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Book Review: Naturalism: A Critical Analysis

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In the current renaissance of dialogue and debate concerning science and religion, there is a significant presence of process thinkers. Important scholars in this field embrace a process perspective, even if they modify some aspects. Examples of this position include Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, John Haught, and Phil Clayton, although each one of these authors modifies traditional Whiteheadian positions to some degree. It is good to have in this volume by Griffin a re-statement of the classical Whiteheadian position in the current religion and science dialogue. I recommend this work to anyone interested in the topic of process theology and natural science. Taken together, these books represent a major summary of Griffin's philosophy, and stand as a fitting capstone to his career at Claremont.

Naturalism: A Critical Analysis, edited by Wm. Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Pp. ix and 286. \$90 (hardcover).

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Naturalism: A Critical Analysis is a valuable volume for those who would like to bring themselves up to date on criticisms of naturalism as a worldview and on the comparative merits of theism as a worldview. The eleven authors of this volume are convinced that under extended scrutiny the philosophical naturalism that dominated the philosophical scene for most of the twentieth century has now been shown to generate dilemmas and have costs that are daunting at best and prohibitive at worst whereas theism is proving to be quite resilient. Each of the ten chapters of *Naturalism* was written by a different author (the first article is co-authored). The first three chapters are on epistemology, the next four on ontology, the eighth on value theory, and the last two on natural theology. Three aims shared by most chapters are (1) to identify phenomena or problems that naturalism has not dealt with adequately, and perhaps cannot deal with adequately, (2) to explain why a consistent naturalism must be strictly physicalist and therefore eschew emergent, supervenient, mental, and abstract properties and entities, and (3) to show that philosophical theism is a more comprehensive and adequate worldview than is philosophical naturalism. Most of these authors have published extensively on the topics about which they write in *Naturalism*, so to some extent their articles (written for this volume) serve as valuable introductions to and updates of their work. In such a short review I cannot summarize and critique each of ten wide-ranging, technical articles, so I have chosen to summarize each chapter without critique. The title of each chapter precedes my summary of it.

Farewell to philosophical naturalism

Paul Moser and David Yandell begin by posing a dilemma for naturalism. If naturalism cleaves to strict physicalism, it cannot account for the

universal, normative nature of its claims about what there is to know and how it can be known. If, however, it moves away from strict physicalism in order to accommodate the universality and normativity of its claims about what we can and cannot know (and consequently of what it is rational to believe to exist), then it must incorporate non-naturalistic concepts and cease to be naturalistic. From this dilemma M&Y (Moser and Yandell) conclude that naturalism is inadequate at best and self-refuting at worst. Next M&Y point out that naturalists justify their ontological naturalism by means of methodological naturalism, which is the belief that "every legitimate method of acquiring knowledge consists of or is grounded in the hypothetically completed methods of the empirical sciences." M&Y argue that in order for naturalists to justify MN (methodological naturalism) within their naturalistic framework, they must show either (1) that MN is justified by empirical evidence to date or (2) that it will be justified by the completed methods of the empirical sciences. With regard to (1) they point out that MN is not a thesis of any of the empirical sciences and that the empirical sciences do not make the kinds of universal, normative claims that MN makes. Furthermore, the empirical sciences do not make claims about the non-empirical, as do MN and ontological naturalism (ON). Hence, current sciences do not empirically support MN or ON, and neither do they support the highly speculative (wishful?) thesis that when the methods of the sciences have been completed, they will vindicate MN and therefore ON.

Knowledge and naturalism

Dallas Willard believes that "narrower Naturalism or unqualified Physicalism cannot find a place for knowledge, truth, logical relations or noetic unity." The normative aspects of knowledge and belief formation, Willard argues, cannot be replaced "by mere *descriptions* of actual processes of belief formation." Moreover, truth is a necessary condition of knowledge, and for a thought or statement to be true "is simply for its subject matter *to be as it is represented* or held to be." But physical properties never represent anything. Therefore, in the world as understood by naturalism there could be no truths, belief, or knowledge. But there are beliefs, truths, and knowledge. Therefore, Willard concludes, naturalism is a false world-view. Willard, like Moser and Yandell, also has interesting things to say regarding the purported support of naturalism by science.

The incompatibility of naturalism and scientific realism

Robert Koons argues that scientific realism is *incompatible* with philosophical naturalism because "nature is comprehensible scientifically *only if* nature is *not* a causally closed system—only if nature is shaped by supernatural forces (forces beyond the scope of physical space and time)." Crucial to Koons' position is his argument that reliability is an essential ingredient of knowledge because "the proper function of belief-forming processes is to form true beliefs, so the sort of process which fulfills this proper function must be a reliable one." Therefore, anyone who believes that a method of belief formation is reliable—that is, for the most part pro-

duces in us *correct* representations of the world because it (the method) connects us to the world in appropriate ways—must have an understanding of reality which justifies believing that the epistemic success of the method is reliable and not merely lucky. Koons argues that a theistic ontology provides warrant for believing that scientific methods are reliable whereas a naturalistic ontology does not.

