for democracy and decolonialization.[24] Indeed, these missionaries have been uniquely responsible for remarkable democratizing gains throughout the world: "The development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, volunteer organizations, most major colonial reforms [including abolishing slavery, widow-burning, foot binding, female circumcision, marriage of pre-pubescent girls, etc.], and the codification of legal protections for nonwhites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[25]

Woodberry challenges anyone to look at any map to see for himself: Countries with more Protestants are more democratic and have more stable democratic transitions; and where Protestant missionaries have been, there we find more printed books and more schools per capita. Furthermore, in Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, "most of the early nationalists who led their countries to independence graduated from Protestant mission schools."[26]

This Jesus-shaped legacy continues. Former Canadian Broadcasting Corporation journalist Brian Stewart began his career as no friend of "religion." Yet he discovered just how deeply involved Christians—and often *only* Christians—were involved in bringing relief to, and engaging in other righteous endeavors in, many hell-holes in the world. This ultimately persuaded him of the reality of the Christian faith such that he became a follower of Christ:

> For many years I've been struck by the rather blithe notion, spread in many circles including the media, and taken up by a rather large section of our younger population that organized, mainstream Christianity has been reduced to a musty, dimly lit backwater of contemporary life, a fading force. Well, I'm

> here to tell you from what I've seen from my "ring-side seat" at events over decades that there is nothing that is further from the truth. That notion is a serious distortion of reality. I've found there is *no* movement, or force, closer to the raw truth of war, famines, crises, and the vast human predicament, than organized Christianity in action. And there is no alliance more determined and dogged in action than church workers, ordained and lay members, when mobilized for a common good. . . . I've never reached a war zone, or famine group or crisis anywhere where some Church organization was not there long before me . . . sturdy, remarkable souls usually too kind to ask "what took you so long?"[27]

No wonder political scientist Guenther Lewy, another agnostic, observes that

> adherents of [a naturalistic] ethic are not likely to produce a Dorothy Day or a Mother Teresa. Many of these people love humanity but not individual human beings with all their failings and shortcomings. They will be found participating in demonstrations for causes such as nuclear disarmament but not sitting at the bedside of a dying person. An ethic of moral autonomy and individual rights, so important to secular liberals, is incapable of sustaining and nourishing values such as altruism and self-sacrifice.[28]

CONCLUSION

Many of us Westerners in particular are like trust-fund kids. We sit on great wealth but do not realize either the worldview foundations that gave rise to, or the great cost and self-sacrifice involved in shaping, the democratic ideals and structures we take for granted. These democratizing gains emerged as a result of the human-dignifying biblical framework that was radically different from naturalism's metaphysical starting points but also from the Greco-Roman culture in the midst of which it appeared—an outlook inspired by the example of the crucified Christ and carried into action by his dedicated followers. These social and moral gains more naturally flow from a biblical worldview—with its theistic framework and humans made in the divine image and with a self-sacrificing Savior to redeem a broken humanity. Given the metaphysical starting points of naturalism, such remarkable gains are inconsistent with those stark, valueless, materialistic foundations. Indeed, strict naturalism must be broadened ("the manifest image") if it is to have any hopeful association with such gains for humanity. But alas, such a move looks like wholesale borrowing from the resources of biblical theism, which is the more natural home and the far more probable source of these gains.

NOTES

1. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115.

2. Joel Marks, "An Amoral Manifesto (Part 1)," *Philosophy Now*, no. 80 (February/March 2015), https://philosophynow.org/issues/80/An_Amoral_Manifesto_Part_I.

3. Jaegwon Kim, "Mental Causation and Two Conceptions of Mental Properties." Paper presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting (December 1993), 22–23.

4. See Paul Copan, "Grounding Human Rights: Naturalism's Failure and Biblical Theism's Success," in *Legitimizing Human Rights*, ed. Angus Menuge, Applied Legal Philosophy Series (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 11–31; Paul Copan, "The Biblical Worldview Context for Religious Liberty," in *Religious Liberty: Its Nature, Scope, and Limits*, ed. Angus Menuge (London: Routledge, 2017), 11–33.

5. For many examples, see J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3–155; for analysis, see J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*. Yale Egyptological Studies 2 (New Haven: Yale Egyptological Seminary, 1988); J. Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

6. T. A. J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

7. J. Harris, *Pompeii Awakened: A Story of Rediscovery* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 110–23, 277–78; R. Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39–55, 65–86; for images, see P. Roberts, *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 118–28.

8. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 3. 190–92.

9. A. S. Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, Ecumenical Studies in Worship 5 (London: Lutterworth, 1959); R. de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964).

10. P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (London: SCM Press, 1968).

11. G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

12. Aristotle, *Politica* 1.1252a–b; Martial, *Epigrammaton liber* 3.94.

13. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 198–243; idem, "Hope Deferred? Against the Dogma of Delay," *Early Christianity* 9 (2018): 37–82; David Wenham, *From Good News to Gospels: What Did the First Christians Say About Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

14. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 273: "A [Greek] god is a power that represents a type of action, a kind of force."

15. A compelling case for protoracism in antiquity has been made in Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

16. Then racism staged a comeback with a vengeance and set the stage for other very negative developments. Major enlightenment figures such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Voltaire, David Hume, Edmund Burke, among others, all supported slavery and other inequalities.

17. J. Hill, *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us? How It Shaped the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

18. For comments on the question of influence as well as a thorough documentation on a host of democratizing gains for humanity influenced by Protestantism in particular, see Robert D. Woodberry, "The missionary roots of liberal democracy," *American Political Science Review* 106 (2012): 244–74; also, Copan, "The Biblical Worldview Context for Religious Liberty."

19. Tom Holland, "Why I was wrong about Christianity," *New Statesman* (September 14, 2016): http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/religion/2016/09/tom-holland-why-i-was-wrong-about-christianity.

20. Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, ed./trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 150–51.

21. Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and Imprescriptable," in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caupto, et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 70.

22. Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 72.

23. For example, Jeremiah Johnston, *Unimaginable: What Our World Would Be Like without Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2017); Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (New York: Random House, 2005).

24. Woodberry, "Missionary roots," 254.

25. Ibid., 244–45.

26. Cited in A. P. Dilley, "The world the missionaries made," *Christianity Today* (January/February 2014): 41.

27. Brian Stewart, "On the Front Lines," *Christianity.ca*. Address at Knox College (Galesburg, IL), May 12, 2004. https://www.christianity.ca/page.aspx?pid=11235.

28. Guenter Lewy, *Why America Needs Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 137.

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Part VI

NATURALISM, FREEDOM, AND IMMORTALITY

Chapter 13

Theism, Robust Naturalism, and Robust Libertarian Free Will

J. P. Moreland

INTRODUCTION

It is evident to most analytic philosophers who are philosophical naturalists that their ontological framework rules out, or at least, makes highly implausible, the reality of libertarian freewill and agency. As Kevin Timpe and Jonathan D. Jacobs correctly observe: "There is . . . a near consensus on this: naturalism is certainly incompatible with *libertarian* free will."[1] Thus, Roderick Chisholm claimed that "in one very strict sense of the terms, there can be no science of man."[2] Along similar lines, John Searle says that "our conception of physical reality simply does not allow for radical [libertarian] freedom."[3] And though a bit dated, in what still may be the best naturalist attempt to reconcile naturalism and the sort of freedom (he opts for compatibilism) necessary for moral responsibility, John Bishop frankly admits that "the idea of a responsible agent, with the 'originative' ability to initiate events in the natural world, does not sit easily with the idea of [an agent as] a natural organism. . . . Our scientific understanding of human behavior seems to be in tension with a presupposition of the ethical stance we adopt toward it."[4]

Nevertheless, some demur and believe there are versions of naturalism and libertarianism that are consistent. To cite one example, Timpe and Jacobs state: "We aim to show in this paper that libertarian free will is not incompatible with naturalism."[5] And those who agree with the inconsistency of the two often fail to spell out in any detail as to why they think as they do. Accordingly, my purpose in this chapter is to show that robust naturalism renders robust libertarianism virtually impossible, but the latter fits and is at home in a theistic worldview. Obviously, I will have to spell out "robust naturalism," "robust libertarianism, "fits," and "is at home in."

To accomplish my purpose, I shall do the following: (1) discuss crucial background issues relevant to the epistemic status of my argument; (2) sketch out a metaphysical framework required to understand what follows; (3) clarify robust naturalism and argue that it *should be* the version of naturalism in which we are interested when it comes to questions about the fittingness of one or another form of free will with naturalism; (4) clarify robust libertarianism and argue that it *should* be the version of free will in which we are interested when it comes to questions about free will's plausibility with naturalism, and show why robust libertarianism is highly implausible on robust naturalism, but not on theism.

IMPORTANT EPISTEMIC BACKGROUND ISSUES

Two Issues in Scientific Theory Acceptance

Basicality

While theism and naturalism are broad worldviews and not scientific theories, three issues that inform the adjudication between rival scientific theories are relevant to our topic. The first issue involves deciding whether it is appropriate to take some phenomenon as *basic* such that only a description and not an explanation for it is required, or whether that phenomenon should be understood as something to be explained in terms of *more basic* phenomena. For example, attempts to explain uniform inertial motion are disallowed in Newtonian mechanics because such motion is basic on this view, but an Aristotelian had to explain how or why a particular body exhibited uniform inertial motion. Thus, what is basic to one theory may be derivative in another.

Naturalness

Issue two is the *naturalness* of a postulated entity in light of the overall theory of which it is a part. The types of entities postulated, along with the sorts of properties/powers they possess and the relations they enter should be "at home"—there should be a fittingness—with other entities in the theory. Some entity (particular thing, process, categorical or dispositional property, or relation) e is natural for a theory T just in case either e is a central, core entity of T or e bears a relevant similarity to central, core entities in e's category within T. If e is in a category such as individual, force, property, event, relation, or cause, e should bear a relevant similarity to central, core entities of T in that category. This is a formal definition and the material content given to it will depend on the theory in question.

Moreover, given rivals R and S, the postulation of e in R is ad hoc and *question-begging* against advocates of S if e bears a relevant similarity to the appropriate entities in S, and in this sense, is "at home in S, but fails to bear this relevant similarity to the appropriate entities in R."[6] The notion of "being ad hoc" is notoriously difficult to specify precisely. It is usually characterized as an intellectually inappropriate adjustment of a theory whose sole epistemic justification is to save the theory from falsification. Such an adjustment involves adding a new supposition to a theory not already implied by its other features. In the context of evaluating rivals, R and S, the principle just mentioned provides a sufficient condition for the postulation of e to be ad hoc and question-begging.

The issue of naturalness is relevant to theory assessment between rivals in that it provides a criterion for advocates of a theory to claim that their rivals have begged the question against them or adjusted their theory in an inappropriate, ad hoc way. And though this need not be the case, naturalness can be related to basicality in this way: Naturalness can provide a means of deciding the relative merits of accepting theory R, which depicts phenomenon e as basic, versus embracing S, which takes e to be explainable in more basic terms. If e is natural in S but not in R, it will be difficult for advocates of R to justify the bald assertion that e is basic in R and that all proponents of R need to do is describe e and correlate it with other phenomena in R as opposed to explaining e. Such a claim by advocates of R will be even more problematic if S provides an explanation for e.[7]

While I will discuss this in more detail later, now is an appropriate place to apply, albeit briefly, what I have presented to the topic of naturalism and libertarian freedom. In their attempt to show the compatibility between their account of libertarianism and naturalism, Timpe and Jacobs claim that "in general, evaluation of metaphysical theories does not work piecemeal; it proceeds by consideration of the intuitive force and theoretical power of the more systematic, general metaphysical view in which a particular theory is embedded."[8] Later, I will provide reasons for rejecting, or at least nuancing, this claim, especially when it is applied to mental properties and states. But for now, I grant it and want to draw out an implication of the last part of their assertion, namely, "theoretical power of the more systematic, general metaphysical view in which a particular theory is embedded."

