

Akeel Bilgrami

*The Wider Significance of Naturalism: A Genealogical Essay*

Some of the philosophical debates of our time are secular echoes, indeed secular descendants, of disputation some centuries ago that was no less intense and of measurably greater and more immediate public significance. If some of this sort of significance persists in our current debates, it is seldom on the surface. This is because of our tendency in analytic philosophy to view our metaphysical and epistemological concerns in relatively autonomous terms, unburdened by any political and cultural implication or fall-out. Hence, such wider significance as might still exist can only be unearthed by paying some *genealogical* attention to the antecedent disputes in which the issues at stake loomed larger and more visibly in public and political life.

Though it is not by any means the only one that comes to mind, I will restrict my discussion to one example—the deep division among philosophers today over naturalism,<sup>1</sup> understood as the metaphysical claim that there is nothing in the world that is not countenanced by the methods of natural science.<sup>2</sup> Naturalism in this sense has evolved in recent years into a sophisticated doctrine and with sophistication there has been a certain degree of acknowledgement that some concepts describing or expressing certain properties that are, on the face of it, non-natural properties may not get a strict rendering into the conceptual vocabularies (physical, causal, functional...) of the various natural sciences. Even so, naturalism posits various forms of *systematic dependency relations* in which these properties stand to the properties traversed by the explanatory methods of the natural sciences.<sup>3</sup> No properties are allowed which do not stand in these dependency relations. The primary focus of the debate has been over value properties—with intentional properties of mind plausibly thought to be, for reasons that I won't elaborate here, just a special case of value properties.<sup>4</sup> In a word, the debate is over whether values are or are not

reducible to (do or do not stand in systematic dependency relations with) natural properties as defined above.

This debate has a well-studied history within the confines of Philosophy and in that history the chief protagonists have been Hume and Kant and their many successors down to this day. On the Humean side, there is a conception of value in which they are considered largely to be a refinement of our desires. They are mental states we possess which, though they may be more reared in and geared to social relations and social constraints than other passions (as, for instance, in Hume's elaboration of the notion of 'sympathy' or in Adam Smith's account of them as 'moral sentiments'), they are nevertheless *tendencies* of our mentality. On the other side, finding all this too psychologistic and tied to human inclination, Kant had relegated morals to a 'noumenal' status within 'pure practical reason' whose relation to the *perceptible* world was rendered at least *prima facie* problematic. I want to steer past this canonical dispute between Humeans and Kantians, and in its stead make my subject, a roughly Aristotelian (as for instance, in John McDowell's reading of Aristotle's moral philosophy) conception of value because it helps to bring to the front much more specifically than either of those positions, a genealogy of the political and cultural significance of the vexed disagreement between 'naturalists' (as I have defined the term) and their opponents.<sup>5</sup>

In the next section, I will motivate this conception of value and then, in the rest of the sections that follow, I will present the sort of genealogical analysis that displays the wider significance of the dispute about naturalism that this conception of value generates.

## I.

Let me motivate this conception of value via a dialectic that begins with a familiar distinction.

It is a relatively familiar point, sometimes attributed to Spinoza, that one cannot both *intend* to do something and *predict* that one will do it at the same time<sup>6</sup>. When one predicts that one will do

something, one steps outside of oneself and looks at oneself as the object of behavioural and causal and motivational tendencies, one looks at oneself as another might look at one, and so this is often called the ‘third person’ point of view’ on oneself. But when one intends to do something, one is asking ‘What should I do?’ or ‘What ought I to do?’, one is being an agent not an observer of oneself, one is a subject rather than an object, and that is why this is sometimes known as a ‘first person’ perspective on oneself. . Even when intentions to do something are formed without being deliberately decisional answers to explicit questions of that form, they are distinctively within the first person point of view by contrast with predictions of what one will do.

[A terminological aside: This vocabulary may be misleading since ‘first person’ and ‘third person’ can give the impression of being merely grammatical categories involving the first and third person pronoun, while the perspectival categories that the distinction between intention and prediction invoke are *philosophical* categories which *do not coincide* with the *grammatical*. Proof of this failure of coincidence can be found in examples such as when someone says, “I predict that I will...,” where the first occurrence of the first person pronoun, ‘I’ is an agentive use and the second occurrence refers to oneself as an object of detached study or observation—raising hard questions, incidentally, about breezy assumptions we make about unproblematic anaphora in such cases. For this reason it may be sensible to replace the terms ‘the first person’ point of view and ‘the third person’ point of view with ‘the agent’s’ or ‘the engaged point of view’ and ‘the observer’s’ or ‘the detached’ point of view, respectively.]

With whatever terminology we describe it, the crucial point is that though one can and does have both these points of view on oneself, we cannot have both these points of view on oneself *at once*.

