THE CHARM OF NATURALISM
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I want to make some very general observations on what many see and applaud as a broadly "naturalistic" turn in recent philosophy. There seems little doubt at first glance that there is such a thing, at least judging from what many now call what they are doing. Something known as "epistemology naturalized" has been with us for some time. Or at least a recommendation to that effect was made some time ago. More recently we have been encouraged in such enterprises as "naturalized semantics," "naturalizing belief," and even more generally, "intentionality naturalized." And now there is the even more general project (why not go all the way?) of "naturalizing the mind" (the title of a delightful recent book). I have even seen something called "naturalizing responsibility." And there are no doubt many other efforts at "naturalization."

Is there more to all this than just a trendy label? What, if anything, is behind it? Is it something distinctive, and new? And if so, is it a good thing?

These questions are not easy to answer. The idea of "nature," or "natural" objects or relations, or modes of investigation that are "naturalistic," has been applied more widely, at more different times and places, and for more different purposes, than probably any other notion in the whole history of human thought. The earliest turn towards naturalism that I have heard of was in the fifth century B.C. And they seem to have been happening every so often ever since.

When we look at this most recent enthusiasm for what its proponents call "naturalism," I think we find that, whatever they are excited and optimistic about, it is not naturalism as such. With two exceptions that I will mention in a moment, I think there is nothing in naturalism alone that is sufficiently substantive to be philosophically controversial. What is usually at issue is not whether to be "naturalistic" or not, but rather what is and what is not to be included in one's conception of "nature." That is the real question, and that is what leads to deep disagreements. And as far as I can see, those disagreements are not themselves to be settled by what can be recognized as straightforwardly "naturalistic" means. So one thing that seems not to have been "naturalized" is naturalism itself. If it were, the resulting naturalistic view of the world might be impressively comprehensive and illuminating, and superior to views of other kinds, but if it had those virtues it would have them on its own merits, not simply because it is an instance of something called "naturalism."

"Naturalism" seems to me in this and other respects rather like "World Peace." Almost everyone swears allegiance to it, and is willing to march under its banner. But disputes can still break out about what it is appropriate or acceptable to do in the name of that slogan. And like world peace, once you start specifying concretely exactly what it involves and how to achieve it, it becomes increasingly

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difficult to reach and to sustain a consistent and exclusive "naturalism." There is pressure on the one hand to include more and more within your conception of "nature," so it loses its definiteness and restrictiveness. Or, if the conception is kept fixed and restrictive, there is pressure on the other hand to distort or even to deny the very phenomena that a naturalistic study—and especially a naturalistic study of human beings—is supposed to explain. The source of these two conflicting movements of thought is what I want to illustrate.

But the first thing to do with naturalism, as with any philosophical doctrine or "ism," is to ask what it is against. What does the so-called "naturalistic turn" turn away from, or deny?

Here we have to distinguish two aspects of naturalism. There is naturalism as a view of what is so, or the way things are, or what there is in the world. And there is naturalism as a way of studying or investigating what is so in the world. A naturalistic study of human beings would study and understood them in relation to the rest of nature. Obviously, what you think the natural world is like will have an effect on how you investigate the things in it, and what you think is the best way to understand them. The two aspects of naturalism are connected.

Under the first aspect, as a doctrine about what is so, or what there is, naturalism says that there is nothing, or that nothing is so, except what holds in nature, in the natural world. That is not very informative so far, but even without specifying it more precisely it already seems to exclude some things that many people have apparently believed in. Naturalism on any reading is opposed to supernaturalism. Here we have what looks like a substantive issue, or at any rate something controversial. Not everyone regards exclusive naturalism as beyond question or as an unqualified good thing.

This is the first of the two exceptions I mentioned. By "supernaturalism" I mean the invocation of an agent or force which somehow stands outside the familiar natural world and so whose doings cannot be understood as part of it. Most metaphysical systems of the past included some such agent. A naturalistic conception of the world would be opposed to all of them.