I take it that the dispositional property "being active power" and an exercise of active power are irreducibly conscious entities. As Thomas Nagel has recently reminded us, topics in the philosophy of mind—and action theory—are not local ones; they invade our understanding of the entire cosmos and its history. If irreducible consciousness, libertarian agency and reason exist, we simply must ask what sort of reality could and did give rise to them. Thus, one must keep an eye on worldview implications of a position on a topic in

philosophy of mind.[9] I think the same point applies to the actual and dispositional properties and powers that constitute libertarian free will. And while Timpe and Jacobs primarily apply their claim to the development of a naturalist-friendly account of libertarianism, it may and, indeed, must be applied to the nature of naturalism as a worldview and the comportment of libertarian free will within that broader view—the level of worldview—within which a particular theory (one regarding the nature of free will) is embedded.

In my view, this means that any account of free will, especially a naturalistically contentious one like libertarian theories, must be evaluated by their comportment with the broader worldviews within which they are claimed to be embedded. And such an evaluation is not done properly without taking into account whether or not a rival worldview—in this case, theism—(1) does a better job of providing a "more systematic, general metaphysical view" than naturalism and (2) provides grounds for taking harmonization attempts regarding naturalism and libertarianism as question-begging and inappropriately ad hoc.

According to classic Western theism, God is the basic entity and He is a substance with active power which, when exercised, is done for the sake of a teleological goal or reason. Thus, the powers and properties constituting God's libertarian freedom are basic. As I will develop in more detail later, it should be clear that the appearance of libertarian agents and free will is natural in this theistic view but quite odd, unnatural, and not basic in a naturalist worldview.[10] Thus, again, it may very well be ad hoc and question-begging for someone to claim that a view of libertarian free will is "at home," consistent with," or "not ruled out by" naturalism. And if such a view is, in fact, developed, it may either be so minimalist that it either leaves out important features of a libertarian account and, thus, may need to prove its libertarian credentials, or so irrelevant to plausible versions of libertarianism that match our experiences of agency, that its "consistency" with naturalism may involve a view that can be safely ignored.

The Nature of the Theistic Argument from Libertarian Free Will

Natural-Scientific Explanation versus Personal Explanation

Personal explanation differs from event-causal covering law explanations employed almost universally in natural science. Associated with *event* causation is a covering law model of explanation according to which some event (the *explanandum*) is explained by giving a correct deductive or inductive argument for that event. Such an argument contains two features in its *explanans*: a (universal or statistical) law of nature *and* initial causal conditions. Sometimes a covering law explanation is underwritten by some sort of realist model of the entities involved in the event-causal processes in view.

By contrast, a *personal* explanation (divine or otherwise) of some state of affairs brought about intentionally by a person will employ notions such as the intention of the agent and the relevant causal power of the agent that was exercised in causing the state of affairs. In general, a personal explanation of some basic result R brought about intentionally by person P, where this bringing about of R is a basic action A, will cite the intention I of P that R occur and the basic power B that P exercised to bring about R. P, I, and B provide a personal explanation of R: agent P brought about R by exercising power B in order to realize intention I as an irreducibly teleological goal.

Two Forms of the Argument

The argument for God's existence from the reality of robust libertarian freedom seeks to show that, given robust freedom, a theistic versus a natural-scientific explanation is epistemically and explanatorily superior. The argument itself is best expressed in one of two forms: an inference to the best explanation (IBE) or a Bayesian argument.

An IBE begins with certain data to be explained (e.g., the metaphysical entities constitutive of robust libertarianism), assembles a pool of live options that explain the data, and usually on the basis of certain criteria—for example, explanatory power by making the data more epistemically likely than rivals, naturalness, being less ad hoc—one option is chosen as the best explanation of the data. Applied to our case, the claim is made that, on a theistic metaphysic, one already has an instance of an unembodied mind in God which exercises robust libertarian freedom. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that embodied or unembodied finite libertarian agents should exist in the world. But on a naturalist view, mental entities are so strange and out of place that their existence (or regular correlation with physical entities) defies adequate explanation. There appear to be two realms operating in causal harmony and theism provides the best explanation of this fact. Moreover, it would seem that all entities besides certain conscious agents possess only passive liabilities whereas libertarian agents possess active power. It is hard to see how the combinatorial processes that constitute the naturalist creation account (see below) could give rise to emergent mental properties, especially emergent active volitional powers.

The argument may also be construed in Bayesian terms along the following lines.

To see this, recall that:

$$\frac{P(h/e\&k)}{P(\neg h/e\&k)} = \frac{P(h)}{P(\neg h)} \times \frac{P(e/h\&k)}{P(e/\neg h\&k)}$$

Where e is the existence of the metaphysical entities constitutive of robust libertarian free will, ¬h = naturalism (technically, it is the negation of theism, but we can assume that theism and naturalism are the only live options for present purposes), and k = background knowledge. The first ratio is the prior probability of naturalism, given robust libertarianism and background knowledge divided by the prior probability of theism, given robust libertarianism and background knowledge. These probabilities are hard to assign objectively, but surely the numerator is not ten times higher than the denominator. Given that these two probabilities are in the same ballpark, the really important ratio for the Bayesian argument is the second one: the "fittingness" (naturalness) of robust libertarianism, given naturalism, divided by the "fittingness" of robust libertarianism, given theism. The advocate of this form of the argument will claim that robust libertarianism is natural and "fits" in a theistic worldview, but not in a naturalistic one due to two problems: (1) a proper understanding of scientific naturalism, the view held by the vast majority of scientific naturalists, and one (I hope to show) that a scientific naturalist *should* adopt; (2) genuinely emergent properties are, in principle, unpredictable and, thus, there is no reason to think that they would exist, given naturalism.

METAPHYSICAL LEXICON FOR WHAT FOLLOWS

Before we can fruitfully discuss the nature of a robust libertarian account of free will, it will be useful to get before us a relevant lexicon:

Part and Wholes

Part/whole relations are important for treatments of substances, and there are two kinds of parts relevant to our discussion—separable and inseparable.

p is a *separable part* of some whole W $=_{\text{def.}}$ p is a particular, p is a part of W, and p can exist if it is not a part of W.
p is an *inseparable part* of some whole W $=_{\text{def.}}$ p is a particular, p is a part of W, and p cannot exist if it is not a part of W.

In contemporary philosophy, inseparable parts were most fruitfully analyzed in the writings of Brentano, Husserl, and their followers.[11] The paradigm case of an inseparable part in this tradition is a (monadic) property-instance or relation-instance. Thus, if substance s has property P, the-having-of-P-by-s is (1) a property-instance of P and (2) an inseparable part of s which we may also call a mode of s. Assuming for the sake of argument that a lump of clay is a substance (most likely, it is a mereological aggregate, not a substance;

see below) and that it has a spherical shape, then the lump is a substance, the property of being spherical is a universal attribute, and the-having-of-sphericity-by-the-clay is a mode (inseparable part) of the clay and a property-instance of sphericity.

Setting aside properties, there are two ways something can be simple in the sense relevant to what follows: by being uncomposed of separable parts or by being metaphysically indivisible. I use "metaphysically indivisible" to mean what many philosophers say by "indivisible in thought." Something could be metaphysically divisible but not physically divisible (if, say, such division annihilated the whole), but not conversely. Moreover, all particulars that are metaphysically indivisible are uncomposed, but not conversely (an extended whole with no separable parts could still be divided). According to our usage, a substance with inseparable parts is simple.

Relations

For our purposes, two kinds of relations are relevant: internal and external. If something, A (say the color yellow) stands in an internal relation (brighter than) to B (say the color purple), then anything that did not stand in that relation to B could not be A. So if any color was not brighter than purple, it could not be the color yellow. If a thing X stands in an internal relation to another thing Y, then part of what makes X the very thing it is, is that it stands in that relation to Y. By contrast, external (e.g., spatial) relations are those that are not internal. If A stands in an external relation to B, then A can cease to stand in that relation to B and still exist and be self-identical.

Substances and Mereological Aggregates

A *substance* $=_{\text{def.}}$ an essentially characterized particular that (1) has (and is the principle of unity for its) properties but is not had by or predicable of something more basic than it; (2) is an enduring continuant; (3) has inseparable parts but is not composed of separable parts; (4) is complete in species.

Regarding condition (4), a thing's species (i.e., essence) answers the most basic question "What kind of thing is this?" where by "most basic" I mean (i) an answer to this question is presupposed by an answer to any less basic question of this form (for Socrates, being human is presupposed by the answer "being white" to the less basic question "What kind of thing is Socrates?"); (ii) an answer to this question is true of the object in every possible world in which it exists. A hand is not complete in species because "being a hand" does not adequately capture the sort of thing it is. Rather, being a human hand or a gorilla's hand is required. But being human is complete in species.

A *physical substance* is $=_{\text{def.}}$ (1) a substance; (2) spatially located, extended, can possibly move, and in its entirety cannot be located in more than one

place at once;[12] (3) metaphysically divisible; (4) essentially characterized by the actual and potential properties of an ideal chemistry and physics. In my view, atomic simples (if there are such) are the only physical substances in the strict philosophical sense. All other candidates for physical substances are such in a loose and popular sense and, strictly speaking, are mereological aggregates.

I prefer to analyze substances, including material ones, within a framework of properties, natural-kind essences and individuators (bare particulars or haecceities) and not within an ontology of separable parts or stuff. The difference between a substance and stuff is typically illustrated by two ways of interpreting "Mary had a little lamb." If "Mary" is used as a count noun, it refers to an individual substance—a particular sheep—of which the question "where is it?" makes sense. If "Mary" is used as a mass term, it refers to an amount of stuff—a few ounces, for example—of which the question "how much did she have?" makes sense. Stuff, in turn, can be construed as atomless gunk or ontological goo. Setting aside issues of temporal parts, atomless gunk is construed in particulate terms as follows: x is composed of atomless gunk $=_{\text{def.}}$ x is a particular and all of x's separable parts have proper separable parts. Ontological goo is construed in non-particulate terms as follows: x is composed of ontological goo $=_{\text{def.}}$ x is a particular, x is spatially continuous and non-gappy, and x contains an undifferentiated ontological blob. It has been said, not unfairly, that extreme and moderate nominalist ontologies are goo/blob ontologies.[13]

A *mereological aggregate* (aka *system*) is $=_{\text{def.}}$ (1) a particular whole; (2) such that it is constituted by at least substantial separable parts and external relation-instances between and among those substantial separable parts (there are differences among philosophers as to whether such aggregates have additional constituents, for example, boundaries).[14]

What about the diachronic identity of the human person?[15] Are we continuants that remain literally the same through accidental change, especially through change in body parts? We have pretty deep intuitions that we are literal continuants. In my view, this is a properly basic belief grounded in self-awareness. For example, the simple act of attending to oneself humming through a tune is such that the literal continuity of the self is made evident, and it is the self that unifies each aspect of humming the tune into the experience of one, single subject.

Now nearly everyone these days wants to avoid mereological essentialism, roughly, the view that the separable parts of a whole are essential to that whole such that it could not have had different parts and still existed. Most versions of substance dualism provide a fairly straightforward way of grounding human persons as substantial continuants while avoiding mereological problems regarding an organism's body, in this case, the human body: we

are simple, immaterial wholes, and not mereological aggregates, our "persistence" conditions are different from those of our bodies, and the fact—if it is a fact—that mereological essentialism applies to our bodies does not affect us.