The distinction, as I have presented it so far, is a distinction regarding two perspectives or points of view on *oneself*. But there

ought also to be a similar distinction that holds for perspectives we have on the *world*. We can have a detached perspective on it, a perspective of study as is paradigmatically found in natural science (though that is just one very highly systematic form that that perspective takes), and we can have a perspective of agency on the world, one of responding to it with practical engagement rather than with detached observation and explanatory purpose.

[Here again there is scope for being misled. The point is not that we are not agents when we are observing and explaining the world in scientific terms, but that we, as agents, are taking a perspective of detached observation or study on it rather than one of practical engagement. A scientist in her scientific observation and study does engage with the world and is an agent when she does so, but she does so with a perspective on the world that is detached. This point was already visible in the example I gave above when I was speaking of a third person perspective one can take on oneself. When I say, “I predict that I will...,” the first use of the personal pronoun is an agentive one, but the fact is that, qua prediction, the angle I have taken on myself is that of detached observation rather than of agency, by contrast with when I say “I intend to...” Exactly the same point holds of one’s third person perspective on the world. One does not cease to be an agent when one has a detached perspective on the world, one just treats the world as an object of detached study rather than as something that prompts our practical engagement.]

So, these contrasting points of view one has can apply to oneself *as well as to the world*. I want now to consider the *latter* and ask a crucial question: what must the world be like, what must the world contain, such that it moves us to such practical engagement, over and above detached observation and study? If the world prompts such engagement, it must contain elements over and above those we observe and study from a detached point of view. The obvious answer to the question is that over and above containing the facts that natural science studies it contains a special kind of fact, evaluative facts and properties, or more simply, it contains *values*;

and when we perceive them, they put normative demands to us and activate our practical engagement. Values, being the sort of thing they are, are not primarily the objects of detached observation, they engage with our first rather than our third person point of view on the world.

Thus if we *extend* in this way *onto the world* a presupposition of the fundamental distinction between intention and prediction (the presupposition of two contrasting perspectives that one can have *on oneself*), we get a conception of values that is neither Humean nor Kantian. We get a conception of values by which they are not merely something *we* generate with our mental tendencies and ‘*project*’ onto the world (a favoured metaphor among Humeans), but, they are properties that are found in the world, a world of nature, of others who inhabit nature with us, and of a history and tradition that accumulates in the relations among these, and within which value is understood as being ‘in the world’. So conceived, values are not dismissible either as mere inclinations as Kant did of Hume’s psychologistic conception of values, nor (since they are perceptible properties in the world, precisely what Kant denied) are they dismissible as populating some gratuitous noumenal ontology of the pure and unencumbered will of ‘Practical Reason’. It is not as if sympathy and moral sentiments, much stressed by Humeans, are left out of this picture, but sympathy and moral sentiments, on this picture, are our responses to the normative demands that we apprehend in our perceptions of the evaluative properties of the world.

I have tried to motivate a view of value that places it in the world as flowing from our commonsensical commitments to agency. The motivation was presented in two stages. 1) I had said there that if the distinction between intention and prediction presupposes a distinction between a first person or agent’s point of view and a third person or disengaged point of view that we can take on ourselves, then there ought to be a similar distinction of points of view that we can take upon the world; and, 2) if there is to be a first person or agent’s point of view we can take on the

world of the sort that we can take on ourselves, then the *world* must contain values which prompt such a point of view of agency to be activated in our agentive responses to them.

The notion of agency and its presuppositions, derived from the initial Spinozist distinction between intention and prediction, play a crucial role in the motivation for such a view of value. But a question might be raised: Why can't agency consist in nothing more than the fact that we try and fulfill our desires, intentions, and so on. True, there is a first person point of view that is activated and exercised in agency, but why can't it simply be exercised merely in our efforts to satisfy our desires and fulfill our intentions? Why do I insist that agency comes into play *only when our desires (and moral sentiments) are responding to the callings of something external, the evaluative properties in the world?* To put it in terms of my two-stage dialectic for the motivation, the question is: It is true that the distinction between intention and prediction points to a distinction between the first and the person point of view *on ourselves*, but why am I insisting that there actually be a replication or version of this distinction in points of view we have *on the world*.

These are good questions and fruitful ones. Rather than the conception of agency presented in 2) above, they urge upon us much the more standard and much the more minimal and simple philosophical conception of practical agency, our capacity to act so as to fulfill our *desires* (on the basis of our *beliefs* about what will be a suitable available way to fulfill them); and by stressing this standard view of agency they resist the consequent of the conditional presented in 1), while granting the antecedent.

The questions, then, throws down the following challenge. The motivation I have presented for a conception of value that places values in the world depends on an unmotivated conception of agency as requiring an exercise of the first person point of view conceived of as responses to normative demands from the world. On this conception of agency, as I put it earlier, desires (including those desires that are loftier and amount to moral sentiments) are

*not self-standing* but rather are responses to things in the world which have whatever it takes (evaluative properties) that prompt their activation. Why does this seem compulsory, why can't desires be thought of as self-standing? How can we motivate the denial of their self-standingness, philosophically?