Supernaturalism as a doctrine about what is so can have consequences for the study of human beings—in particular, how they believe and come to know things. In epistemology there have been many supernaturalists. Descartes thought that human knowledge cannot be accounted for without a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God who guarantees the truth of what human beings clearly and distinctly perceive to be true. For Berkeley, God's agency is the only active force there is in the world of things we perceive and know about. Without him there would be nothing for us to know. Even Locke relied on a benevolent agent as the ultimate source of those cognitive faculties which are all that human beings need to get along in the world they find themselves in. These are not fully naturalistic accounts of human knowledge. They appeal to something beyond the natural world. In going against this supernatural consensus, Hume is almost alone among the greats. His credentials as a fully naturalized—or at least as a non-supernaturalized—metaphysician and epistemologist are impeccable. The same
is probably true of John Stuart Mill, if he counts as one of the greats. But there have not been many.

In the sense in which naturalism is opposed to supernaturalism, there has been no recent naturalistic turn in philosophy. Most philosophers for at least one hundred years have been naturalists in the non-supernaturalist sense. They have taken it for granted that any satisfactory account of how human belief and knowledge in general are possible will involve only processes and events of the intelligible natural world, without the intervention or reassurance of any supernatural agent. Many people regard that as on the whole a good thing. But it is nothing new.

In fact, the long-standing naturalistic consensus is being challenged more directly now, when the virtues of naturalism are being so loudly proclaimed, than it was during the long period when they went more or less without saying. Alvin Plantinga, for example, argues that no satisfactory general explanation of human knowledge can be given on a naturalistic basis. He thinks that justification or warrant, which is essential to knowledge, can be understood only in terms of the proper function of human cognitive capacities. And that in turn, he thinks, requires a divine designer of those capacities. Successful epistemology therefore "requires supernaturalism,"3 in particular, what he calls "theism."

He is apparently not alone in that belief. If Plantinga and his friends convince others, there will be a general turn away from naturalism. That shows that it is naturalism that is now old hat. It is not something towards which there has been a recent, glorious turning.

Even supernaturalists like Plantinga and Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and others would still count as "naturalized epistemologists" in at least one current sense that has been given to that phrase. Epistemology has been said to be "naturalized or naturalistic" as long as it tries to explain only how human beings do in fact arrive at their beliefs rather than how they ought to arrive at them.5 If that is enough to make an epistemology naturalistic, then virtually every philosopher in history has been a naturalized epistemologist. They have all been concerned to describe and understand the human condition as it is, to see and to explain how we actually get all the knowledge we've obviously got. If God plays a role in human beings' coming to know things, that will be part of the answer to the purely "descriptive" question of how human beings in fact arrive at their knowledge. Even supernaturalism as a view of what is so is not incompatible with naturalized epistemology in this curiously weak, so-called purely "descriptive" sense.

This shows that the first aspect of naturalism dominates over the second. If you do not start out with any restrictions at all on what the world you are studying contains, studying things only as part of the natural world does not amount to anything very definite. Some determinate conception of what the natural world is like is needed to give substance to the claim that one's epistemology, or one's study of any other aspect of the world, is naturalistic.

The second exception to the idea that there is no real dispute about naturalism is perhaps best illustrated (at least in epistemology) by Quine, who after all, as far as I know, is the person who coined the phrase "epistemology naturalized." He
was responding to Carnap, with whom he had a real dispute. Carnap sought a reduction of all talk of external bodies to talk only about possible sense experiences. It was intended as what came to be called a “rational reconstruction” of our science or knowledge. It would have shown how our conception of the world could be supported solely by materials to be found in immediate sense experience. But no satisfactory translation or reduction was found. The idea of “rational reconstruction” does not in itself require that statements about the external world must be *translatable* into statements about immediate sense experiences. It requires only that it be shown how our beliefs about the world *could be* justified by information that we *could* get through experience or observation. That general task of what might be called “hypothetical (or reconstructed) justification” was pretty much the task of analytic epistemology through the middle fifty years or so of this century. One form it took, and perhaps still takes, is confirmation theory.