Why is mereological essentialism a problem for virtually all versions of physicalism besides those who identify us with an atomic simple? Because, at the end of the day, these versions of physicalism identify us as mereological aggregates, and mereological essentialism cannot be avoided for such wholes.

Why think that mereological essentialism characterizes mereological aggregates? Because a proper metaphysical analysis of such wholes does not provide an entity adequate to ground their literal identity through part alteration. To see this, suppose we have some mereological aggregate W, say a car, in the actual world w at some time t, and let "the ps" refer distributively to all and only the atomic simples (assuming such) that make up W. Now, given that the ps just are a specific list of simples taken distributively without regard to structure, it would seem obvious that if we have a different list of simples, the qs, it is not identical to the ps even if the two lists share all but one part in common. This same insight would be true if we took "the ps" and "the qs" collectively as referring to some sort of mereological sum. In either case, there is no entity "over and above" the parts that could serve as a ground of sameness through part alteration.

Now, W has different "persistence" conditions than, and, thus, is not identical to the ps. W could be destroyed and the ps (taken in either sense) could exist. Let S stand for all and only the various relations that stand between and among the ps. S is W's structure. Is W identical to S and the ps? I don't think so. W has its own structure, say, in comparison to some other whole W* that is exactly similar in structure to W. W and W* have their own structures. Given that S is a universal, it is not sufficient for individuating W's specific structure. For that we need SI, W's structure-instance, W's token of S, and SI will consist of all and only the specific relation-instances that are instantiated between and among the ps. Let "the rs" stand for all and only the relevant relation-instances that compose SI.

I think it is now obvious that SI is a mereological aggregate composed of the rs. If the rs undergo a change of relation-instances, it is no longer the same list of relation-instances. Given that SI just is a mereological aggregate or, perhaps, a specific ordering of the rs, if the rs undergo a change of relation-instances, SI will cease to exist and a different structure (perhaps exactly similar to SI) will obtain since there is no entity to serve as a ground for SI's sameness through part replacement. If W is the ps plus SI, it seems to follow that W is subject to mereological-essentialist constraints. Adding a surface/boundary to W won't help avoid these constraints.

Consider a lump of clay and an associated statue, and grant that the former constitutes the latter. Given that the lump is a mereological aggregate, it is subject to mereological-essentialist constraints as argued above. Can the statue retain absolute Leibnizian identity through part replacement? It is very hard to see how. After all, it is a mereological aggregate, too, and there is no entity in the statue that can serve as a ground of such identity. If someone disagrees with this judgment, he/she is invited to provide an account of exactly what that entity is and how it is able to function as a sufficient ground for Leibnizian identity. It is more likely that our concept of a statue leads us to take the statue as the same through part replacement in the loose, popular sense for certain purposes. And the same seems to be true on physicalist renditions of human persons whether or not they have emergent properties.

Supervenience

There are three different kinds of properties that constitute three different types of supervenience. The first is a functional property: F is a functional property $=_{def.}$ F is a functional concept that is constituted by role R. F supervenes on some entity e if and only if e plays (realizes) role R. As the definition shows, and as Jaegwon Kim has argued persuasively, there are no functional properties that characterize things in the mind independent world, given a naturalist worldview.[16] Rather, functional "properties" are functional concepts, ways of describing or taking something for certain purposes.

To understand the other two kinds of properties, it will be helpful to clarify the difference between emergent and structural properties and supervenience. An emergent property is a completely unique, new kind of property different from those that characterize its subvenient base. Accordingly, emergent supervenience is the view that the supervenient property is a mereologically simple, intrinsically characterizeable, novel property different from and not composed of the parts, properties, relations, and events at the subvenient level. We may clarify the sense in which emergent properties are novel as follows:

> Property P is a novel emergent property of some particular x at level l_n just in case P is an emergent property, x exemplifies P, and there are no determinates P' of the same determinable D as P such that some particular at levels lower than n exemplifies P or P'.

By contrast, a structural property is one that is constituted by the parts, properties, relations, and events at the subvenient level. A structural property is identical to a configurational pattern among the subvenient entities. It is not a new kind of property; it is a new pattern, a new configuration of subvenient entities. And many philosophers would characterize emergent and structural

supervenience as causal and constitutive, respectively. Since I am contrasting emergent and structural supervenient properties, I will use the notion of an emergent property as a simple, novel, sui generis property.

In addition, a few words need to be said about the nature and modal force of supervenience relevant to our topic. Since the literature focuses on property supervenience, I shall follow suit and set aside global supervenience. Also, I shall employ "supervenience" to express strong property supervenience with a modal force of either metaphysical or nomological necessity.

CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC NATURALISTS SHOULD BE ROBUST NATURALISTS

At this point, since there is a variety of versions of naturalism and libertarianism,[17] it may be wise to look briefly at the nature of naturalism as a worldview to gain further insight into why the ontology of robust naturalism and libertarianism are the preferred views, and why the latter is not at all plausible, given the former. Scientific naturalism usually includes

1. different aspects of a naturalist epistemic attitude (e.g., a rejection of so-called "first philosophy" along with an acceptance of either weak or strong scientism);
2. a Grand Story which amounts to an etiological account of how all entities whatsoever have come to be, told in terms of an event causal story described in natural-scientific terms with a central role given to the atomic theory of matter and evolutionary biology;
3. a general ontology in which the only entities allowed are those that either (a) bear a relevant similarity to those thought to characterize a completed form of physics (robust naturalism or strong physicalism) or (b) are dependent on and determined by the entities of physics and can be explained according to the causal necessitation requirement (given a "suitable" arrangement of matter, the emergent entity *must* arise) in terms of the Grand Story and the naturalist epistemic attitude (weak naturalism or physicalism.)

The Naturalist Epistemic Attitude

For most naturalists, the ordering of these three ingredients is important. The naturalist epistemic attitude serves as justification for the naturalist etiology, which, in turn, helps to justify the naturalist's ontological commitment. Moreover, naturalism seems to require coherence among the postulates of these three different areas of the naturalistic turn. David Papineau claims that

we should set philosophy within science in that philosophical investigation should be conducted within the framework of our best empirical theories. It follows that "the task of the philosophers is to bring coherence and order to the set of assumptions we use to explain the empirical world."[18]

For example, there should be coherence among third-person scientific ways of knowing; a physical, evolutionary account of how our sensory and cognitive processes came to be; and an ontological analysis of those processes themselves. Any entities that are taken to exist should bear a relevant similarity to entities that characterize our best physical theories; their coming-to-be should be intelligible in light of the naturalist causal story; and they should be knowable by scientific means. Put differently, any candidate entity must be locatable in the Grand Story and, in turn, known by way of the naturalist epistemic attitude.

This ordering of these widely accepted features of naturalism put naturalists on something akin to the horns of a dilemma: (1) Embrace a robust ontology with the hope of retaining superior epistemic warrant/explanatory power by adhering to the ordering listed above, and embark on the difficult and highly counterintuitive task of reducing or eliminating entities that are recalcitrant in order to locate them in the Grand Story, or (2) Embrace a weak naturalist ontology, leave certain commonsense entities as they are, but lose the claim of superior epistemic warrant/explanatory power by bloating the naturalist ontology such that entities cannot be located in accordance with the accepted epistemology.[19]

Daniel Stoljar rightly calls lemma one "the Standard Picture" of what philosophy is supposed to be about. And he points out that those who do not accept the idea that robust naturalism (my words) virtually requires acceptance of strict physicalism are not making a conceptual mistake—for example, some minimalist version of libertarianism may well be conceptually consistent with weak naturalism—rather, they are flying in the face of a thesis (warranted by science) we have overwhelming reason to believe.[20]

Scientism constitutes the core of the naturalist epistemology.[21] Long ago, Wilfrid Sellars said that "in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not."[22] Contemporary naturalists embrace either weak or strong scientism. According to the former, nonscientific fields are not worthless nor do they offer no intellectual results, but they are vastly inferior to science in their epistemic standing and do not merit full credence. According to the latter, unqualified cognitive value resides in science and in nothing else. Either way, naturalists are extremely skeptical of any claims about reality that are not justified by scientific methodology in the hard sciences.

Moreover, that methodology is a third-person one that sanctions only entities capable of exhaustive description from a third-person perspective.

Skepticism prevails for entities that require the first-person perspective as their basic mode of epistemic access. For such naturalists, the exhaustive or elevated nature of scientific knowledge entails that either the only explanations that count or the ones with superior, unqualified acceptance are those employed in the hard sciences.[23]

At least two philosophical theses elaborate the naturalistic epistemic and methodological constraints for philosophy. First, there is no such thing as first philosophy (a subject matter with respect to which philosophy is autonomous from and authoritative in comparison to science); rather, there is continuity between philosophy and natural science. Second, scientific theories that are paradigm cases of epistemic/explanatory success, for example, the atomic theory of matter and evolutionary biology, employ combinatorial modes of explanation. Thus, any process that constitutes the Grand Story and the coming-to-be and nature of any entity in the naturalist ontology should exhibit an ontological structure analyzable in terms that are isomorphic with such modes of explanation. Colin McGinn has defended this idea along with what he takes it to entail, namely, the inability of naturalism to explain genuinely unique emergent properties:

> Can we gain any deeper insight into what makes the problem of consciousness run against the grain of our thinking? Are our modes of theorizing about the world of the wrong shape to extend to the nature of mind? I think we can discern a characteristic structure possessed by successful scientific theories, a structure that is unsuitable for explaining consciousness. . . . Perhaps the most basic aspect of thought is the operation of *combination*. This is the way in which we think of complex entities as resulting from the arrangement of simpler parts. There are three aspects to this basic idea: the atoms we start with, the laws we use to combine them, and the resulting complexes . . . I think it is clear that this mode of understanding is central . . . [and] our scientific faculty involves representing the world in this combinatorial style.[24]

In sum, the naturalist epistemic attitude countenances and countenances only (1) the hard sciences along with mathematical empiricism as the paradigm of knowledge, (2) a certification of third-person ways of knowing while eschewing the first-person, (3) an employment of combinatorial modes of explanation for the nature, coming-to-be and perishing of all macro-wholes above the basic level of micro-physical particles (waves, wavicles, strings, or whatever; hereafter, simply "particles"), and (4) a rejection of first philosophy. Given that an exercise of active power is a non-relational, intrinsically characterizeable mental event, and the property of being active power in a simple quality and not a structural property composed of separable parts, it would seem that these entities at the heart of libertarian free will are ruled out by the naturalist epistemic attitude and the Grand Story it certifies.

The Grand Story

The naturalist has an account of how all things whatever came to be. Let us call this account the Grand Story. The details of the Grand Story need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that some version of the Big Bang is the most reasonable view currently available. On this view, all of reality—space, time, and matter—came from the original "creation" event and the various galaxies, stars, and other heavenly bodies eventually developed as the expanding universe went through various stages. On at least one of those heavenly bodies—Earth—some sort of prebiotic soup scenario explains how living things came into being from nonliving chemicals. And the processes of evolution, understood in either neo-Darwinian or punctuated equilibrium terms, gave rise to all the life-forms we see, including human beings. Thus, all organisms and their parts exist and are what they are because they contributed to (or at least did not hinder) the struggle for reproductive advantage, more specifically, because they contributed to the tasks of feeding, fighting, fleeing, and reproducing.

There are four important things to note about the Grand Story. First, in keeping with the naturalist epistemic attitude, at the core of the Grand Story are two theories that countenance only combinatorial modes of explanation: the atomic theory of matter and evolutionary theory. Any appeal to the existence of emergent properties violates this ontological constraint.