To answer this, we need to look a little harder at the relationship between desires and agency.

Gareth Evans had once said illuminatingly that questions put to one about whether one believes something, say whether it is raining outside, do not prompt us to scan our mental interiority, they prompt us to look outside and see whether it is raining.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, one not only looks outside when one is asked, "Is it raining?" but also when one is asked, "Do you believe it is raining?"

Now, let's ask: Is this true of questions put to one about whether one *desires* something? When someone asks one, "Do you desire x?," are we prompted to ponder our own minds or are we prompted to consider whether x is desirable? There may be special sorts of substitutions for x where we might ponder our own minds but for most substitutions, I think, we would consider x's desirability. This suggests that our desires are presented to us as having desirabilities in the world as their objects.

If one thought this extension of Evans's point wrong, if one thought that a question of that sort prompted one to step back and consider by scanning our minds what we desired (rather than to consider what was desirable), that would suggest instead that our desires were presented to us in a way such that *what they were desires for* was available to us only as something that we could have access to when we stepped back and pondered our own minds—in the *third* person. But now, if the presupposition of Spinoza's point is right and if agency is present in the possession and exercise of the *first* person rather than the third person point of view, that makes it a question as to how this conception of our desires can square with the fact of our agency. To see our desires as reaching down all the way to desirabilities in the world places

our desires squarely within the domain of our agency since now *what* we desire is presented to us in the experiencing of the desiring itself, rather than presented to us when we stepped back to observe our desires—thereby abdicating our agency.

This gives a decisive reason for resisting a self-standing view of desires—such a view cannot accommodate the fact of our agency—and in doing so it establishes two things. First it establishes the deep and essential links between value and agency, and second it motivates the conception of value that resists naturalism about value by resisting (unlike Kantian forms of resistance to it) a purely ‘naturalistic’ conception of *nature* and, more generally, the perceptible (phenomenal) *world*.

Putting it just this way as I have, following this Aristotelian conception, in order to contrast it with the Kantian resistance to naturalism, might invite a confusion that needs to be preempted at the very outset. It would be a confusion to dismiss such an anti-naturalist conception of value as taking an ‘unscientific’ view of nature and the world. To say values are properties in the world (including nature) is to make the world (including nature) not comprehensively surveyable by the methods of natural science. That is the anti-naturalism. How could this be an unscientific thing to say? Something is unscientific, one must assume, if it falls afoul one or other of the claims of one or other of the natural sciences. What else could ‘unscientific’ mean? But if this is what it means, then anti-naturalism is not unscientific since no natural science contains the proposition that natural science has full coverage of the world (including nature). That is something that only a philosopher says (or a scientist, playing at being a philosopher, says). And one can find it to be bad philosophy, without being accused of doing bad science in return. Claims such as those made by ‘creationism’, ‘natural design’... are unscientific since they say something by way of answer to a question that is scientific (about the origins of the universe) and contradict what the best current science has to say on that question But the anti-naturalism we are considering, the claim that values are properties in the world,



makes no attempt to answer any question of that kind. It is not a question within natural science. It is just a confusion to dismiss it as unscientific.

There is more to be said on this subject because there are sometimes concessions made by naturalism to anti-naturalism that do little to redeem the deeper prejudices –accumulated over the centuries as I will try and show in the next section in spheres of broader cultural and political significance than those that surface in current debates—that naturalism is prone to. Indeed sometimes the concession only extends these prejudices.

Let me look a little closely at one such concession that merely carries these prejudices over from the natural sciences to the social.

Suppose one were to concede that the natural sciences do not have full coverage of the world (including nature). And suppose one does so specifically by conceding the importance of what I have placed on centre-stage, the notion of agency and the contrast of the point of view of agency with the point of view of detached observation and study. This can be done by allowing that the world contains such things as '*opportunities*'. Thus, for instance, here in front of me in a glass there is a substance with the chemical composition  $H_2O$ , but right there, in the very same place, there is also something properly describable as 'an opportunity' to satisfy a desire of mine, the desire that I quench my thirst. The first is something that I study from a detached point of view, but the latter is necessarily something I respond to with practical engagement. The world, now, will not be comprehensively surveyed by the natural sciences since no natural science studies opportunities.

This is a concession that a naturalist, as I have defined him, might make. Has he conceded enough to the anti-naturalist as I have defined him? Perhaps the answer has to be 'yes', if all we care about is the letter and not the spirit of the anti-naturalist's objections to the disenchantment that naturalism has wrought. And if so, we will need another label than naturalism for what the anti-naturalist most deeply opposes (and a correspondingly different label for his own position). I had already in Footnote 2 suggested

that that label might be ‘scientism’. Let me explain why that term is apt.