Quine’s so-called “naturalistic” turn was to say “why all this creative reconstruction, all this make believe?” Why ask how statements of the kinds human beings believe could be confirmed by sense experiences they could conceivably have? As Quine put it: “Better to discover how science is in fact developed and learned than to fabricate a fictitious structure to a similar effect.” The question is how science is “developed and learned.” It is not just a question of the logical relations among the propositions human beings believe. Something is at stake here between Quine and Carnap, but it is not the merits of naturalism. It is really a dispute about what *philosophy* is or ought to be doing. Quine obviously has no quarrel with the idea of reducing one domain of discourse to another, if you can do it. Carnap and the positivists obviously have no quarrel with the idea of natural scientific studies of human belief and knowledge, or even of institutions like science. Naturalism as a way of investigating the world is thought by all to be nothing but a good thing. But for logical positivism no such studies could be part of philosophy. Philosophy could be only *a priori*. Its only subject-matter could therefore be the “concepts,” or the logical relations among the “principles,” employed in the sciences. Its only task could be “analysis.” It could not pronounce professionally on the actual acquisition and development of science, but only on what it called its “logic.”

Quine’s rejection of the very notion of the *a priori* left him with no such constraints. Study human knowledge in the same way you would study anything else in nature, he says, and don’t worry much about what label you attach to what you are doing. That meant that a task continuous with what epistemologists had attempted in the past could now proceed scientifically. Epistemology would in that sense be part of natural science, and it would study the acquisition, transmission, and growth of natural science. The idea is, in Quine’s words, “that knowledge, mind, and meaning are part of the same world that they have to do with, and that they are to be studied in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science. There is no place for a prior philosophy.”

That same empirical spirit is present in the study of the history of science, which could also be described as a form of naturalism in the investigation of human knowledge. The history of science has of course been with us almost as long as
science has, but its flourishing in the 1960s was in part also a reaction against the abstractions of logical positivism. The positivists focussed on what is known, or on the form of what is known, rather than on the knowing of it, or on the processes of finding it out. They did not study science as a human enterprise that develops in different ways at different times as a result of different sorts of forces. That could not be part of philosophy for them. The growth of the history of science in the last thirty years has changed and enormously enriched the picture. And it certainly has been a very good thing.

Quine himself at one time seemed not so sure. He thought the historically-oriented work of people like Kuhn, Polanyi, and Hanson had "loosed a wave . . . of epistemological nihilism" (as he put it) and tended to "discredit the idea of observation," to "belittle the role of evidence and to accentuate cultural relativism." These are curious complaints for a fully naturalized epistemologist to make. Scientific epistemology must be prepared to accept whatever the empirical study of human beings actually reveals. If it turns out that human knowledge is acquired without there being a firm, fixed line between so-called "observational" and "non-observational" terms, or if what a philosophical "theory of evidence" calls "evidence" is never actually appealed to in the acceptance and rejection of scientific hypotheses, then so be it. That will have to be accepted as the way knowledge is in fact acquired. If cultural relativism turns out to be the best way to account for what happens in human life, the committed naturalist has to accept cultural relativism. (What he should do first of all, of course, is try to figure out what the term 'cultural relativism' actually means. But that is another story.)

The point is that conclusions of naturalized epistemology can be drawn only from the study of what actually goes on with human beings. If it turns out that women's knowledge differs in certain ways from men's, for instance, or poor southern blacks' knowledge from that of affluent urban whites, that is something that a naturalized epistemologist should welcome, or at any rate should not resist. Studies in the sociology, economics, and politics of knowledge could also be called "naturalistic epistemology" too. The lively interest in such matters these days is certainly on the whole a good thing. Not because naturalism is a good thing, but because coming to see more and more differences among things in the world—if they are actually there—is almost always a good thing.

I want to draw attention to a conflict or tension that I think is present in a commitment to naturalism. It arises most clearly when we move beyond questions about this or that culture or this or that institution within a culture to that more general level at which philosophers typically ask about apparently universal features of human life. Now I mean naturalism in every area of philosophy, not just epistemology.

Naturalism as a view of what is so, or what the world is like, must be given some determinate and restricted content. That means that anything that human beings think about, believe in, care about, or value that lies outside that restricted conception cannot really be seen as part of the natural world in which they live.
But since it cannot be denied that people do have the very thoughts, beliefs, values, and concerns in question, the contents of those attitudes will have to be understood and accounted for in terms of something less than their possible truth. What human beings think, feel, and care about must be fully expressible somehow within the restricted resources available in the naturalist’s world. And that can lead to distortion. If, to accommodate psychological phenomena and their contents in all their complexity, the restrictions are lifted, naturalism to that extent loses its bite. This is the basic dilemma I want to bring out.