Second, it is an expression of a scientistic version of philosophical monism according to which everything that exists or happens in the world is (in principle) susceptible to explanations by natural-scientific methods in the hard sciences. Whatever exists or happens in the world is natural in this sense. Prima facie, the most consistent way to understand naturalism in this regard is to see it as entailing some version of strong physicalism: everything that exists is fundamentally matter, most likely, elementary "particles" (whether taken as points of potentiality, centers of mass/energy, units of spatially extended stuff/waves or reduced to/eliminated in favor of fields), organized in various ways according to the laws of nature.[25] By keeping track of these particles and their physical traits we are keeping track of everything that exists. No nonphysical entities exist, including emergent ones. This constitutes a strong sense of physicalism and robust naturalism. When naturalists venture away from strong physicalism, however, they still argue that additions to a strong physicalist ontology must be depicted as rooted in, emergent from, dependent upon the physical states and events of the Grand Story. This is weak physicalism and no longer robust naturalism. Later, I will say more about why emergent properties should not be allowed in a naturalist ontology.

Third, because of the importance of laws in science and the importance of combinatorial processes in causation, the Grand Story is constituted by

event causality and eschews both irreducible teleology and agent causation in which the first relatum of the causal relation is in the category of substance and not event. And the Grand Story is deterministic in two senses: diachronically, such that the state of the universe at any time t coupled with the laws of nature determine or fix the chances for the state of the universe at subsequent times; synchronically, such that the features of and changes regarding macro-wholes are dependent on and determined by micro-physical phenomena.

The Naturalist Ontology

For present purposes, it is important to say a bit more about criteria for naturalist ontological commitments. A good place to start is with what Frank Jackson calls the location problem.[26] According to Jackson, on the basis of the superiority of scientific ways of knowing exemplified by the hard sciences, naturalists are committed to a fairly widely accepted physical story about how things came to be (the Grand Story) and what they are.[27] Given these commitments, the location problem is the task of locating or finding a place for some entity (e.g., semantic contents, mind, agency) in that story.

For Jackson, the naturalist must either locate a problematic entity in the basic story or eliminate the entity. Roughly, an entity is located in the basic story just in case it is entailed by that story. Otherwise, the entity must be eliminated. Jackson correctly notes that a naturalist ought to adopt serious metaphysics: his or her ontology should start with the smallest number of different sorts of entities—those we find in our best theories in physics—and incorporate those entities that can be explained by the Grand Story's combinatorial processes, namely, mereological aggregates for individuals and structural properties for attributes.

It is hard to see how the ontology generated by the combinatorial processes at the heart of scientific explanation, for example, as seen in the atomic theory of matter and evolutionary biology, could countenance simple emergent properties or substances. In my view, "emergence" is just name for the problem to be solved (how could simple emergent properties and substances emerge if you start with particles as depicted by physics and just rearrange them over time?). Among other things, this means that without some pretty serious, wildly ad hoc adjustments, the sort of unity possessed by consciousness (and, perhaps, its ground) cannot be located or otherwise explained, given robust or strong naturalism. Jackson grasps the connection between accepting the epistemic superiority of naturalism and deciding between weak and robust naturalism. For Jackson, if naturalism is to have superior explanatory power, this entails strong/robust naturalism.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the robust naturalist ontology is the mereological hierarchy. Let us construe this hierarchy in terms of individual entities and properties rather than in terms of concepts or linguistic descriptions. So understood, the standard mereological hierarchy consists in an ascending level of entities in the category of individual such that for each level above the ground level of elementary micro-physics (at which entities have no further physically significant separable parts), wholes at that level are composed of the separable parts at lower levels standing in external relations to each other. Thus, from bottom to top we get micro-physical entities (strings, waves, particles, fields), subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, cells, living organisms, and so on. The relationship between individuals at level n and n+1 is the separable part/whole relation. In the category of property, structurally supervenient properties—those that are merely a new relational combination of the parts and properties at the subvenient level—such as being H_2O, fit naturally into the naturalist combinatorial depiction of how all things have developed since the Big Bang.

ROBUST LIBERTARIAN FREE WILL AND THE IMPLAUSIBILITY OF ITS HARMONIZATION WITH ROBUST NATURALISM

Shortly, I shall unpack the formal elements of a libertarian view of free will that I take to be true and most obvious.[28] Most philosophers and those working in the hard sciences are agreed that robust libertarian freedom is highly implausible and, indeed, broadly logically inconsistent with the generally accepted depiction of naturalism presented in the previous section.

And most philosophers working in the subdiscipline regarding action theory and agency approach questions of free will by focusing on the sort of control needed to underlie moral responsibility. I agree this is important, but I do not think that this is the conceptual or epistemic starting point for developing a view of agency, especially a libertarian one. The control approach leaves open the question as to why people have a concept of moral responsibility and a belief that they are morally responsible agents in the first place. And the control approach can, and sometimes does, limit free action to moral acts, especially momentous ones. But this is a mistake. The primary places we exercise free agency are in directing our attentive noticings toward various intentional objects and in moving our bodies. As I go through my day, I freely choose to think, see, and notice various things within or around me.

How do I know I have free agency? In my view, it is through knowledge by acquaintance with my own states of consciousness—especially volitional acts—from within the first-person point of view. It is through such

knowledge that people become aware and accept (or should accept unless they have an ideology that disallows) their possession and exercise of active power. An exercise of active power has what many philosophers call an "actish phenomenal quality" that is distinct from the experience of a passive liability being triggered and it is available to direct awareness.[29]

Consider this thought experiment. Most of us are quite aware of the different what-it-is-like, the different phenomenological texture in having a passive thought (e.g., when someone is talking to me) and an active thought (one to which I exercise my active power and choose to attend). This difference is self-evident to introspective awareness. And such awarenesses provide non-doxastic, internalist grounds for the proper basicality of one's belief that one has and can exercise active power. On this basis, I think that active power is epistemically, conceptually, and ontologically foundational and essential for there to be such things as knowledge of, a concept of, and the existence of libertarian acts. And it is on the basis of this account, and knowledge of relevant moral features that we have the concept of moral responsibility.

With this in mind, stated formally, a person P exercises libertarian agency and freely does some intentional act e just in case (1) P is a substance that has the active power to bring about e; (2) the substantial person P exerted his/her active power (or refrained from exerting such power) as a first, unmoved mover (an "originator") to bring about e; (3) P had the categorical ability to exert or refrain from exerting his/her power to bring about e; (4) P acted for the sake of reasons which serve as the final cause or teleological goal for which P acted. Taken alone, 1–3 state necessary and sufficient conditions for a pure voluntary act, for example, freely directing my eyes toward a specific desk upon entering a room. Propositions 1–4 state necessary and sufficient conditions for an intentional act, that is, a voluntary act done for a reason (e.g., raising my hand to vote).

There are at least six features of a libertarian intentional free act as just characterized that make it difficult and, indeed, virtually impossible to reconcile with robust naturalism. First, the free agent is a substance. But for two reasons, ordinary objects are not substances in a naturalist ontology; rather they are bundles of events (synchronically) and space-time worms (diachronically), or mereological aggregates.

The importance of a substantial agent for libertarian agency is true for at least three reasons: (1) Libertarian agency is possible only if there is a distinction between the capacity to act or refrain from acting and the agent that possesses and exercises those capacities. (2) The synchronic type of unity present among the various capacities possessed by an agent is the type of unity (i.e., a diversity of capacities within an ontologically prior whole) that is entailed by the classic notion of substance;[30] (3) Nonbasic free acts take time and include sub-acts as parts, and an enduring agent is what gives unity to such acts by

being the same self who is present at the beginning of the action as intentional agent, during the act as teleological guider of means to ends, and at the end as responsible actor.

But this is not countenanced by robust naturalism. Thus, naturalist John Bishop frankly admits, "The problem of natural agency is an ontological problem—a problem about whether the existence of actions can be admitted within a natural scientific perspective. . . . [A]gent causal-relations do not belong to the ontology of the natural perspective. Naturalism does not essentially employ the concept of a causal relation whose first member is in the category of person or agent (or even, for that matter, in the broader category of continuant or `substance'). All natural causal relations have first members in the category of event or state of affairs."[31]

Focusing on substance and substance causation of ordinary macro-objects such as persons, there are two reasons substance causation is not an option for robust naturalism. (1) With the exception of atomic simples (if there are such), all wholes in the category of individual in the mereological hierarchy are mereological aggregates, for example, a rock or table, and not genuine substances. There can be no substance causation above atomic simples because there are no substances. And mereological aggregates are not continuants in the way required by responsible agency.

As we have already noted, mereological aggregates are very different from genuine Aristotelian substances. Jonathan Schaffer characterizes the difference in terms of grounding (ontological dependency or priority):

> The notion of grounding may be put to further use to capture a crucial mereological distinction (missing from classical mereology) between an integrated whole which exhibits a genuine unity, and a mere aggregate which is a random assemblage of parts. Thus, Aristotle speaks of "that which is compounded out of something so that the whole is one—not like a heap, however, but like a syllable, . . ." (1984: 1644; Meta.1041b11–2). This intuitive distinction may be defined via:
>
> Integrated whole [*substance*]: x is an integrated whole =df x grounds each of its proper parts.
>
> Mere aggregate [*mereological aggregate*]: x is a mere aggregate =df each of x's proper parts ground x.[32]

Timpe and Jacobs claim that free will is an emergent systems-level feature.[33] But it is widely acknowledged that in the strict, philosophical sense, if systems are genuine objects, systems are mereological aggregates. If they are not genuine objects, then they may be given an eliminativist treatment such that a "system" is identical to the ps (the relevant collection of atomic simples) arranged system-wise. Either way, they are not substances.

(2) The particulars that populate the robust naturalist ontology are, one and all, exhaustively characterized by passive liabilities with regard to their causal powers, and this ontology virtually requires event causation. A passive liability is such that, given the proper efficient cause, it is and, indeed, must be actualized. As such, the actualization of a passive liability is a passive happening, not an *action*. This fact about passive liabilities is what makes them, along with their causes, fitting entities for subsumption under law. It is the exploding of the dynamite that causes the breaking of the window. An ontology of aggregates/systems that undergo the triggering of passive liabilities that "bring about" the same sort of triggering in another object is why event causation and subsumption under law are embraced by robust naturalists. Substances are not involved. Events are causes and effects.

Second, there is a straightforward ontological problem with active power, given robust naturalism. Given the mereological hierarchy, all natural objects with causal powers possess them as passive liabilities. Below, I will raise problems for the reality of emergent properties. But for now, I mention two points. (1) In the category of property, the mereological hierarchy sanctions only supervenient structural properties, not emergent properties. And since emergent properties are, in principle, unpredictable and inexplicable from exhaustive knowledge of the relevant subvenient base, then there can in principle be no naturalist explanation of why emergence happens, especially why it regularly happens at this precise level of complexity. These must be taken as brute.

Moreover, active power is doubly suspect, given the hierarchy. Not only is active power an emergent property, it is active. In both ways, it differs from any other property of any other entity in the universe except persons. This is extremely hard to believe and it is ad hoc and question-begging in the sense described in earlier sections of this chapter.

(2) The naturalist epistemology is constituted by (a) some form of scientism; (b) a third-person approach to knowing; (c) combinatorial explanations. But the hard sciences are silent about the existence or nonexistence of active power. And the reality of active power cannot be grasped in the fundamental sense by any third-person approach. It is primarily known by first-person awareness, and derivatively known from the third person through verbal reports, body movements, and so forth. Without first-person knowledge of active power, there simply would be no awareness or concept of it. And there would be no concept of moral responsibility. Finally, active power is a simple property and not a structural one. Thus, combinatorial processes and explanations are inapplicable.