This concession by naturalism to anti-naturalism can be made with the following theoretical and methodological aim in mind. Let it be that the world contains such things as opportunities that fall outside of the purview of *natural* sciences. What they fall within is the *social and behavioural* sciences which now can be described as having the following as one of their goals (of course one among many other goals, though it may, in some sense that I won’t try and elaborate here, be a very central and frameworking goal for these sciences within which more specific goals get their specific point): the goal of studying and explaining individual (possibly even eventually social) behaviour as a kind of desire-satisfaction in human subjects in the light of their (probabilistic) apprehension of the desire-satisfying properties in the world, i.e., *opportunities* that the world provides to satisfy our wants and preferences.

On this picture values themselves continue to be seen in entirely Humean terms, as generated by placing some internal constraints upon desires viewed as dispositions and tendencies in the subject. The subject, however, also has beliefs about what in the world is most likely to fulfill those desires. These may be described, as in the concession being considered, as opportunities in the world for desire-satisfaction. Though the world is now said to contain something (opportunities) that surpass the subject matter of the natural sciences, they contain nothing that is itself intrinsically normative. So what are allowed as properties in the world (these opportunities that prompts our first person point of view of agency) are mere instruments to satisfying desires, but it is only these desires which (as Humeans insist) exclusively generate values when we put the right internal constraints upon them, and none of these constraints are in any way normative constraints coming from the world. If there is any impression that values are in the world in this view, that is a phenomenological illusion brought about by our own ‘projections’ onto the world. The perceptible

world contains only *means* that human subjects perceive as having a measurable likelihood of satisfying their desires.

The social and behavioural sciences can see in this picture of the world, the scope to extend the notion of scientific rationality. True, their angle on the world is less detached than the natural sciences. One, after all, looks at the world with more practical engagement when one sees something not merely as H<sub>2</sub>O but as an opportunity. Despite this concession to anti-naturalism, the normative element in this picture of the practical domain is constructed entirely out of a normative void. It emerges only from within human causal tendencies and *dispositions* (desires) plus the likely *means* provided by the perceptible world (opportunities) to gratify them. There are two aspects to the normative element, on this view. The aspect of *value*, which is restricted to some sophisticated and constrained understanding of the former and the aspect of *rationality*, which is exhausted by the latter's perceived contribution to the former's satisfaction. No more intrinsic normative element is acknowledged and that is the reason to think of this picture as rightly describable by the term 'scientific'.

Sometimes a further concession toward anti-naturalism is made by philosophers (such as Donald Davidson) whereby the normative element is seen as irreducible to human dispositions and causal tendencies but it is not clear how, on this view, that concession can be ultimately grounded, if those tendencies are not responsive to normative demands made by evaluative properties *in the world*. In this further concession, the irreducible normativity is supposed to enchant the human subject but it remains mysterious how this is supposed to happen when the world the subject inhabits remains disenchanting. The human subject is supposed to be enchanted wholly from within. We may try to remove some of the mystery in this idea by saying: unlike non-human animals, human beings can ask of any one or more of their desires and inclinations and tendencies, "Is it good to have it?," a possibility that only comes with language and a level of sophistication of thought that only linguistic creatures can possess. This question, "Is it good to have

this desire, this disposition or tendency?,” is a clear and intelligible one and to the extent that it is intelligible, this use of ‘good’ in a question of that form is proof that value is not simply reducible to desire and inclination and causal tendency.<sup>8</sup> It must be something over and above these, else that question cannot quite make sense.

This is all salutary and convincing, but the question remains as to what are the normative sources a subject can turn to in order to answer the question: Is it or is it not good for me to have a certain desire, a certain disposition or tendency? Davidson himself does not locate the source in anything other than desires themselves. There is no hint in his writing that the dispositions we have which are distinctly relevant to values are dispositions to respond to normative demands coming from the evaluative properties of the perceptible world that we inhabit with others, along the lines I tried to convey at the beginning of this section. Davidson is impervious to such a normative source because he is impervious to the considerations that I had raised earlier via Evans’s insight, considerations which displayed the deep links between value and agency. Because it has no place for evaluative properties, for desirabilities that the world contains to which our desires are responses, the Davidsonian position must find another answer than the one we gave to the question about desires that parallels the question Evans raises about beliefs. And the only other answer there is, as I pointed out, forces an abdication of agency.

Thus though Davidson was among the first to make an important concession to anti-naturalism when he claimed an irreducibility for intentionality on the grounds that they are essentially caught up with normative considerations, his anti-naturalism remains quite incomplete without the further claim that he fails to make—that those normative considerations are grounded in the world to whose demands our intentional states are responsive.<sup>9</sup>

There is something that needs to be qualified in my constant use of expressions such as “values in the world make normative

*demands* on us, they *move* us to or *prompt* our engagement with the world.” For someone like me, keen on making the evaluative enchantment of the world so much of a piece with our own capacities for agency, indeed grounding the possibility of agency in such enchantment, this vocabulary might seem to betray a curious lapse, an undermining of the voluntaristic and decisional aspects of agency by the coercive force (betrayed in this rhetoric) of such an external calling from the world.