I can illustrate it by starting with an extreme naturalist view. I would say that it is a ridiculously extreme position, were it not for the fact that many philosophers I respect appear to hold it. It says that the natural world is exhausted by all the physical facts. That is all and only what the natural world amounts to on this view; there is nothing else in nature. First of all, this view is probably not itself reached by purely naturalistic means. It not only states all the physical facts, which presumably can be determined by broadly naturalistic means. But it goes on to say that those are all the facts there are—that they are the whole truth about the world. And that claim is more than the conjunction of all the physical facts. It excludes everything else from being true, as they alone do not. Is the exhaustiveness that is essential to physicalism something that is naturalistically or physicalistically arrived at? That is one question.

Second, a natural world conceived of only as the totality of all the physical facts obviously does not contain any psychological facts. There are no truths to the effect that someone believes, knows, feels, wants, prefers, or values anything. Of course, anyone who holds that the physical is all there is might hold that everything we think along those lines is really just physical facts in disguise. In any case, that would leave no psychological facts for a naturalistic theory of the world to explain. The study of human beings on such a restricted physicalist conception would be just a study of physical goings-on, including some that happen to go on in human organisms.

The case is extreme because it does not include very much for a study of human beings to explain. Without at least biological facts in your naturalistic conception of the world you will not have much to investigate that is distinctively or interestingly human. But if the physicalist conception is expanded to include biological facts as well, what exactly are such facts thought to add? Do biological facts include the “intentional” facts of human beings believing, knowing, feeling, wanting, preferring, and valuing certain things? Some would say not, since these are just “folk” ways of speaking. Organisms inhabiting the natural world are not be thought of as having any such attitudes, or as acting from them, on that view. That would mean that naturalism could never be faced with the problem of explaining how and why human beings come to believe and feel and want the things they do. There would be no such facts. Naturalism as to what is so would be so restrictive as to leave naturalism as a method of investigation with much less to do.

There is an embarrassing absurdity in this position which is revealed as soon as the naturalist reflects and acknowledges that he believes his naturalistic theory of the world. If persons with attitudes like belief and knowledge are not really part
of nature, he cannot consistently say that about himself. I mean he cannot say it and consistently regard what he is saying as true. In fact he cannot say anything and regard it as true, or think of himself as saying it, if he holds such a restricted naturalistic conception.

It looks as if any sensible naturalism will have to acknowledge that human beings do in fact have a complex set of attitudes, feelings, evaluations, institutions, and so on. If it is going to explain what is so, it will have to explain how and why human beings think and feel and act in all the ways they do. It will offer those explanations by appealing not only to the ways human beings are, but also to facts of the natural world surrounding and affecting those human beings. To explain why people believe that there are such things as rectangular tables, for example, or red apples, it will trace the connections between human beings who perceive things and a world that contains rectangular tables and red apples. It is because things are as they are in the natural world, and because humans are as they are, and interact as they do with their surroundings, that they get the beliefs they do and are on the whole right about the natural world.

Even this simple general picture leaves room for human attitudes directed towards objects or states of affairs which restrictive forms of naturalism can find no room for within their conception of the world. For example, many philosophers now hold that things as they are in the world of nature are not really colored. There are rectangular tables in the natural world, perhaps, and there are apples in the natural world, but no red apples (and no yellow or green ones, either). This view appears to be held largely on the grounds that colors are not part of "the causal order of the world" or do not figure essentially in any purely scientific account of what is so. Scientific naturalism accordingly excludes them.

But even on this view those false beliefs and illusory perceptions of the colors of things must themselves be acknowledged as part of nature. A naturalistic investigator must somehow make sense of them as the psychological phenomena they are. Since he holds that there is no such fact as an object's being colored, he cannot specify the contents of those perceptions and beliefs in terms of any conditions that he believes actually hold in the world. If he could, that would amount to believing that there are colored things in the world after all. Scientific naturalism denies that. But still, the beliefs and perceptions with those particular contents must be accounted for.