Third, a "first mover" is a substance that has active power. As such, it is the absolute originator if its actions. It is not just another caused cause, just one

more event in a chain of events in which earlier causes "bring about" latter effects that, in turn, bring about later effects to form one big series of passive happenings governed by natural law. No, a first mover is not subject to laws in its initiation of action. Since such an initiation is a first, spontaneous, action not caused by a prior event, it amounts to the absolute origination of initiatory movement. Such an origination comes into being instantaneously and spontaneously, and while the effect it produces (e.g., the earliest stages in the raising of one's arm) may well be subject to natural laws, the initiating event is not since there is nothing prior to its coming-to-be on which a law may operate. Moreover, such a first mover is an unmoved mover, that is, it has the power to bring about an action without having to change first before it can so act. An exercise of active power is the action of a substantial agent acting as an unmoved mover, and this is what provides the metaphysical ground for two-way ability and the sort of control necessary for libertarian free acts.

Fourth, there are serious difficulties with the idea that there are such things as emergent properties (as opposed to supervenient structural properties). Mental properties are considered the paradigm case of such properties. But substance dualists will argue that the presence of sui generis conscious properties do not indicate that they are emergent; rather, it indicates the presence of a new substance that possesses these properties, namely, a soul or self. As I have shown elsewhere, these two views—the emergent property and the new substance view—are empirically equivalent and neuroscience is irrelevant as to which view is true.[34]

I have already pointed out that emergent properties do not fit into a robust naturalist epistemology, Grand Story or ontology; so I shall not repeat my reasoning here. Instead, there are other problems with the idea of emergent properties that I want to mention.

For one thing, an appeal to emergent properties has always seemed suspect to me: "emergence" is not a solution, but a name for the problem to be solved. It is a label and that's all. Moreover, as a label, it leaves open that the new kind of property may reside in a new substance or be due to God's regular intention that the property appear under the same set of circumstances. As Timothy O'Connor has noted, if the lawlike link between occurrent subvenient properties and their dispositional properties (i.e., the capacity to actualize the emergent property) is contingent, then the only adequate explanation for the link and the appearance of an emergent property is God's direct activity and stable intention that things be so.[35] Now it seems to many, perhaps most philosophers who do not start with a prior commitment to strong physicalism that the link is, indeed, contingent as seen in a number of well-known thought experiments.

Further, emergence seems to be a case of getting something from nothing, a case of magic without a Magician. If matter is relevantly similar to

what current physics and chemistry tell us, then matter does not have mental potentialities. And if one adopts some version of panpsychism, three problems arise. (1) In what may be the most authoritative book on panpsychism currently available, David Skrbina notes that, historically, panpsychism was always seen as a rival to and not a version of naturalism.[36] (2) And if one loads subvenient entities with mental dispositional powers to actualize the emergent property, one has difficulty explaining how the simple qualitative unity of the emergent property could result from innumerable dispositional properties (constituting the propensity to actualize the emergent property) possessed by myriads of subvenient (separable) parts. It is hard to see how, at the "right" level of complexity, and due simply to a more complex spatial arrangement of separable parts, a new kind of simple property arises. (3) As just noted, the panpsychist link between physical and mental entities is contingent; so the panpsychist or naturalist will have to take the link as a brute fact that is well explained by theism.

Fifth, sorites problems lurk in the neighborhood. Could this emergent property be instantiated with one less atomic part in the subvenient base when that base is the "right" level of complexity? Surely the answer is yes. How about two less atomic parts? And so on. *Sans* ontological vagueness, at some point, the emergentist must say that the subtraction of one small atomic part has a huge, disproportionate metaphysical effect—the inability to instantiation of the new emergent property. But how can such a significant metaphysical effect be due to such an insignificant cause?

Sixth, (4) expresses a view of reasons an irreducible, teleological goals for the sake of which a person acts. From the first-person perspective, in intentional action, we are aware of acting for the sake of ends or goals. And our motives and reasons for acting are those ends. I take it that our direct awareness of our reasons/motives being ends for the sake of which we act is the ground of the properly basic belief that reasons/motives are, in fact, teleological goals.

Now, if there is anything that naturalists agree upon, it is that there is no such thing as teleology. Matter is mechanistic, not in the sense that it only engages in action by contact and is bereft of forces, but in that it only behaves according to chains of efficient causes. As philosophers Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz noted some time ago, attempts to slap teleology onto a naturalist framework really amount to abandonment of naturalism:

> Aristotle's account [of natural function and teleology] does *not* provide a naturalistic reduction of natural function in terms of efficient causation. Nor do characterizations of natural function in terms of an irreducibly emergent purposive principle, or an unanalyzable emergent property associated with the biological phenomenon of life, provide such a reduction. Theistic and vitalistic approaches

> that try to explicate natural function in terms of the intentions of an intelligent purposive agent or principle are also nonnaturalistic. Another form of nonnaturalism attempts to explicate natural function in terms of nonnatural evaluative attributes such as intrinsic goodness. . . . We do not accept the anti-reductionist and anti-naturalistic theories about natural function listed above. Without entering into a detailed critique of these ideas, one can see that they either posit immaterial entities whose existence is in doubt, or make it utterly mysterious how it can be true that a part of an organic living thing manifests a natural function. . . . [T]he theoretical unity of biology would be better served if the natural functions of the parts of organic life-forms could be given a reductive account completely in terms of nonpurposive or nonfunctional naturalistic processes or conditions.[37]

Finally, libertarian acts involve so-called top/down causation in which a macro-object (a particular person) exercises causal influence in the microphysical world. But there can be no top/down causation, given a robust naturalist epistemology, Grand Story and ontology. Space limitations hinder me from developing this point, but I have argued for it in detail elsewhere, and my argument does not depend on a commitment to the causal closure of the physical.[38] I encourage the reader to read the piece and evaluate my arguments for himself or herself.

In sum, it may be possible to present a minimalist version of both naturalism and libertarian free will that some naturalists would accept. Timpe and Jacobs believe they have done exactly that.[39] I remain skeptical because I think that any such attempt will (1) be so minimalist about both items that it will be questionable as to whether the minimalist view is a genuine representation of naturalism and libertarianism; (2) involve advocates who help themselves to entities that a self-respecting naturalist would eschew and justify embracing those entities with mere assertions that they aren't problematic.

However, even if such a minimalist account does show that libertarian free will is "consistent with" or "not incompatible with" naturalism or that naturalism "doesn't rule out" libertarianism, I'm not sure this amounts to much worth having.[40] The proper question is not, "Can a minimalist version of naturalism and libertarianism be shown to be logically consistent?" Rather, it is "Given the most reasonable form of naturalism and theism as a rival worldview, is it more reasonable than not to believe that the existence of libertarian actions and agents are more at home in a naturalist worldview than a theistic worldview? What is the truth of the matter?"

As Timpe and Jacobs admit, there is a near consensus that naturalism is "certainly incompatible" with libertarian free will.[41] Maybe that consensus is not due to people being unfamiliar with the literature on action theory. Perhaps people rightly grasp the inner logic of what naturalism ought to be if it is

to claim superior epistemic credentials and explanatory power. And perhaps through introspective knowledge by acquaintance of active power and the teleological role of reasons/motive in life, people have a clear concept of what libertarian freedom really amounts to even if, for ideological reasons, they do not believe in it. I have tried to show that this is the case. Whether or not I have succeeded, I believe the questions I propose are the right ones to ask.

NOTES

1. Kevin Timpe and Jonathan D. Jacobs, "Free Will and Naturalism: How to Be a Libertarian, and a Naturalist Too," in *The Blackwell Companion to Naturalism*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), 319.

2. Roderick Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," reprinted in *On Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 14.

3. John Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Science* (Cambridge, MA: 1984), 98.

4. John Bishop, *Natural Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1. Bishop's own solution eschews libertarian agency in favor of a version of compatibilism.

5. Timpe and Jacobs, "Free Will," 319.

6. For example, suppose theory S explains phenomena in terms of discrete corpuscles and actions by contact, while R uses continuous waves to explain phenomena. If some phenomenon x was best explained in corpuscularian categories, it would be ad hoc and question-begging for advocates of R simply to adjust their entities to take on particle properties in the case of x. Such properties would not bear a relevant similarity to other entities in R and would be more natural and at home in S.

7. For example, suppose that R is Neo-Darwinism and S is a version of punctuated equilibrium theory. Simply for the same of illustration, suppose further, that R depicts evolutionary transitions from one species to another to involve running through a series of incrementally different transitional forms except for some specific transition e which is taken as a basic phenomenon, say, the discrete jump from amphibians to reptiles. S pictures evolutionary transitions in general, including e, as evolutionary jumps to be explained in certain ways that constitute S. In this case, given the presence of S, it would be hard for advocates of R to claim that their treatment of e is adequate against S. Phenomenon e clearly counts in favor of S over against R.

8. Timpe and Jacobs, "Free Will," 327.

9. Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Chapter 1.

10. It may be that mental properties are basic according to versions of panpsychism, but it is far from clear that active power is basic and, in any case, I have argued elsewhere that panpsychism is a rival to robust naturalism, not a version of naturalism, and it is rationally inferior to theism. See J. P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* (New York: Routledge: 2008), Chapter 6.

11. For a treatment of and bibliography for Brentano's treatment of parts and wholes, see R. M. Chisholm, *Brentano and Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); for a treatment of and bibliography for Husserl's treatment of parts and wholes, see Barry Smith, ed., *Parts and Moments: Studies in Logic and Formal Ontology* (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1982); J. P. Moreland, "Naturalism, Nominalism, and Husserlian Moments," *The Modern Schoolman* 79 (January/March 2002): 199–216.

12. With apologies to Hud Hudson. See his *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). Cf. J. P. Moreland, "Hud Hudson's 4DPartism and Human Persons," *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003): 545–54.

13. See D. M. Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 38, 45, 49, 58, 76–77, 117, 120, 126, 130, 135.

14. While virtually all contemporary discussions about emergence, top-down causation and related matters draw a distinction between a mere aggregate (roughly, a collection of separable parts without regard to their structure) and a system, it is clear that a system is the same thing I am calling mereological aggregates. For more on this, see Nancey Murphy, "Introduction and Overview," in *Downward Causation and the Neurobiology of Free Will*, ed. Nancey Murphy, George F. R. Ellis, and Timothy O'Connor (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 1–28; Nancey Murphy and Warren S. Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–77.

15. It is customary to use "persistence conditions" in the literature on diachronic personal identity. But "persistence conditions" is ambiguous and can refer either to diachronic Leibnizian identity or some degree, perhaps sortal-dependent, of a relevant respect of resemblance. See Georg Gasser and Matthais Stefan, eds., *Personal Identity: Complex or Simple?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

16. Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, 1st edn. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 120–22; *Mind in a Physical World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 103–06.

17. See Neil Levy, "Naturalism and Free Will," in *The Blackwell Companion to Naturalism*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), 305–18.

18. David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 3.

19. For a recent argument showing that attempts to embrace naturalism without strict physicalism are failures, see Howard Robinson, *From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 104–11. Several portions of Robinson's book support a number of theses in this chapter.

20. Daniel Stoljar, *Physicalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 13–15.

21. See J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

22. Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 173.

23. I am assuming here a realist construal of explanation.

24. Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 55–56; cf. 54–62, 90, 95.

25. I will continue to talk in terms of particles and not fields because much of the literature in philosophy of mind does so, for example, debates about atomic simples and constitution, but I do not think anything important hangs on this. Cf. Robert Clifton and Hans Halverson, "No place for particles in relativistic quantum theories?" *Philosophy of Science* 69 (2002): 1–28.

26. Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1–5.

27. For an excellent précis of the Grand Story, see Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 12–18.

28. See Chapter 4 in J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae, *Body and Soul* (Downers Grove, IL InterVarsity Press, 2000).

