

## Naturalism without Physicalism: what is it and how plausible is it?

### *Physicalism.*

Def. 1. The whole truth about the [relevant portion of the] world is contained in a completed version of modern physics.

Def. 2. Completed physics, plus the forever unknowable quiddities of the properties science unearths.

### *Naturalism*

First, there is 1. Above, the most austere physicalism. Then there is 2, with the admission unknown intrinsic properties of an entirely mysterious sort. Then one branch is

3. The intrinsic qualities are identical to or in some way continuous with the qualities we experience in sensation/perception, but without any admixture of consciousness.

4. As 3, but with the admixture of consciousness, or some, proto version of that, if that makes sense.

Another branch, this time from 1 or 2, goes

5. Emergent property dualism, with epiphenomenalism.

6. Emergent property dualism with interaction.

7. Emergent substance dualism with epiphenomenalism.

8. Emergent substance dualism with interaction.

There is another different line of development that concerns the nature of causation, which could be combined in various ways with what goes above. These would be

9. Everything closed under physics.

10. Everything closed under *physical* laws, which would allow for emergent, but non-teleological laws within the physical.

If one allowed any of the interactionist options mentioned above one would need

11. All purely physical systems closed under physics.

Or

12. All purely physical systems closed under *physical* laws.

One might wonder whether it makes sense to allow

13. Interactionism, but without any irreducibly teleological laws.

There is also the option for which Nagel in *Mind and Cosmos* opts, following Aristotle;

14 Teleology is present in the physical system.

15. Nothing mental that emerges can survive the death of its body.

Is there anything above that could not be called 'naturalism' or even 'materialism'?

Strawson has firm objections to emergence, at least of the mental from the non-mental., if not within the realm of the development of the mental itself.

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Strawson's argument for panpsychism can be reconstructed as follows.

(1) Reductionism about experience is false.

(2) Physicalism is true.

(3) If reductionism about experience is false, and if physicalism is true, then, if ‘physical stuff is, in itself, in its fundamental nature, something wholly and utterly non-experiential’, there must be ‘brute emergence’ of the experiential.

Therefore

(4) If ‘physical stuff is...utterly non-experiential’ then there must be brute emergence of the experiential.

(5) Brute emergence is an incoherent idea.

Therefore

(6) Physical stuff is not in its fundamental nature utterly non-experiential.

*Naturalism without physicalism..? (i) McDowell.*

John McDowell.

The point is clearly not restricted to ethics. Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands beyond those of ethics. Such initiation is a normal part of what it is for a human being to come to maturity, and that is why, although the structure of the space of reasons is alien to the layout of nature conceived as the realm of law, it does not take on the remoteness from the human that rampant Platonism envisages. If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one’s eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature. I cannot think of a good short English expression for this, but it is what figures in German philosophy as *Bildung*. (1994: 84)

McDowell says

I should have restricted myself to the obvious claim that the second-nature is no less natural than the first-nature. There was no need to offer to make a connection between them beyond their both being natural. (2008: 221)

Now my use of these labels...comes in contexts in which I am considering the plausibility of theses to the effect that some region of human life exemplifies free responsiveness to reasons, with such theses understood to imply that the characteristic phenomena of those parts of human life are beyond the reach of natural-scientific understanding. And the point of these labels is captured by this thought: by dint of exploiting, in an utterly intuitive way, ideas like that of the patterns characteristic of the life of animals of a certain kind, we can insist that such phenomena, even though they are beyond the reach of natural-scientific understanding, are perfectly real, without thereby relegating them to the sphere of the occult or supernatural. (2008: 217-8)

He goes on to say that he is not denying that some things may be genuinely supernatural:

But for my purposes it is enough to consider a position that, without necessarily ruling out supernatural phenomena altogether, holds that they had better not be taken to include phenomena that are biological, in the sense that they are characteristic of the lives of animals of our species. The point of my call for a relaxation is this: the fact that such phenomena are natural, in the sense of not being supernatural, provides no grounds for supposing that the conceptual apparatus that captures free responsiveness as such must be naturalizable, in any sense congenial to scientific naturalism. (218)

I call this a transcendental argument because it is roughly of this form.

- (1) We know that human beings are just natural biological entities.
- (2) We also know that we are free rational beings.
- (3) And we know that rationality and freedom cannot be reduced, in any sense, to natural scientific processes.
- (4) It follows from this that we, as living, rational human animals, possess a nature in addition to the nature that physical science explores.

McDowell says of the ‘sphere of the occult and supernatural’ that it is

- a region whose extent has shrunk for us with the advent of a modern scientific outlook, in the most extreme version of the outlook to nothing at all. (217)

#### 6.8. *Naturalism without physicalism..? (ii) Price and Rorty.*

Price distinguishes between two kinds of naturalism, which he calls *object naturalism* and *subject naturalism*.

According to this second view, philosophy needs to begin with what science tells us *about ourselves*. Science tells us that we humans are natural creatures, and if the claims and ambitions of philosophy conflict with this view, then philosophy needs to give way. This is naturalism in the sense of Hume, then, and, arguably Nietzsche. (2004: 73)

Price endorses the *priority thesis*

Subject naturalism is theoretically prior to object naturalism, because the latter depends on validation from a subject naturalist perspective. (74)

...common candidates [for “hard problems” for the object naturalist] include meaning, value, mathematical truth, causation and physical modality, and various aspects of mentality... (73)

This is invoked later

...how are we to place moral facts, mathematical facts, meaning facts, and so on? (74)

Rorty, in his defence of ‘quietism’ is more direct than Price and has no reservations.

For the subject naturalist, the import of Price’s dictum that “we are natural creatures in a natural environment” is that we should be wary of drawing lines between kinds of organisms in non-behavioral and non-physiological terms. This means that we should not use terms such as “intentionality”, or “consciousness”, or “representation” unless we can specify, at least roughly, what sort of behavior suffices to show the presence of the reference of these terms.

For example, if we want to say ...that there is something it is like to be a bat but nothing it is like to be an earthworm...we should be prepared to explain how we can tell – to specify what behavioral or physiological facts are relevant to the claim [otherwise] we are inventing spooks to make jobs for ghost-busters. (2010: 61-2)

Facing the suggestion that this ‘emphasis on behavioral criteria is reminiscent of the positivists verificationism’, he says that it is not a product of a general theory of meaning but an insistence that

...rather the traditional philosophical distinctions complicate narratives of biological evolution to no good purpose. (62)

If it is not clear how McDowell relates to the features of liberal naturalism mentioned above, it is, I think, clear that neither Rorty nor Price would have anything to do with any kind of dualism or interactionism.

*Conclusion.*

The theme has been ‘naturalism without physicalism’. I believe that I have shown at least three things.

(i) McDowell follows up from Davidson's rather enigmatic appeal to 'normativity', and ties it to a certain Wittgensteinian spirit of philosophical 'quietism', but fails to explain how the doctrine of second nature that is the product can be any sort of naturalism.

(ii) Price and Rorty stress the pragmatism that comes from a Quinean foundation, and thereby give a scientific twist – but a social scientific one – to the move away from the dominance of physics.

(iii) Quine can be seen as a unifying factor in all the above cases, surprisingly even in the case of McDowell.

But it seems that the attempt to free naturalism from the toils of science, following the emphasis on normativity, fails to deliver anything clear enough to convincing.