An easy way around this difficulty has suggested itself to many philosophers, at least in this case. They take the apparently more sensible scientific naturalist view that there really is no systematic error in our beliefs about the colors of things. The beliefs are not in general false, since there is something in the restricted naturalist's world to give content to them after all. Beliefs about the colors of objects, it is said, are really beliefs about certain dispositions which those objects have to produce perceptions of certain kinds in certain kinds of perceivers in certain kinds of circumstances. Objects in nature really do have those dispositions. So the beliefs are preserved as largely true. The color of an object depends on what kinds of perceptions it is disposed to produce.
A dispositionalist theory of this kind can succeed only if it can specify the contents of the perceptions of color which it says physical objects have dispositions to produce. They cannot be identified as perceptions of an object's having some quality that objects actually have in that restricted naturalist's world. They cannot be identified simply as perceptions of an object's having a disposition to produce just these perceptions under certain circumstances. The question is: which perceptions? There must be some way of identifying the perceptions independently of the object's disposition to produce them. So it looks as if they must be identified only in terms of some so-called "intrinsic" quality that they have. Not a quality that the perception is a perception of, but simply a quality of the perception itself.

I doubt that we can make the right kind of sense of perceptions of color in this way. So I doubt that any dispositional theory can give a correct account of the contents of our beliefs about the colors of things. The way we do it in real life, I believe, is to identify the contents of perceptions of color by means of the colors of the objects they are typically perceptions of. It is only because we can make intelligible non-dispositional ascriptions of colors to objects that we can acknowledge and identify perceptions as perceptions of this or that color. But if that is so, it requires our accepting the fact that objects in the world are colored, and that is what the restrictive naturalist who denies the reality or the objectivity of color cannot do.

None of this is something I can hope to establish here. The point is only to draw attention to what I see as a general problem of restrictive naturalism. Exclude colored objects in general from the world, and you are in danger of losing the capacity to recognize perceptions of and beliefs about the colors of things. Include colored objects, and the contents of those perceptions and beliefs no longer go beyond what is so in the natural world.

I have found in my experience that this tension is not widely felt or acknowledged. Most philosophers regard it as so obvious and uncontroversial that colors are not real, or are in some way only "subjective," that they simply do not recognize what I think is the distortion or incoherence they are committed to. That is something I continue to ponder, and try to get to the bottom of. But a problem of this same form is at least sometimes recognized elsewhere. Two large areas of philosophy are problem areas precisely because some form of restrictive naturalism looks like the only possibility in those cases. I have in mind the areas of mathematics and morality, or evaluation generally.

Human beings have evaluative beliefs and attitudes; they regard some things as better than others, they think that a certain thing is the thing to do on a certain occasion, and so on. To understand and acknowledge the presence of these human attitudes in the world, the naturalist must understand their contents—what those human beings actually think or believe. Naturalism is widely understood to imply that no evaluative states of affairs or properties are part of the world of nature. On that assumption, either evaluative thoughts and beliefs take as their "objects" something that is not to be found in the natural world at all, or their
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contents are equivalent to something that is true in that world, so they are not really evaualive.

One way to embrace the first option would be to say with G. E. Moore that evaluative statements are assertions about a "non-natural" world, or that they ascribe "non-natural" properties to objects in the natural world. We might then wonder what that "non-natural" domain is like, and how it is related to what goes on before our eyes. And whatever it is, we might wonder why we should ever take any interest in it. Values might then be other-worldly, and have nothing to do with us. If all that is just too mysterious, we could keep to this first option by saying instead that evaluative attitudes do not have contents that are true or false at all. In evaluating something we are prescribing, recommending, approving, or encouraging something, but not ascribing any properties to it or saying anything true of it beyond the "natural" properties we think it has got.

This last idea, I believe, distorts our actual thought and practice. It cannot give the right kind of sense to the evaluative thoughts we have or the inferences we regard as valid when combining evaluative and non-evaluative propositions. Again, that is not something I am going to try to prove here. I simply draw attention to the source of the pressure towards some such emotivist or expressivist theory. It comes from a restricted naturalistic conception of what the world contains. Nature itself, it is said, is value-free. So evaluations cannot be strictly speaking either true or false. That is one alternative. It is not an inevitable consequence of a restricted naturalistic view of the world. The same restrictive view of nature is what leads a non-expressivivist like Moore to the idea of values as "non-natural" or in some sense "other-worldly."

Dissatisfaction with both non-naturalism and expressivism leads the restrictive naturalist to the second option, and so to some form of reductionism. Human attitudes that appear to be evaluative are to be seen as attitudes with contents which can and do hold in the restricted natural world after all. They can be true or false, but the conditions of their truth are purely natural and so non-evaluative.