29. I am not claiming that every time someone acts he is aware of this quality, and I acknowledge that such awareness comes in degrees. See Timothy O'Connor, "Conscious Willing and the Emerging Sciences of Brain and Behavior," in *Downward Causation and the Neurobiology of Free Will*, eds. Nancey Murphy, George F. R. Ellis, and Timothy O'Connor (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 173–86.

30. See J. P. Moreland, "Substance Dualism and the Unity of Consciousness," in *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, eds. Jonathan Loose, Angus Menuge, and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 183–207.

31. John Bishop, *Natural Agency*, 40. An interesting implication of Bishop's view is that naturalism cannot allow for there to be a first event in the absolute sense of not being preceded by other events because all events are caused by prior events or else they are simply uncaused. In the latter case, the coming-to-be of the event cannot be "natural" since it is just a brute fact. In the former case, this means that if the *kalam* cosmological argument is correct and there was a beginning to the universe, then the beginning itself was not a natural event, nor was its cause if it had one. For more on this, see William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

32. Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What," in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, eds. David Manley, David J. Chalmers, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28. The italicized words in Schaffer's definitions are mine.

33. Timpe and Jacobs, "Free Will," 330.

34. See J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, rev. 2nd edn. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 226–27.

35. See Timothy O'Connor, *Persons & Causes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 70–71, n. 8. I have argued that the causal relation between mental and physical states is, in fact, due to God's direct activity and stable intention that things remain a certain way. See Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God.*

36. David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 4.

37. Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, *Substance: Its Nature and Existence* (London: Routledge, 1997), 98–99.

38. J. P. Moreland, "Why Top-Down Causation Does Not Provide Adequate Support for Mental Causation," in *Neuroscience and the Soul*, eds. Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. TenElshof (Grand Rapids, MI: 2016), 51–73.

39. See Timpe and Jacobs, "Free Will."
40. Ibid., 327, 331–32.
41. Ibid., 319.

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Chapter 14

The Naturalness and Justification of Belief in Life after Death

Jonathan J. Loose

How are we to explain the ubiquity of belief in life after death? Some experimental work in the cognitive sciences indicates, perhaps surprisingly, that such belief is not rooted in either religious instruction or the fear of death. Rather, belief in the persistence of a person through death seems to show itself to be natural in the sense that it is intuitive, easily acquired and transmitted, and built primarily on innate and cognitive rather than cultural foundations. The cognitive science of religion (CSR) offers an explanatory framework that seems to account well for this naturalness, and there is significant enthusiasm for it. This raises a further important question: Do these natural explanations undermine the justification for holding the beliefs that they explain?

I will argue that there is no good reason to think that the evidence that afterlife belief is natural favors philosophical naturalism. While the CSR may further our understanding of some cognitive mechanisms that have a bearing on the production of religious beliefs, the claim that knowledge of these mechanisms demonstrates that such beliefs are unreliable turns out to be either false, on the one hand, or self-defeating, on the other. There are many causes of religious belief that fall outside the purview of the CSR. Following Plantinga, I argue that the temptation to assume that the CSR explains away religious beliefs arises because, as an instance of evolutionary psychology, it is constrained by a naturalistic methodology. This constraint allows the CSR to work legitimately toward its goal of "sciencing up" areas within religious studies, but it also severely restricts its potential to provide defeaters for the rationality of beliefs supported by evidence that is necessarily excluded by its naturalistic method. Through Plantinga's reduction test for defeat, it is possible to assess the justification of a belief in light of contradictory findings from naturalistically constrained inquiries. It turns out that while such

inquiries can impact upon a belief's justification, they are unlikely to defeat it once all of the relevant evidence is taken into account.

AFTERLIFE BELIEFS: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

There is significant interest in the experimental investigation of religious beliefs, including beliefs about life after death, and it is illuminating to consider those studies that have been central to discussion of such beliefs in adults, children, and even infants. In what they take to be the first exploration of the way in which the minds of dead agents are represented by children, Bering and Bjorkland investigated two hypotheses.[1] First, they asked whether young children start out with a default belief in the continuity of mental states through death that then wanes as they grow older. Second, they asked whether the extent to which these beliefs wane differs depending on the particular types of mental states being considered. For example, belief in postmortem psychobiological states (such as thirst) was hypothesized to reduce more rapidly than belief in postmortem psychological states (such as emotional, desire, and knowledge states).[2]

The investigation consisted of three experiments involving children between ages four and twelve. The children were interviewed after a puppet show depicting a mouse character being killed and eaten by a crocodile.[3] The children were asked questions about the various biological, psychobiological, and psychological states of the dead mouse (e.g., drinking, thirsting, thinking). The pattern of the children's responses supported both hypotheses. First, younger participants had greater confidence that the mouse would have an ongoing psychological life (and—notably—beliefs about continuity were typically expressed without making use of religious afterlife language, suggesting that these beliefs did not result from learning in a religious environment). Second, young children's confidence in persistence through death decreased when moving from psychological to psychobiological to biological states, with older children being even more selective than younger children about which states can persist.[4]

The results suggest that children initially believe in the continuity of many states of various types, but this belief becomes increasingly weak and more selective as time goes by. Further studies using the same experimental paradigm explored the impact of religious instruction. For example, one study showed that differences in the pattern of response between children in Catholic and secular schools in Spain only emerged among older, eleven- and twelve-year-old children.[5] Such studies provided further evidence that afterlife beliefs are not initially the product of a particular social and cultural environment.[6]

The claim that afterlife beliefs are natural in the sense that they result primarily from the given structure of human psychology is also supported by other evidence from much younger children. Researchers have exploited the fact that infants look longer at things they find surprising to enable them to explore the concepts of five-month-old infants. One study compared infants' conceptions of what persons can do with their conceptions of what material objects can do in order to see if they are understood to be subject to the same constraints.[7] Infants were presented with situations in which an object appeared to move from one place to another without traversing the points in between. This discontinuous movement led to surprised reactions from infants if the thing moving was a box, but not if it was a human being. Kuhlmeier concluded that persons are viewed fundamentally as intentional agents to whom expectations about material objects do not apply. She writes that "an appreciation that people are just objects may be a developmental accomplishment."[8]

If a tendency toward afterlife belief is natural, then we might expect it to be difficult to suppress, even when it is consciously rejected. Bering observed that to be the case. For example, this is revealed anecdotally in the results of an interview study in which Bering asked college students various questions about a man who was instantaneously killed in a car accident,[9] observing that:

> when asked whether the dead protagonist knew that he was dead (a feat demanding ongoing cognitive abilities), one young extinctivist's answer was almost comical: "Yeah, he'd know, because I don't believe in the afterlife. It is non-existent; he sees that now." Despite himself, this alleged extinctivist was a dualist.[10]

Combining the findings reviewed so far, the emerging picture is of a young child with a default belief that human persons are capable of surviving death. Some of the physical constraints that apply to non-agents do not apply to agents and many of an individual's beliefs, emotions and desires are thought confidently to persist. Children's afterlife beliefs come under a significant cultural influence later in childhood, but even then the original intuitive bias is such that it can at times overwhelm clearly articulated reflective beliefs to the contrary. How is this picture to be explained?

EXPLAINING AFTERLIFE BELIEF

The Cognitive Science of Religion

The CSR is an approach to understanding religious belief that emerged in the mid-1990s. It "draws upon the cognitive sciences to explain how pan-cultural

features of human minds, interacting with their natural and social environments, inform and constrain religious thought and action."[11]

Barrett describes the CSR as an activity fundamentally aimed at the "sciencing up" of religious studies and anthropology.[12] It is concerned with regularities in the organism that produce culture-independent cognitive biases and so it rejects a comprehensive cultural relativism. The mind is understood to include a range of mental tools. Examples of these tools include folk physics, folk biology and folk psychology. These pre-cultural cognitive devices are domain-specific in the sense that the beliefs that they produce typically reside in a single domain. However (as will become clear), they may also inform and constrain religious thought, and so knowledge of their operation might also help explain universal (rather than culturally determined) aspects of religious thought. This emphasis on culture-independent cognitive biases means that CSR researchers are interested in ideas shared across communities. From all this, Barrett surmises: "Explaining religion is explaining how mental tools working in particular environments resist or encourage the spread of these ideas and practices we might call 'religious.'"[13]

Central to CSR, then, is the claim that the genesis of some aspects of religious belief is not cultural but natural, resulting from the operation of innate cognitive tools that make these beliefs intuitive and easy to transmit and acquire. The standard model within CSR explains this claim through evolutionary psychology and the "spandrel thesis." According to the spandrel thesis, intuitive religious beliefs are the by-products of cognitive tools that were selected by evolution for other purposes.

The Cognitive Science of Afterlife Belief

There are different ways that afterlife beliefs might be by-products. Bering offers "simulation constraint theory."[14] His idea is rooted in proposals such as the existence of a Theory of Mind (ToM) tool.[15] ToM enables thought about the minds of others distinct from one's own, and it is a central part of a child's naive psychology. Bering accepts the minority view that the ToM operates through a process of simulation: we understand the minds of others by analogy with our subjective experience of our own minds. The first and most obvious consequence of this is that we cannot have experience of nonexistence and thus cannot simulate the nonexistence of the minds of the dead. What we do have is experience of the absence of living persons, and thus we have a bias to think of dead minds as continuing to exist elsewhere.[16] Our conception of afterlife is also more likely to involve simulatable features that have been part of our own experience (e.g., an agent lacking thirst) as opposed to features we have not experienced (e.g., a complete absence of knowledge). So, we assume that dead agents will have the mental states that

we cannot conceive being without; hence they are more likely, for example, to be thought of as knowing rather than thirsting.

In contrast to Bering's theory, Robbins and Jack have argued that afterlife beliefs do not reflect constraints on the functioning of a ToM but rather a clear and early separation in the way that minds and bodies are conceived. Minds can be thought about without considering the constraints that must apply to physical objects and the "very fact that the mental and the physical seem so starkly different may lead us to believe in mind–body dualism."[17] Afterlife belief is but a short step from mind-body dualism. Bloom agrees, arguing that afterlife beliefs arise from the existence of separate, highly structured systems (tools, modules). He draws a distinction between those tools that have evolved for understanding the social and physical realms. Crucially, these two separate systems produce incommensurate outputs and the only way to make sense of this is to believe in the existence of two ontologically distinct realms, and so we are biased by the structure of our psychology to do just that. Bloom believes that "we implicitly endorse a strong substance dualism of the sort defended by philosophers like Plato and Descartes," but on this view this dualism has not arisen for any purpose. Rather it emerges as an "evolutionary accident."[18]

Both simulation constraint theory and commonsense dualism present difficulties. On the one hand, it is not clear that simulation is the best way to conceive of the operation of the ToM tool and if it cannot simulate nonexistence, then that would predict a high prevalence of beliefs about prelife existence, which we do not find. On the other hand, if Platonic dualism is commonsensical, then we would not expect there to be strong beliefs about the containment of a person within their body parts, but such beliefs are common.[19] Hence the theoretical debate continues within the CSR. For example, Hodge looks again at Bering's data and notes that he fails to distinguish between mental/physical states, on the one hand, and social/biological ones, on the other. He thus explores how a cognitive system that processes social and biological information in different ways might give rise to afterlife beliefs. He claims that whilst biological death can be accepted, social death is much more problematic and so we make use of cognitive tools normally used for reasoning about people who are absent (so-called offline social reasoning) to conceive of a biologically dead individual as socially alive. This, says Hodge, explains both the studies of Bering and those of Astuti and Harris noted above.[20]

These are but three examples of theories in CSR that attempt to explain present findings and guide new research. The overall picture is one of relatively little empirical data, and relatively many theoretical proposals. Barrett has noted that CSR has a need for "empirical fortification and/or falsification of claims," and lists Bering's theory among others as one that "needs empirical attention."[21] What CSR does provide is a framework for the systematic

discussion of empirical evidence and guidance of data collection in relation to religious belief; it thus offers some potential for "sciencing up" religious studies.