Naturalism and the ontological status of properties

J. P. Moreland argues that the issue of the ontological status of properties is the Achilles heel of naturalism. He begins by agreeing with naturalist D. M. Armstrong that internal, i.e., mental properties “are not reducible to natural, physical, causal/functional entities.” He proceeds by noting that according to Armstrong, if naturalists would be consistent, they should deny the existence of internal relations. Therefore, Moreland concludes, “the best naturalist theory of knowledge or justification (or warrant) will be externalist” and exclude mental properties. “Weak naturalists” try to escape this harsh conclusion by introducing notions such as emergence and supervenience. Moreland, like Moser, Yandell, and Willard, argues that such a move is inconsistent with naturalism. Yet “strong naturalism” (strict physicalism) is inadequate because it cannot accommodate first person introspection and certain mental properties. After critiquing the naturalist theories of properties of D. M. Armstrong and Keith Campbell, Willard concludes with an exposition of the strengths of traditional, *non-naturalist* property realism.

Naturalism and material objects

Michael Rea’s startling thesis is that “material objects as they are ordinarily conceived have no place whatsoever in the strict ontology of a consistent naturalism.” The concept of a material object, Rea argues, is the concept of something that must have “persistence conditions,” and the persistence conditions of an object are necessary truths “about what changes it can and cannot survive.” Hence, belief that a material object exists entails belief that necessary truths are instantiated. Because naturalists limit warranted belief about what exists to what can be ascertained empirically, and because the instantiation of a necessary truth cannot be ascertained empirically, therefore naturalists have no right to believe in the existence of material objects. Rea’s second argument is based on his contention that belief in the existence of mind-independent material objects is justified only for those who believe that some object in space/time belongs to a natural kind. We are justified in holding that belief only if we believe the object has or is a proper part or has a proper function. Naturalism, however, cannot identify a *proper* part or function of any thing because the pertinent notion of “proper” is normative in a sense that empirical methods cannot accommodate. Hence, naturalists cannot justify belief in the existence of material objects.

Naturalism and the mind

After a brief critique of eliminativism, Charles Taliaferro provides an extensive critique of *non*-eliminativist naturalism, which retains belief in mental phenomena but claims they are a species of physical phenomena, and hence are compatible with naturalism. Taliaferro presents numerous thought experiments to show that mental properties/states and physical properties/states are distinct and therefore not identical, and that various mental states cannot be understood satisfactorily by means of biological, chemical, or physical categories. Taliaferro concludes by discussing the naturalist claim that metaphysical dualism is “queer” or “anomalous.” He acknowledges that from within the worldview of naturalism the existence of non-physical mental events, properties, or entities will seem anomalous. If, however, one’s worldview is theism, then the existence of non-physical mental events, properties, etc., is not anomalous at all, as theism holds that consciousness and intention have not emerged from an initially consciousnessless, purely physical reality. Rather, a non-physical consciousness preceded, conceived, and willed the existence of the universe, so the existence of creatures with non-physical minds and wills should be no surprise.

Naturalism and libertarian agency

Stewart Goetz argues that in order for libertarian freedom to be real, “a substantial self (mind or soul) which makes a choice for a purpose must exist at the deepest level of reality and be able to causally interact with the ultimate or deep entities of the physical world” so that “on those occasions when an agent chooses for a reason, events at the micro-physical level of the world occur only because a soul causes them to occur in accomplishing its goals.” Because such libertarianism presupposes substance dualism, it is incompatible with philosophical naturalism. Goetz defends the intelligibility of his *non*-causal account of libertarian agency by arguing that teleological explanation is as legitimate as causal explanation. Goetz concludes with a critique of naturalists who claim that mental events and states supervene upon physical events and states. What is sometimes not noticed, says Goetz, is that naturalists have not explained *how* subvenient physical properties give rise to mental properties. Some naturalists, like David Chalmers, even concede that it is a category mistake to think that the categories of neurophysiology could ever *explain* how mental properties arise from physical properties. Goetz counters that if naturalists think their inability to explain how the physical gives rise to the mental need not cause them to abandon naturalism, then they should not think that the inability of dualists to explain how a non-physical volition gives rise to a physical effect requires them to abandon dualism.

