

## Why there is no such a thing as naturalism.

### 1. Preliminaries.

Naturalism, I say, affirms the following proposition.

(1) The ‘natural world’ that we see around us, taken historically, in its past and future, is an entity sufficient unto itself. In particular, it does not require any other realm or entity either to explain how it came into existence, or as a precondition of its existence.

(2) The claim that the natural world does not require any other realm or entity to ‘ground’ it, applies not only to the world itself, but also to the world as it can be known by us.

Our conception of the natural world

(a) depends on the nature of our experience: another way of putting this is to say that there is no autonomous, adequate notion of the world as conceived according to *scientific realism* that does not depend on a more traditional empiricism, which takes human experience as a primitive – that is, as something the basic qualitative nature of which cannot be thought of as being part of the physical world.

(b) That it also depends in a substantive way on the existence of a Platonic realm that is not in itself naturalistic.

(c) This latter ties in with the former because the Platonic realm is essentially noetic – it is, as the neo-Platonists believed, a mind not a set of objects, and so our natural world depends on the realms of experience and thought, the latter, at least, not being human thought.

### 2. The real power of the knowledge argument.

Physicalism’s real predicament, as has been brought out by the KA, can be represented in two propositions.

(1) Standard physicalism cannot capture the *qualitative* nature or aspect or reality.

(2) The qualitative is an essential feature of any conception of the physical that goes beyond the purely abstract and mathematically expressed.

These two together entail

(3) Standard physicalism cannot capture any conception of the physical that goes beyond the purely abstract or mathematically expressed.

The generalization of the knowledge argument can be expressed as follows.

Take any property, P, which is a quality or has a qualitative aspect, then it will be true of any subject, S, who has no experiential grasp on that qualitative aspect, but otherwise has full knowledge of all matters relating to P, that S lacks knowledge of P’s qualitative aspect.

No-one, I think, would wish to deny the following:

(1) Our naïve, common-sensical or manifest image of the physical world essentially has qualitative features: that is, in addition to formal or mathematical features it has qualitative features which cannot be reduced to the formal ones.

From what has already been argued, it is clear that

(2) These qualitative features derive, via the ‘transparency’ of perception, from the nature of qualia.

As qualia contribute an essential component in the common-sensical conception of the

physical, it would seem that

(3) The nature of qualia cannot be *analysed* as some function of, or on, the operations of the physical, naively conceived.

It is more or less explicit for the physicalist that

(i) we can have a grasp on the nature of the physical in scientific terms.

What I suspect most physicalists accept but which is not discussed in this context is

(ii) our concept of the physical is not purely mathematical and formal but involves a qualitative component.

(iii) we can only have a clear grasp on a quality – be able to imagine what it is like – if it is ultimately based on qualia: a quality is a ‘transparent’ projection of [some aspect of] a quale.

From this it follows

(iv) our conception of the physical is conceptually dependent on the nature of qualia.

From this it follows that

(v) qualia or qualia possessing states cannot be analysed or explicated in terms of some function of or operation on the physical, as independently conceived.

### 3. *Empiricism and Physicalism.*

The case I have been presenting can be put in a more formal manner, as follows.

1. Qualities based on the ‘what it is like’ of experience are essential to our ‘common-sense’ or ‘manifest image’ world, and to our conception of the features in it.
2. Our scientific conception of the world is either purely mathematical/formal, or, in so far as it is not just this, is modeled on the basis of the manifest image.
3. Purely mathematical/formal concepts cannot provide a complete account, analysis or reduction of the ‘what it is like’ of experience.

Therefore

4. The non-formal/mathematical, modeled component is essentially dependent on ‘what it is like’ to give a complete account.

Therefore

5. We know the WIL does not resemble qualitatively anything in physical space in the case of secondary qualities.
6. There are good reasons for thinking that this is true in the case of primary qualities, too

Therefore

7. Any non-abstract (etc) account of the natural world depends essentially on the nature of sense-experience in ways we have reason to believe the world itself does not mirror.

### 4. *The presupposition of Platonism.*

The options are (i) standard forms of nominalism: (ii) Resemblance nominalism:

Armstrong has refuted both of these.

(iii) tropism: this is incoherent because it tries to treat *instance-of-F* as more primitive than *F*.

(iv) in re realism: This forces one to adopt either a combinatorial theory of possibility, which is too restrictive, or a Lewisian theory, which is too bizarre

(v) Platonism of some kind. Why should this worry a naturalist? Quine thought that abstract objects – sets and mathematical entities in his case – were acceptable if they were necessary for the best scientific theory of the world – and he thought that they

were. My conclusion will show a brief reflection on that, I think.

In the words of Ian Crombie's neat summary:

The essential characteristic of [the classical theory of forms] seems to be the belief that there are such things as the very thing which is X... that is, for every "common name" there exists a "common nature". The beautiful, the equal, the large, fire, the bed, the shuttle; for each of these there exists a single form, and it is the form alone that the common nature fully exists. In so far as the common nature exists also in things, it does so because they "partake" in it, or because it is "present" to them. Furthermore the form is not only the sole pure case of the common nature, it is also *nothing but* the beautiful, or whatever it may be. (1963: 253)

A reconstruction of Plato's position could be put as follows.

*Plato's position.*

- (1) There are kinds (call them *Forms*) as well as particulars.
- (2) Because these Forms exist they must have a nature - there must be an account of what they are in themselves.
- (3) The only account to hand is that they are the property they represent, pure and unadulterated. This also explains how something's participating in them gives that thing the appropriate property.  
therefore
- (4) Forms are self-predicating.

Aristotle rejected this theory on the grounds that it made forms into a kind of particular.<sup>1</sup>

His explicit solution was:

*Aristotle; part one.*

- (1) You do not want entities that are hybrid between universals and particulars, and this is what Platonic forms are.
- (2) You avoid this by having individualised forms as particulars in things, and universals as *acti mentis*.

This looks like a kind of conceptualism, but is not, as we can see if we follow the story. Frege had a similar problem with the Platonic theory to Aristotle, though he was a Platonist: he, too, thought one had to avoid treating universals as objects. His account runs as follows.

*Frege's position.*

- (1) There are transcendent universals, - called 'concepts' - but they are incomplete entities.
- (2) Only complete entities, which are objects, can be named.  
therefore
- (3) When we refer to a concept or universal we are really referring to a dummy object that stands in for it for purposes of reference: 'the concept "horse" is not a concept'. (Frege, 1952: 46)

*Aristotle; part two.*

- (3) You cannot have individualised forms (instances of universals) without forms (universals).  
therefore
- (4) There is (are) some mind(s) which think(s) all things for which there are forms (universals). For the individual, this is the active intellect, for the cosmos as a whole, it is the prime mover.

***Conclusion.***

Quine defined naturalism as

“the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described” (1981, 21)

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory of forms is found principally in his *Peri ideon*, fragments of which are preserved in Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary on the *Metaphysics*. The text, translation and discussion of Aristotle's views are to be found in Fine 1993.