EXPLAINING AWAY AFTERLIFE BELIEF?

Turning from examples of the studies and theories that constitute the CSR, what consequences follow for the phenomena they describe? Visala highlights a disagreement about this question among CSR researchers themselves.[22] Whilst most CSR researchers claim religious agnosticism, there is a tension between explicit claims to religious agnosticism and implicit tendencies to write "as if the falsity of religious truth claims has been established."[23] For example, Atran and Boyer claim agnosticism for CSR, but refer to religious beliefs as counterfactual to reality (Atran), or as involving "concepts of imagined entities."[24] Barrett is clearer in supporting the religious agnosticism thesis, claiming that: "I find the cognitive science of religion independent of whether someone should or should not believe in God."[25] However, he nevertheless makes positive claims for CSR suggesting that it might provide evidential support and clarification of some theological claims, such as those related to the existence and nature of a *sensus divinitatis* as found in the writings of John Calvin and Plantinga.[26]

At the popular level the religious falsity thesis is trumpeted. Dennett claims that such work demonstrates that people are equipped with a "fiction generating contraption" whilst Dawkins refers to a "built-in irrationality mechanism in the brain."[27] Bloom describes religious belief as "Evolutionary Accident" and quotes Mencken's view that "the existence of religion illustrates humanity's 'stupendous capacity for believing the incredible.'"[28] Michael Murray reports Bering's grandstanding claim that with this research, "We've got God by the throat; all we have to do is squeeze."[29] Can such claims be underwritten by the findings of the CSR?

Unreliability Arguments

As is by now clear, CSR offers accounts of the causes of religious beliefs. Note first that even a complete explanation of the cause of a belief says nothing about its truth. Nevertheless, whether or not a belief is true, knowledge of its causes can undermine its justification, showing the belief to be unreliable. Lost and parched in the desert, I see a mirage and stagger forward, believing that there is water ahead. My belief is unjustified being founded in an illusion, but coincidentally there is water ahead and I soon find it. So my unjustified belief is also true; I have been lucky. Those who promote the religious falsity

thesis claim that given the CSR, supernatural belief is similarly unjustified and an unreliable indicator of the truth about the world. If it turned out that some religious beliefs were in fact true, then that too would just be good luck for the believer.

Consider again Bloom's claim that intuitive dualism is an "evolutionary accident." He is not claiming that such belief is produced in a random or unsystematic way since by-product beliefs are the result of the normal function of cognitive systems operating in their normal environments. Rather, he is claiming that, as spandrels, such beliefs must be both unintended and unreliable guides; they are systematic and unfortunate cognitive mishaps. This is an example of what Visala has termed the "unreliability argument from spandrelism."[30] It applies not only to afterlife beliefs, but to all religious beliefs that have been understood in terms of the standard model in CSR. This includes intuitive belief in God or gods, which are held to be by-products of the function of a "god faculty" consisting of tools that detect agency and attribute mental lives to others.

We might wonder why it is that a cognitive tool must be automatically considered unreliable when it is operating in areas other than those for which it was originally selected. After all, it is possible that the principles by which a system operates are in fact applicable to a wider range of inputs than those that drove its formation. Thus, to establish unreliability requires more than just the claim that a belief is a by-product. However, even if the argument from spandrelism were thought to be enough, it turns out to be self-destructive. Critics note that most of our beliefs are in fact spandrels. In particular, the historically recent emergence of scientific beliefs implies that these too were produced by mechanisms that evolved for other purposes. If the naturalist rejects all religious beliefs because they are unjustified in virtue of being spandrels, then he must also reject the scientific beliefs that both naturalist and theist hold dear. This would, of course, include the very beliefs about selection that underpin the notion of a spandrel in the first place. The argument turns out to have a "suicidal tendency."[31]

Causal Connection

Further unreliability arguments have been proposed. Even if a belief does not need to be a target of selection to be justified, perhaps it does nevertheless need a particular causal connection to its object; a connection that seems to be missing in the case of religious beliefs. Consider Clark and Barrett's analogy of a pill that causes the person who takes it to believe that there is an elephant in the room. Whether or not an elephant is in fact hidden in the room, the pill is the entire cause of the elephantine belief.[32] Compare the elephantine belief with a religious belief, and the workings of the elephant pill in the body with

those of the mechanisms proposed by the CSR. Just as the elephant belief is not causally connected to any elephant, so the religious belief is not causally connected to any supernatural reality. Both, then, would seem to be unjustified. However the obvious response to the claim that a justified religious belief must be causally connected to its object is to point out that there is no contingent reality to which a creator God would not be causally connected, and this would include the inchoate theistic beliefs for which accounts in the CSR give a proximal explanation. We might then claim that beliefs in afterlife or gods are causally connected to a supernatural object whilst also being induced by cognitive tools such as ToM; a claim that is not available for pill-induced elephantine beliefs. Van Inwagen makes the general point as follows:

> Suppose that God exists and wants supernaturalistic belief to be a human universal, and sees (he would see this, if it were true) that certain features that it would be useful for human beings to have—useful from an evolutionary point of view: conducive to survival and reproduction—would naturally have the consequence that supernaturalistic belief would in due course become a human universal. Why shouldn't he allow those features to be the cause of the thing he wants?—rather as the human designer of a vehicle might use the waste heat from its engine to keep its passengers warm.[33]

We should ask, however, whether it is always the case that a naturalistic explanation can be incorporated within a broader supernaturalistic one. Van Inwagen notes that in practice some such explanations would be regarded by any unbiased person—whether or not a believer in the supernatural—to be "unreasonable, contrived, artificial, or desperate."[34] He gives a characteristically coruscating illustration of a statue of Mary in an Italian church that is observed to weep, although what is in fact being observed is urine from bats that have infested the roof. The situation seems to resist being interpreted as God's allowance of natural processes to bring about the appearance of a weeping statue. However, no such resistance is present in the accounts offered by the CSR. Thus, van Inwagen claims that these may be legitimately incorporated within broader supernatural explanations. They could be the means by which God brings about his purpose of producing supernatural belief.

The causal connection argument can be expressed in a further, more challenging way. Despite the possibility that theistic explanations might incorporate naturalistic ones, it might still be objected that a supernatural reality would not have an appropriate causal connection to a supernatural belief since that belief would exist whether or not God does. Perhaps belief in a proposition is only justified if it is counterfactually sensitive; if it would not have been held in the case that the proposition turns out to be false.

A causal connection requirement like this would not be met by a supernatural belief that would arise whether or not its object existed. Murray and others have responded by claiming that God's creative activity is required for any believers to exist at all, and thus for there to be any beliefs at all. The burden of proof is thus on the objector to show that this is not the case before challenging the counterfactual sensitivity of theistic belief.[35] However, the objection suffers from a yet more substantial *tu quoque*. If justified beliefs must be counterfactually sensitive, then many beliefs held on the grounds of induction would also fail to be justified since they do not meet this requirement. To challenge the justification of inductive beliefs is therefore to challenge the scientific realism on which the naturalist's objection to religious beliefs from the CSR depends, and so the causal connection argument is also self-defeating.

Religious Diversity

Finally, perhaps it could be claimed that the world's religious belief systems are diverse and contradictory and that this demonstrates that the mechanisms by which they are produced are unreliable, or even chaotic. In fact, this objection offers an important reason why CSR accounts do not undermine the justification of religious beliefs. The CSR seeks to explain only the most general and abstract, culturally independent and inchoate religious beliefs. The subsequent development of these into mature and specific religious commitments requires additional causal influences beyond the functioning of cognitive tools. These other causes of particular mature religious beliefs—such as testimony, religious experience, or the discovery of reasons—are not addressed. The CSR might explain why intuitive dualism is the default position but have very little to say about how this will mature into a full-fledged belief about afterlife. Perhaps it will become belief in a soul that moves through an intermediate state to reembodiment in final Resurrection, or perhaps an atman moving from human life to human life on its journey toward moksha and liberation. Whatever the consequences of the CSR for the justification of inchoate religious beliefs, a believer can possess good reasons for holding mature religious beliefs irrespective of the way that those beliefs originally came about. In this way the belief remains propositionally justified. Furthermore, if the belief comes ultimately to be based on these other reasons then it will also be doxastically justified. In short, a believer can ultimately possess good grounds for a belief (propositional justification) and also hold the belief in virtue of these grounds (doxastic justification) irrespective of the way in which the belief originally arose. Thurow points out that in fact religious beliefs often are doxastically justified in this way:

> People believe because: they think the Bible is reliable, they think they have witnessed, or know others who claim to have witnessed certain miracles, certain prayers get answered, their life has been changed for the better since believing, the world seems so carefully designed, they've had or know of others who claim to have had religious experience of various kinds, and it is hard to explain all the evidence we have about early Christianity if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead.[36]

To summarize, if the spandrel thesis explains away religious beliefs as accidents then it also explains away scientific beliefs, undercutting itself. The reply that there must be a causal connection between the belief and its object and that this is only present in the scientific case is to invite the theist's objection that the contingent universe depends on God, who is thus always causally connected to our beliefs. However, it may be argued that the causal connection needs to be counterfactually sensitive and this would undermine beliefs about God that arise as spandrels. However, this requirement would also undermine inductive scientific claims that are not counterfactually sensitive and so—once again—the position is self-defeating. Furthermore, consideration of the diversity of mature religious beliefs serves to emphasize the limited scope of explanations in the CSR and thus to highlight that mature religious beliefs have other sources of justification. Given all this we should wonder why this research is thought to warrant subtle scholarly assumptions or energetic popular-level pronouncements of the falsity of religious belief. In order to understand this, we need to go further and establish the relationship between cognitive evolutionary accounts and naturalism. Only then can we see why some see obvious support for philosophical naturalism in CSR and explain the circumstances in which such theories would indeed provide defeaters for religious belief.

Cognitive Science of Religion and Methodological Naturalism

Plantinga offers a rigorous consideration of the nature of theories in evolutionary psychology including by-product theories such as those employed in the CSR. He focuses on the question of whether or not a cognitive mechanism that is responsible for bringing about certain beliefs can be assumed to operate in a way that is not truth-aimed. He claims that theories within evolutionary psychology that conflict with Christian beliefs do so because they are implicitly constrained by methodological naturalism (MN). MN rules out references to God, supernatural agents or revelatory claims from the data, theories, and context of evaluation of those theories. When all such references have been removed, it is very likely that any conclusions drawn from the theory that relate to religious beliefs will also be in conflict with them.

Scientific Activity and Methodological Naturalism

If the perception of conflict is a result of a commitment to MN, then understanding whether there is a genuine underlying conflict requires establishing the proper relationship between MN and scientific activities. Of course, some would argue that MN is part of all science "by definition." Plantinga cites Murphy's claim that "there is what we might call methodological atheism, which is by definition common to all natural science,"[37] but he notes that mere appeal to a definition is not an adequate way to resolve a dispute. It is also clear that the term "science" has been used historically and presently to describe activities that presuppose MN, but also activities that do not. (Plantinga cites examples of the latter including the work of Newton and the Bridgewater Treatises.) Alternative constraints have also been proposed such as the exclusion of value judgments or subjectivity, or the importance of empirical verifiability, falsifiability, or replicability. A further significant distinction exists between non-realist scientific theories that aim at empirical adequacy given the data, and realist theories that aim at truth. Such aims are radically different, but the label "science" is used in relation to both.