An external source of value that moves or prompts or makes demands of our agency is not coercive of the subject because it is only from within the first person, agentive, point of view that these external callings can so much as be recognized by the subject. That was the point of the appeal and the extension of the insightful point by Gareth Evans about belief, to desires. If these callings’ demands are recognized only from within the first person point of view, there is no question of their being *coercive* forces. Rather, the subject, in such a recognition of the callings, acknowledges something on its own agentive terms, acknowledges by his agency the authority of those values to make those demands and calls. Agency, then, requires *two things at once*: a) a source of value from the outside and not merely from within our own causal tendencies and dispositions, as well as b) the human subject itself acknowledging this authoritative source of value from the first person point of view and, therefore, allowing that authority to make its demands on one. Both points are implicit in the use I made of Evans’s insight.

This essential role for the human subject in the very understanding of values as properties of the world makes values a very *distinctive* kind of property or fact in the world. One cannot aspire to apprehend such facts wholly without context and without interest weighing in. The subject is in some sense, then, central to the properties that are in perceptible view to him. McDowell himself represents this in an analogy with secondary qualities. But that analogy is imperfect in some respects and may even mislead,

if taken in the wrong direction.<sup>10</sup> If the point of the analogy is to merely say that the human subject is not a cancellable element in the attempt to provide a complete characterization of the evaluative properties in the world, that is true and it is illuminating to have it pointed out. Value is more like ‘red’ than ‘square’. If one feels that a congenitally blind subject misses out more of what the redness of the tablecloth is (in knowing merely the wavelength and other such specifications) than the squareness of the table is (in knowing merely the geometrical properties of a square), then there is an important sense in which the human subject and her specific kind of visual sensibility is more relevant to the property of being red than it is to the property of being a square. Value, too, makes such an essential reference to the subject though, obviously, the relevant sensibility here is a moral, not a visual, one. But in the case of value, the reference to the human subject goes deeper still since the perception of value properties may not be something that we *can* wholly aspire to have speak to us, independent of the context of our social and other background factors that shape our perceptions, in a way that we might aspire to with secondary qualities such as red. Of course, *all* properties –including even primary qualities— are to some extent determined in our perceptions by our background conditions of thought. The familiar point of ‘the theory-ladenness of observation’ was intended to acknowledge just that. But the further point about values is that to say that they are in the world (including nature) is to say something richer in assumption. The relations between the human subject and the world (including nature) he inhabits have a history and tradition within which his perceptions of the value properties in the world and nature at any given time speak to him and make normative demands. They will necessarily speak therefore in terms that are *contaminated* (I use a strong term such as that here to mark how much the point is supposed to exceed the acknowledgement of the mere theory-ladenness of observation in general) by a much richer set of background assumptions, and may well therefore speak differentially to subjects in different social and cultural contexts.

None of this should suggest a cultural relativism—any more than the theory-ladenness of observation of non-evaluative natural facts suggests a conceptual relativism. Though no relativism is implied by it, I mention the possibility of differential responses to evaluative facts in the world partly at least to make clear that the *motivation* for insisting on a philosophical conception of value that views them as facts external to human subjects is *not* to provide some sort of argument against a relativism about values. If there are such arguments against relativism, they will not be found by any simple appeal to a conception of value as being in the world. The motivation and argument for such a conception of value rather is entirely as I stated it at the outset and then later consolidated with the Evansian considerations a little later: to get right the relations between human subjectivity (the first person point of view), human agency, and value.

And if we have got these relations right, that is, if we have, via these considerations that first originated in a roughly Spinozist distinction and deepened in the Evansian argument I gave, given some genuine theoretical motivation for this conception of values as being in the world, then, without distraction from the debate between Humeans and Kantians, the dispute over naturalism can be recast as a dispute as to whether the world really does contain values, as McDowell's Aristotle claims, and therefore is not comprehensively surveyed by the methods of natural science. Naturalists (at least as I have narrowly defined them) deny that the world contains values. They don't deny that we may meaningfully talk of values but they do deny that the talk's meaningfulness has to be understood in realist terms, whereby evaluative concepts describe real properties in the world that fall outside of the purview of natural science.

## II.

I have sought to arrive at a picture of values as properties in the world (including nature) via a dialectic that began with what seemed like a common sense distinction between intention and prediction partly in order to convey how commonsensical it should seem to say that values are in the world. And a first pass at the genealogical issues I want to raise in this essay can be made by asking: why has this very natural way of thinking about values found so little place in the history of thought (and not just strictly philosophical thought in the narrow sense) about value in the last two or three hundred years? To answer this question would require one to get a sense of the very interesting genealogy of our current debates about naturalism, and thereby to give a sense of the wider significance of that debate which today is, at best, only highly implicit, and, at worst, altogether missing, in the idiom and the arguments in which the debate is conducted.