Naturalism and morality

John Hare argues that modern western moral theory consists of three parts. First is the moral demand for impartiality, for treating others as equal to oneself in one’s moral deliberations and actions. Second is the

recognition that our natural capacities are unequal to fulfillment of the moral demand for impartiality. However, because we believe we *can* do what we ought, the third part of modern western moral theory consists of belief in a holy being who can enable us to meet the moral demand. Noting that secular, as well as religious, ethicists recognize the moral gap problem, Hare critiques three secular strategies for dealing with the moral gap. He concludes by arguing that “moral faith” is necessary to sustain our commitment to being moral in the midst of temptations and suffering. Moral faith consists of two convictions. The first is that every human can, with divine aid, become morally good. This conviction keeps us from giving up morally on ourselves or others. The second conviction is that with divine aid it is possible to be both moral and happy. This conviction helps sustain moral resolve by assuring us that self-denial and suffering for the sake of morality are ennobling and only temporary.

Naturalism and cosmology

The question at the heart of William Lane Craig’s contribution is, “Why does the universe exist rather than nothing?” Craig argues that naturalists cannot answer this question as well as theists can. He begins by explaining why the Big Bang model of creation is so widely accepted among cosmologists; then he argues that the evidence on which the Big Bang model is based requires belief that the universe (including energy, matter, time, and space) has not always existed but, rather, came into existence a finite time ago. Next Craig critiques numerous alternatives to the Big Bang theory, including the Steady State Theory, the Oscillation Theory, Vacuum Fluctuation theories, Chaotic Inflationary theories, Quantum Gravity theories, and the Self-Creation Theory—each of which is fascinating, but none of which, according to Craig, can avoid both horns of the following dilemma: either the universe began with a singularity which came into existence from nothing but was caused to begin to exist *or* once upon a time absolutely nothing existed and then the universe came into existence uncaused. To embrace the latter horn of this dilemma is to embrace absurdity. To embrace the former horn is to embrace supernaturalism.

Naturalism and design

A consistent, thoroughly physicalist naturalism excludes design and purpose from all explanations. However, William Dembski argues, in order to explain some things satisfactorily, even in biology, design must be added to necessity and chance; therefore naturalism is false. A pattern indicates design when two things have been established: *complexity* and *specification*. “Complexity ensures that the object in question is not so simple that it can readily be explained by chance.” In addition to complexity there must be a pattern that “specifies” (is indicative of) intelligence at work. It might seem that notions of “sufficiently complex” and “involving a pattern indicative of intelligence” are either question begging or impractically vague, but these criteria, Dembski points out, have long been used effectively in forensic activities such as detective work, forensic medicine,

cryptography, and archaeology, and are now being formalized by people in the intelligent design movement. Demski concludes his contribution, and the volume, by drawing on the work of biochemist Michael Behe to argue that acceptance of the possibility of design in natural systems will enrich science, not stifle it.

Referring to God: Jewish and Christian Philosophical and Theological Perspectives, (ed.) Paul Helm. St Martin's Press, 2000. ix + 175. \$65.00

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Although both the title of this volume and its introduction suggest that its concern is with issues that lie at the intersection of philosophy of language and inter-religious dialogue, readers looking for sustained discussion of these topics will be disappointed. Four of the seven chapters are based on papers (and their commentaries) delivered at a conference on Christian and Jewish philosophy of religion, but forays into inter-religious dialogue are infrequent, and only one contribution - Joe Houston's "William Alston on Referring to God" - explicitly engages with the question of how reference to God is secured.

In fact, the papers included in this volume form a rather mixed bag. In "The Source and Destination of Thought" John Haldane presents an argument for God's existence based on concept-acquisition. Jerome Gellman has two papers in this collection. In "Identifying God in Experience: On Strawson, Sounds and God's Space" he responds to objections against experience-based arguments for God's existences by drawing on some ideas in Strawson's *Individuals*. In his second paper, "Judaic Perspectives on Petitionary Prayer" Gellman develops a model of petitionary prayer based on the idea of holding God to his promises. Eleonore Stump contrasts the theodicies of Aquinas and Saadia, a tenth century Jewish philosopher, in "The God of Abraham, Saadia and Aquinas," and in "Maimonides and Calvin on Accommodation" Paul Helm examines the different roles that Maimonides and Calvin assign to equivocation in their accounts of religious language.

Rather than attempt to say a bit about each paper, I will restrict my comments to two contributions: Haldane's "The Source and Destination of Thought" and Houston's "William Alston on Referring to God". Haldane develops a semantic version of the cosmological argument, what he calls the "Prime Thinker" argument. According to Haldane, neither of the two standard naturalistic accounts of concept-acquisition — abstractionism and innatism — are satisfactory. More promising is the Wittgensteinian view that concepts are acquired through the learning of general terms. But, says Haldane, this explanation generates a vicious regress: "The Wittgensteinian proposal that concepts are inculcated through membership of a linguistic community ... is not itself ultimately explanatory because for any natural language user it requires us to postulate a prior one. This regress will be halted if there is an actualising source whose own