If such a reduction is expressed in terms of the dispositions natural objects or states of affairs have to produce certain reactions in human beings, it faces the same kind of problem as the dispositionalist view of colors. Those reactions themselves must somehow be identified, and if they are left as reactions with evaluative contents no naturalistic progress will have been made. Reductionism threatens to take away the evaluative aspect of the attitudes, feelings, and reactions that objects are said to produce, just as I think it cannot make the appropriate identifications in the case of perceptions of color. It cannot get the contents of our beliefs or attitudes right. To insist that evaluative attitudes simply must be so reducible, and to restrict oneself to reduced or non-evaluative terms alone, would be in effect to eliminate the evaluative vocabulary altogether. Everything we say or think that is intelligible and either true or false would have to be said or thought without it. Here again it is the restrictive naturalism that produces the pressure.
The same pattern is present in the philosophy of mathematics, where the quandary is perhaps most obvious, and has certainly been widely acknowledged. There is no question that we have mathematical and logical knowledge. Could there be an explanation exclusively in restricted naturalistic terms of how we come to have that knowledge? It would have to make sense of what we believe in mathematics and logic, and could it do so by giving an account of the conditions under which such things are true or false? If so, would that mean that mathematical and logical facts are to be understood as part of nature? Many would insist that even if in some sense or other it is true that seven plus five is twelve, it is not a natural fact, not a fact of the natural world. But we do all believe it, even know it to be true. A restrictive naturalist who holds that what mathematical statements assert is not part of the natural world he believes in would have to explain our knowledge of logic and mathematics without himself appealing to any mathematical or logical facts at all.

This has been tried, or at least proposed. But when we look at what has been the most widely-canvassed strategy for carrying it out I think everyone has to confess to a certain dissatisfaction. The main idea has been to locate the source of mathematical and logical truth somehow "in us," and not in the world independent of us. All such truths have been said to be "analytic" or "true solely in virtue of the meanings of their constituent terms," something which "we" are in some sense solely responsible for. Since words mean only what we determine or "decide" they are to mean, logical and mathematical truths are said to be true, if at all, only "by convention." These are all attempts to make sense of mathematical and logical knowledge on the assumption that all of it is "empty" or, in the positivists' phrase, "devoid of factual content," and says nothing about the way the world is. Anyone who holds such a view would have to account for human beings' believing certain things which he himself does not acknowledge to be states of affairs that hold in the world as he conceives of it.

There is good reason to think that no such theorist would be equipped even to identify, let alone explain, the mathematical knowledge we all have. For one thing, no naturalistic reduction looks even remotely plausible in this case. Facts about what human beings do, how they think or speak, even how they decide to think and speak, or what conventions or rules they have adopted—all this seems in principle insufficient to express the contents of the things we believe when we believe that seven plus five equals twelve or that everything that is both red and round is red. All of human beings' doing or deciding or intending whatever they do is contingent, something that could have been otherwise. But it could not have been otherwise than that seven plus five is twelve or that everything that is both red and round is red. No contingent truths, however important, could be adequate to express such necessities.

What is more, any naturalism that takes a specifically scientific form, and says that the natural world is the world described exclusively in the terms of the natural sciences, would seem forced to accept truths of logic and mathematics anyway. They are needed in the formulation of physical, chemical, and biological theories. And in any case, it is completely unrealistic to expect a naturalistic theorist of any
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persuasion to get along without any mathematical and logical beliefs of his own. The acceptance of some such truths might even be essential to coherent thought; we could not think without them. If that is so, is that a natural fact, a fact of the natural world? If that meant that it had to be contingent, it is hard to see how it could be. But if for whatever reason we grant the indispensability of logical truths for the possibility of thinking at all, then we have to face the consequences of our really accepting it. That is, we must acknowledge that we do in fact think in those ways, that we do believe that everything that is both red and round is red, that seven plus five equals twelve, and so on. We thereby acknowledge that those and other such demonstrable or undeniable propositions are true.