The answer to the question is to be found in one central strand in the intellectual and cultural history of the West in a phenomenon that can be traced, using a term that Weber put into currency and which McDowell too uses to describe it: 'disenchantment'. For many centuries this natural way of thinking about values as being in the world that I have presented here within the secular terms of my more or less atheistic intellectual orientation, had its source in the presence of a *divinity* which was, in many a view, itself immanent in the world. And it is this source which was undermined in the modern period that Weber described with that term.

This sort of point has, for sometime now—ever since Nietzsche's slogan—been made by summoning the image of the 'dead father'. And it continues to be made in this way in the current revival of tired Victorian debates about the irrationality of belief in a God and in his creation of the universe in six days a few thousand years ago. It is common in the rhetoric wielded by those who speak and write today with scorn of such irrational beliefs,



that they describe them in terms of one's continuing immaturity, one's persistence in an infantile reliance on a 'father', whose demise was registered by philosophers (Nietzsche, but Hegel before him) much more than a century ago, one's abdication of responsibility and free agency in the humbling of oneself to an authority that is not intelligible to human concepts and scientific explanatory methods, concepts and methods hard won in a struggle towards progress and enlightenment, after centuries of obscurantism.

All this may be true enough, but there is something concealing about making the point in just this way since it impoverishes the notion of 'disenchantment' to one merely about loss of faith in God and his creation and his authority. What goes missing in this picture is the intellectual as well as cultural and political *pre-history* of the demise of such an authority figure. Well before his demise, brought about I suppose by the scientific outlook that we all now admire and which is rightly recommended by the authors of the string of recent, somewhat tedious, books that have inveighed against such irrational belief, it was the metaphysics forming around the new science itself and *nothing less than science* which—far from registering his demise—proposed instead in the late seventeenth century, a quite different kind of fate for 'the father', a form of *migration*, an *exile* into inaccessibility from the visions of ordinary people to a place outside the universe, from where in the more familiar image of the clock winder, he first set and then kept an inert universe in motion. And much more than his 'death', it is this exile and *deracination* of God from the world of matter and nature (and therefore from human community and perception) that reveals what is meant by 'disenchantment'.

There is no Latin expression such as "Deus Deracinus" to express the thought that needs expounding here. The expression for the God exiled by the ideologues of the Royal Society in England in the wake of the developments in science around Newton in the late seventeenth century is "Deus Absconditus," which may convey to the English speaker a fugitive fleeing rather than what I

want to stress—the idea that it is from the roots of nature and ordinary perceptible life that God was removed. ‘Racine’ or roots is the right description of his immanence in a conception of a sacralized universe, from which he was torn away by the exile to which the metaphysical outlook of early modern science (aligned with thoroughly mundane interests) ushered him. Even so “Conditus” which literally means “put away for *safeguarding*,” (with the “abs-” reinforcing the “awayness,” of where God is safely placed) conveys something about the question I want to raise. What I want to ask is: why should the authority figure need safeguarding in an inaccessibility? What dangers lay in his immanence, in his availability to the visionary temperaments of all those who inhabit his world? And why should the *scientific* establishment of *Early Modernity* seek this safekeeping in exile, for ‘a father’ whom its successor in *late*, more mature, modernity would properly describe as “dead”?

These *genealogical* questions are crucial to the analysis I want to present about the wider significance of the debates around naturalism, first, because an answer to them would show that the ‘scientific rationality’ which is so insistently extolled by these attacks on religious belief today, did not emerge whole all at once, but also because the answer reveals that—even if we allow it to be a gradual outcome of a triumphantly progressive intellectual history—to focus merely on the end-point of that history as an ideal of rationality towards which we have sequentially and cumulatively progressed and converged in a long struggle against obscurantism, is to give oneself an air of spurious innocence

Narratives of progress have been much under attack for some time for their self-congratulatory triumphalism, but I think it is arguable that things are methodologically much worse than that. They are wrong—at any rate, deeply limited—on, and by, *their own* terms.

In general, a sequence, especially when it is consecutively narrativized and dialectically and cumulatively conceived, as progressive ideals are bound to conceive it, cannot have started

from the beginning of thought and culture itself. If a sequence is to aspire to conceptual and cultural significance (as the very idea of progress suggests) it cannot have *its* beginnings at the very beginning of conceptual and cultural life. That would trivialize things—evacuate the notion of sequence of any of the substance and significance that progressivist narrative aspires to. It cannot be that we have been converging on the significant end-point from the random inceptions of our intellectual and cultural existence. One assumes rather that there were many strands at the outset, endless false leads, but then at some point (what I am calling the *beginning* of the progressivist trajectory) we got *set* on a path, which we think of as the *right* path, from which point on the idea of *cumulative* steps towards a broadly specifiable end began to make sense, a path of *convergence* towards that end. Accumulation and convergence, then, don't start at the beginning of thought, but rather they start at some juncture that we think of as the *start* onto a *right* path.