It seems that science includes a range of different and distinct activities with different and distinct individual goals. If so, then we should ask whether, as van Fraassen's constructive empiricism holds, these activities share a single overriding goal. Plantinga thinks not. Accomplished scientists often have distinct aims, but this is no reason to deny that they have a true knowledge of what it is they are doing. So the conditions that an activity must meet in order to be scientific must be broad enough to encompass this diversity. To be prima facie scientific, an activity must be: "(1) a systematic and disciplined enterprise aimed at finding out truth about our world and that (2) has significant empirical involvement."[38] These intentionally vague conditions circumscribe a collection of different activities. The claim that any constraint on a particular scientific activity must be a constraint on all of them is thus not legitimate and is really an example of the over-enthusiastic promotion of one type of activity above the others. Thus, the claim that MN characterizes all science is an over-enthusiastic promotion of one part of the enterprise.

The CSR would seem to find its place quite easily within Plantinga's conception of science. Recall Barrett's claim that at least one main aim and motivating force behind the development of CSR was the desire to "science up" the study of religion, and to take what cognitive science and evolutionary psychology have to offer to provide the theoretical framework with which to do this.[39] The CSR is clearly a systematic and disciplined enterprise aimed at finding out truth about our world and one that has significant empirical involvement, and it has had some success given its aim. For example, as has already been mentioned, CSR has been applied in a positive way to provide

empirical evidence that informs theological reflection on the nature of intuitive theistic beliefs or dispositions.[40] In addition, the naturalness thesis established within CSR implies that religious traditions are overwhelmingly likely to include belief in gods. This implication has been used to predict at least one seemingly revisionary challenge in the study of religion, motivating textual studies showing that Chinese religions do not in fact exclude belief in gods, despite claims to the contrary.[41]

The Improbability of Defeat for Christian Truths

On this understanding of the relationship between MN and science, MN-constrained scientific activities are able to generate defeaters for the Christian truths with which they conflict, but it is unlikely that they will do so. Consider an individual's total evidence base; the set of all beliefs to which he may appeal when conducting an inquiry. MN weakly constrains this evidence base, defining a subset that can be legitimately included and excluding many theistic beliefs. Since the evidence base is restricted, the most that the inquiry can show is that one or more beliefs are improbable or unlikely in relation to this restricted evidence base. However, such a claim may have little bearing on the justification of the belief in relation to all the evidence available, as illustrated by Plantinga's illustration of the work of the "whimsical physicists":

> Consider a group of whimsical physicists who try to see how much of physics would be left if we refused to employ, in the development of physics, anything we know by way of memory. Perhaps something could be done along these lines, but it would be a poor, paltry, truncated, trifling thing. Suppose, further, that General Relativity turned out to be dubious and unlikely from this point of view. And now consider physicists who do physics from the usual scientific epistemic base, and furthermore believe the results: would they get a defeater for General Relativity upon learning that it was unlikely from the perspective of truncated physics? Surely not; they would note, as a reasonably interesting fact, that there was indeed a conflict . . . but, of course, they take the perspective of the scientific epistemic base to be normative here; it is the right perspective from which to look at the matter. As a result, their knowledge of the way things look from that truncated base doesn't give them a defeater for the beliefs appropriate with respect to the whole scientific base.[42]

So MN-constrained science is unlikely to generate defeaters for beliefs that are outside its evidence base. However, this leads to a worry. Could it be that we have produced a kind of "get out of jail free" card for supernaturalist beliefs? Could just *any* supernatural belief be somehow judged immune from defeat by these types of inquiry? Plantinga argues that this is not the case,

since such inquiries may generate rationality defeaters for beliefs outside the restricted evidence base that they employ. A rationality defeater arises for my belief B when I acquire another belief D, which when combined with my total set of beliefs, desires, and so on (my entire noetic structure) causes it to be irrational for me to hold B any longer. So an MN-constrained inquiry could lead to the acquisition of a D-type belief that is a rationality defeater for a belief outside the restricted evidence base of the inquiry itself.

Plantinga's Reduction Test for Defeat

This leads to the reduction test for defeat; a test that is applied to a belief B that is outside the limited evidence base of the MN-constrained scientific inquiry. B conflicts with a conclusion A of the inquiry. The question is whether A provides not only a conflict with B, but also a defeater for it. To decide this, the total evidence base relevant to B must be considered. The reduction test does this by taking the total evidence base and modifying it in two ways: First B and anything that entails B are removed such that B is not automatically protected from defeat. Next, A is added such that the results of the MN-constrained inquiry take their place along with other evidence in the evaluation of B. The resulting evidence base is then held up to the light alongside B in order to see whether B remains epistemically probable or improbable with respect to it. Since B or anything entailing B is not in this evidence base, there is no "get out of jail free" card, and it is only if B receives enough support from other beliefs outside those in the MN-constrained subset that it will still be judged likely in the presence of A.

It appears that the conclusions of MN-constrained scientific activities can constitute rationality defeaters for nonnaturalistic beliefs with which they conflict, even if these beliefs lie outside the naturalistic constraints of the inquiry. Nevertheless, it is by no means necessary that such conflict will produce defeat and in fact quite unlikely that it will do so. Consider a Christian's mature belief in life after death. Given the reduction test for defeat, it is very unlikely that a CSR account would constitute a defeater for it given the wider evidence base including other Christian beliefs that raise the epistemic probability of the claim whilst not entailing its truth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the CSR is a young field that requires further theoretical development and empirical exploration if it is to fulfill its aim. It has already generated interesting empirical evidence and a range of theoretical proposals about the causes of inchoate belief in psychological continuity through death.

In this and other areas, the CSR guides productive and systematic empirical research and furthers its aim of "sciencing up" elements of religious studies. Nevertheless, explanations of the formation of religious beliefs according to the CSR do not in and of themselves challenge their justification. If spandrel beliefs and counterfactually insensitive beliefs are unjustifiable, then the scientific claims that underpin the challenge are themselves undercut. If the diversity of mature religious beliefs is noted, then it becomes clear that there is a range of sources for belief that are not the subject matter of CSR and through which they may be propositionally and doxastically justified. The mistaken claim that the CSR explains religious belief away arises from its methodological commitment to naturalism. This commitment allows the CSR to achieve its particular scientific aims, but in doing so, it restricts its capacity to challenge beliefs that are supported by evidence that it rules out of consideration. To claim that naturalism is supported by an activity that is committed to MN is simply to beg the question. The genesis of afterlife beliefs may be to some extent a natural phenomenon, but this claim in and of itself does not entail or even indicate that such beliefs are unjustified.

NOTES

1. Jesse M. Bering and David F. Bjorklund, "The natural emergence of reasoning about the afterlife as a developmental regularity," *Developmental Psychology* 40, no. 2 (March 2004): 217–33.

2. Ibid., 218.

3. Ibid., 219–20.

4. Jesse M. Bering, "The Cognitive Psychology of Belief in the Supernatural," *American Scientist* 94, no. 2 (2006): 145.

5. Jesse M. Bering, Carlos Hernández Blasi, and David F. Bjorklund, "The Development of Afterlife Beliefs in Religiously and Secularly Schooled Children," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 23 (2005): 587–607.

6. However, it should be noted that other studies exploring afterlife beliefs in children have reported sensitivity to context. For example, Astuti and Harris showed that a death announced by a medical doctor will produce fewer claims of an afterlife than an announcement made by a priest. Rita Astuti and Paul L. Harris, "Understanding Mortality and the Life of the Ancestors in Rural Madagascar," *Cognitive Science* 32 (2008): 713–40.

7. Valerie A. Kuhlmeier, Paul Bloom, and Karen Wynn, "Do 5-Month-Old Infants See Humans as Material Objects?" *Cognition* 94, no. 1 (November 2004): 95–103.

8. Ibid., 102.

9. Jesse M. Bering, "Intuitive Conceptions of Dead Agents' Minds: The Natural Foundations of Afterlife Beliefs as Phenomenological Boundary," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 2, no. 4 (December 2002): 263–308.

10. Bering, "The Cognitive Psychology of Belief in the Supernatural," 145.

11. Justin L. Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: Looking Back, Looking Forward," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 2 (June 2011): 230.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 231.

14. Bering, "Intuitive Conceptions of Dead Agents' Minds: The Natural Foundations of Afterlife Beliefs as Phenomenological Boundary"; Jesse M. Bering, "The folk psychology of souls," *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 29 (2006): 453–98; Jesse M. Bering, "The End?" *Scientific American Mind* 19 (2008): 34–41.

15. Philip Gerrans, "The Theory of Mind Module in Evolutionary Psychology," *Biology and Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2002): 305–21.

16. Bering, "The Cognitive Psychology of Belief in the Supernatural," 145. This article provides a helpful and brief overview of Bering's work in this area.

17. Philip Robbins and Anthony Jack, "An Unconstrained Mind: Explaining Belief in the Afterlife," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29, no. 5 (2006): 484.

18. Paul Bloom, "Religious Belief as an Evolutionary Accident," in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149.

19. Emma Cohen and Justin L. Barrett, "In Search of 'Folk Psychology': The Cognitive Anthropology of the Person," in *In Search of Self: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Personhood*, ed. Wentzel van Huyssteen and Erik P. Viebe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

20. K. Mitch Hodge, "Context Sensitivity and the Folk Psychology of Souls: Why Bering et al. Got the Findings They Did," in *Is Religion Natural?* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 49–63.

21. Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: Looking Back, Looking Forward," 232.

22. Aku Visala, *Naturalism, Theism, and the Cognitive Study of Religion* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 157.

23. Visala, "Naturalism, Theism, and the Cognitive Study of Religion," 15.

24. David Leech and Aku Visala, "Naturalistic Explanation for Religious Belief," *Philosophy Compass* 68 (2011): 51.

25. Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2004), 122.

26. Visala, "Naturalism, Theism, and the Cognitive Study of Religion"; Kelly James Clark and Justin L. Barrett, "Reformed Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2010): 500–13; Kelly James Clark and Justin L. Barrett, "Reidian Religious Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (2011): 639–75.

27. Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin, 2007), 120; Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 214.

28. Bloom, "Religious Belief as an Evolutionary Accident," 118.

29. Michael J. Murray, "Scientific Explanations of Religions and the Justification of Religious Belief," in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and*

Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 169.

30. Visala, "Naturalism, Theism, and the Cognitive Study of Religion," 170.

31. Justin L. Barrett, "Is the Spell Really Broken? Bio-Psychological Explanations of Religion and Theistic Belief," *Theology and Science* 5, no. 1 (2007): 63.

32. Clark and Barrett, "Reidian Religious Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion," 655.

33. Peter van Inwagen, "Explaining Belief in the Supernatural," in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, ed. Jeffrey Schloss and Michael J. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2009), 136.

34. Ibid., 136.

35. Michael J. Murray, "Scientific Explanations of Religions and the Justification of Religious Belief," in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 175.

36. Joshua C. Thurow, "Does Cognitive Science Show Belief in God to Be Irrational?" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2011): 77–98.

37. Alvin Plantinga, "Games Scientists Play," in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, ed. Jeffrey P. Schloss and Michael J. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 152; see Nancey C. Murphy, "Phillip Johnson on Trial," in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics*, ed. R. T. Pennock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

38. Plantinga, "Games Scientists Play," 158.

39. Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: Looking Back, Looking Forward," 230.

40. Clark and Barrett, "Reformed Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion."

41. Kelly James Clark and Justin T. Winslett, "The Evolutionary Psychology of Chinese Religion: Pre-Qin High Gods as Punishers and Rewarders," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 4 (November 2011): 928–60. See also Jordan Paper, Kelly James Clark and Justin T. Winslett, "'Response to The Evolutionary Psychology of Chinese Religion: Pre-Qin High Gods as Punishers and Rewarders' 79/4: 928–60 [with Rejoinder]," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (June 2012): 518–24.

42. Plantinga, "Games Scientists Play," 161.

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