If the naturalist does or must accept logical and mathematical truths in order to have a determinate conception the world at all, what becomes of the idea that those propositions do not state anything that holds in the natural world? What is the conception of nature that is said to exclude them? It can no longer be identified as simply the world that a scientific naturalist believes in, since if he now accepts logical and mathematical propositions, they are not excluded from what he believes. If this still counts as naturalism, it will be a more open-minded or more expansive naturalism. It does not insist on, or limit itself to, a boundary fixed in advance. It will have expanded to include whatever has been found to be needed in order to make sense of everything that is so in the natural world. What cannot be avoided is to be accepted. To say that not everything that is accepted is accepted as part of nature raises the question of how the naturalist distinguishes what he thinks of as the natural world from all the rest of what he takes to be the case. And more importantly, what, if anything, now turns on making that distinction?

The same question arises in the case of evaluation. If the goodness or other evaluative aspect of something is not a “natural” quality of it, what exactly is a natural quality? After years of effort G. E. Moore admitted that the best he could come up with was that a natural property is a property “with which it is the business of the natural sciences or of psychology to deal.” But if that is what a natural property is, then the famous “naturalistic fallacy”—the mistake of giving a “naturalistic” definition of ‘good’—would be simply the attempt to replace ethics by one of the natural sciences. “Non-naturalism” in ethics would then be nothing more than the view that ethics is not one of the natural sciences. There would be nothing other-worldly or mysterious about that kind of non-naturalism. Who would not want to be an ethical non-naturalist on that definition?

To agree that ethics is not one of the natural sciences, or that goodness or badness is not a scientific matter, is not to concede that nothing is better than anything else, or that no evaluations are true or false. Not everything that is so is the subject-matter of some natural science. If it is true that evaluations cannot be reduced in general to non-evaluative propositions, then our understanding of evaluations cannot be seen as built up out of non-evaluative ingredients alone. Anyone who could identify the presence of evaluative attitudes in the human beings he observes must understand what evaluative attitudes are, even if he does
not agree with those he discerns in others. That suggests that he must have some evaluative attitudes of his own, on pain of his not being able to recognize them in others. If he acknowledges those attitudes of his, his total view of what is so will contain evaluative states of affairs. He will hold that certain things are better than others, that a certain thing is the thing to do on a certain occasion, and so on. His conception of what is so will have been forced to expand, just as I think it must expand in order to recognize beliefs in logical and mathematical truths, and perceptions and beliefs concerning the colors of things. It expands in each case into a more open-minded or less restricted naturalism.

What I am calling more open-minded or expansive naturalism says we must accept everything we find ourselves committed to in accounting for everything that we agree is so and want to explain. We want to explain the thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, and evaluative attitudes that we think people have got. If mathematical and logical truths have to be accepted in order to make sense of those attitudes, then they must be accepted, however in some sense “non-natural” they might seem. If some evaluative propositions must be endorsed in order even to recognize the evaluative attitudes of others, then evaluative states of affairs must be included too, however difficult it might be to decide which particular evaluations are correct. If we have to hold that objects are colored in order to specify and acknowledge all the perceptions and beliefs that we know people have, then the colors of things must be allowed into the picture, and not in reductionist form.

Those who remain committed to a determinate and restricted conception of the natural world will have to locate the contents of all those attitudes somehow within that restricted world. If that leads to a distorted conception of the attitudes that people on earth have actually got, as I think it does, the determinate and restricted naturalism is what is responsible for the distortion. A more open-minded or expansive naturalism will admit states of affairs and psychological phenomena that are found problematic from a more restricted naturalistic point of view. With no restrictive commitment in advance, a more open-minded naturalism will feel no pressure to exclude from the picture anything that is needed.

By now it should begin to look as if this expandable or more open-minded form of naturalism does not amount to anything very substantive or controversial. It is “open” because it is not committed in advance to any determinate and therefore potentially restrictive conception of what is so. Rather than calling it open-minded naturalism we could just as well drop the term ‘naturalism’ and call it open-mindedness. It says that we must accept as true everything we find we have to accept in order to make sense of everything that we think is part of the world. If that is still called “naturalism,” the term by now is little more than a slogan on a banner raised to attract the admiration of those who agree that no supernatural agents are at work in the world.

Notes

--- Presidential Address of the Pacific Division ---


4. Ibid. p. 237.


6. W. V. Quine, op. cit., p. 75.

7. Quine, op. cit., p. 78.