This has many implications for intellectual historiography, some of them highly critical. Just to give you one example, I think it implies a real difficulty for philosophers such as Hilary Putnam when they say that scientific realism is true because it is the only explanation of the fact that there is a *convergence* in scientific theories—that is to say, the posits of science must be real because it is only their reality which would explain the *cumulative* nature of the claims of scientific theories over time.<sup>11</sup> What is the difficulty with this that I have in mind? It is this. Here too, the fact is that these converging and cumulative trends have not existed since the beginning of theorizing about nature. In fact Putnam would be the first to say that it is only sometime in the seventeenth century that we were set on the right path in science and from then on there has been a convergence that is best explained by the corresponding reality of what the converging scientific theories posit. But now a question arises. *What* makes it the case that *that* is when we were set on the *right* path? What is the notion of *rightness*, here? If we have an answer to this last question (about what makes the path the

*right* path at *that* starting point), then that notion of rightness would *already* have established scientific realism and we don't need to wheel in scientific realism to explain the subsequent convergence.

Well, my subject is not scientific realism, so I give this example only to display the more general point that accounts of our rationality that stress our sequential development and progress towards a hard-won end, cannot then just focus on the end-point and avoid the importance of the *beginning* of the sequence, which, may have the greater power to illuminate than its end or even the sequence itself. If you wanted a slogan for what I have been saying, it is: No teleology without genealogy! And, as I have said earlier, my own reason for stressing the Early Modern *origins* of our late modernity's proud embrace of scientific rationality, is to make us less complacent about the ideal that we have embraced by uncovering in its genealogy the thick *accretions* to it that have had large implications for politics and culture.

Let me turn to these now and say more specifically why a scientific establishment of Early Modernity would have found it convenient to put away 'the father' in a safekeeping away from the visionary access of ordinary people.

### III.

There are three things to observe at the very outset about this exile of the 'father' for some two hundred years until Nietzsche announced his demise.

First, intellectual history of the Early Modern period records that there was a remarkable amount of dissent and very explicit dissent against the notions that produced the exile, dissent by a remarkable group of intellectuals, who were most vocal first in England and the Netherlands and then elsewhere in Europe. For the sake of focus, I will restrict myself to England. Second, there was absolutely nothing unscientific about these freethinkers or their dissent. They were themselves scientists, then of course called 'natural philosophers', fully on board with the new science

and the Newtonian laws and all its basic notions, such as gravity, for instance. They were only objecting to the *metaphysical* outlook generated by official ideologues around the new science, who began to dominate the Royal Society, in which the much more complicated Newton of his private study was given a more orthodox public face by people such as Boyle and Samuel Clarke, a public move in which Newton himself acquiesced. And third, the metaphysical outlook of the dissenters was suppressed and the Royal Society ideologues won out and their metaphysics became the orthodoxy, not because of any superiority, either metaphysical or scientific, but because of carefully cultivated *social and political factors*, that is to say, alliances that the ‘Newtonians’ formed with different social groups such as the Anglicans and the commercial and mercantile interests of the time.<sup>12</sup>

To put a very complex range of interweaving themes in the crudest summary, the dispute was at first sight about the very nature of nature and matter and, relatedly therefore, about the role of the deity, and of the broad cultural and political implications of the different views on these metaphysical and religious concerns. The metaphysical picture that was promoted by the exile of ‘the father’ to a place outside the universe was that the world itself was, therefore, ‘brute’ and ‘inert’ and needed an external divine source for its motion. In the dissenting picture, by contrast, matter was *not* brute and inert, but rather was shot through with an *inner* source of dynamism responsible for motion, that was itself divine. For the dissenters, God and nature were not separable as in the official metaphysical picture that was growing around the new science, and John Toland, for instance, to take just one example among the active dissenting voices, openly wrote in terms he proclaimed to be ‘pantheistic’.<sup>13</sup>

This metaphysical disagreement, however, was caught up in a range of wider implications. One was this: Some of the dissenters argued that it is only because one takes matter to be ‘brute’ and ‘stupid’,<sup>14</sup> to use Newton’s own term, that one would find it appropriate to conquer it with nothing but profit and material

wealth as ends, and thereby destroy it both as a natural and a human environment for one's habitation. In today's terms, one might think that this point was a seventeenth century predecessor to our ecological concerns but though there certainly was an early instinct of that kind, it was embedded in a much more general point, a point really about how nature in an ancient and spiritually flourishing sense was being threatened and how therefore this was in turn threatening to our moral psychology of engagement with it, *including the relations and engagement among ourselves as its inhabitants*. This last point is vital to the breadth of significance of the issues at stake, which were not about nature in a purely self-standing sense. That is why the qualms expressed by the term 'disenchantment of nature' were not by any means merely ecological qualms. The ideal of enchantment was (and is) an ideal of an unalienated life (to use Marx's later term), whether from nature or from one another as its inhabitants. Nature, itself, therefore was conceived in terms of its relations with its inhabitants and a history of those relations and a tradition that these engender in different societies, within which subjects engage with nature (broadly conceived in this way). All this went into the understanding of 'nature' in what I have called the "ancient and spiritually flourishing sense" of that term.

Today, the most thoroughly and self-consciously secular sensibilities may recoil from the term 'spiritually', as I have just deployed it, though I must confess to finding myself feeling no such self-consciousness despite being a secularist, indeed an atheist. The real point has not much to do with the rhetoric. If one had no use for the word, if one insisted on having the point made with words that we today can summon with confidence and accept without qualm, it would do no great violence to the core of their thinking to say this: the dissenters thought of the *world* not as brute but as *suffused with value*. That they happened to think the source of such value was divine may not be the deepest point of interest for us today. And, in fact, many of the dissenters were attacked by an inner circle of the Royal Society (consisting of Richard Bentley

and Samuel Clarke, among others, and all approved by Newton himself) that had formed around the Boyle Lectures,<sup>15</sup> for having too tenuous a commitment to the divine on the grounds that the line between pantheism and atheism (as well as materialism) was much too thin. They argued that what was needed for the Protestant faith to flourish in a stable and abiding form was not merely an opposition to the Catholic sympathizers among the High Tories but an opposition to these ‘freethinkers’ on the republican Left among the Whigs, who opposed their metaphysics and denied a providential role to God by making Him co-eternal with matter itself and thereby too easily subtractable from it to yield materialism and atheism. So, though many of the freethinkers had an explicitly pantheistic commitment (Toland is said to have actually coined the term ‘pantheism’), they provided by this perceived approximation to materialism and atheism, an excuse for those who opposed them to cast them as beyond the pale.<sup>16</sup>

I will return later to the wider political reasons for insisting on the importance for the Anglican establishment of a providential God keeping a universe in order from *without*. But for now, the point I am stressing is that to see God *within* was to see nature as sacralized, with the strict implication that it was thereby laden with *value*, making *normative* (ethical and social) demands on one, normative demands, therefore, that did not come merely from our own desires and subjective utilities. It is this sense of forming commitments by taking in, *in our perceptions*, an evaluatively ‘enchanted’ world which—being enchanted in this way—therefore moved us to normatively constrained *engagement* with it, that many dissenters contrasted with the outlook that was being offered by the ideologues of the new science. A brute and disenchanting world could not move us to any such engagement since any perception of it, given the sort of thing it was, would necessarily be a *detached* form of observation; and if one ever came out of this detachment, if there was ever any engagement with a world so distantly conceived, so external to our own sensibility, it could only take the form of mastery and control of something alien, with

a view to satisfying the only source of value allowed by this outlook –our own desires and utilities and gain.

We are much used to the lament that we have long been living in a world governed by overwhelmingly commercial motives. What I have been trying to do is to trace this to its deepest *conceptual* sources and that is why the seventeenth century is so central to a proper understanding of this world. Familiarly drawn connections and slogans, like “Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, are only the beginning of such a tracing.”

In his probing book, *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke says that “the experience of an impersonal outlook was empirically intensified in proportion as the rationale of the monetary motive gained greater authority.”<sup>17</sup> This gives us a glimpse of the sources. As he says, one had to have an impersonal angle on the world to see it as the source of profit and gain, and vice versa. But I have claimed that the sources go deeper. It is only when we see the world as Boyle and Newton did, as against the freethinkers and dissenters, that we understand further why there seemed no option but to stress this impersonality in our angle on the world. A desacralized world, to put it in the dissenting terms of that period, left us no other angle from which to view it, but an impersonal one. There could be no normative constraint coming upon us from a world that was brute. It could not move us to engagement with it on *its* terms. All the term-making came from us. We could bring whatever terms we wished to such a world; and since we could only regard it impersonally, it being brute, the terms we brought in our actions upon it were just the terms that Burke describes as accompanying such impersonality, the terms of 'the monetary' motives for our actions. Thus it is, that the metaphysical issues regarding the world and nature, as they were debated around the new science, provide the deepest *conceptual* sources.

*But why*, one might ask, should the fact of ‘the father’s exile to an external place as a clock winder have led to an understanding of the universe as wholly brute and altogether devoid of value? Why was it not possible to retain a world suffused with values that were



intelligible to all who lived in it, despite the inaccessibility of the figure of the father? Why must value require a sacralized site for its station, without which it must be relegated to proxy, but hardly proximate, notions of desire or utility and gain? It might seem that these questions are anachronistic, suited only to our own time when we might conceivably (though perhaps not with much optimism) seek *secular* forms of *re-enchanting* the world. One cannot put them, at least not without strain and artificiality, to a period in which value was so pervasively considered to have a sacred source. But even if we cannot put these questions to a world view which, by our modern lights, was constricted by impoverished conceptual options, we can ask a diagnostic question about what forces prevented the *development* of the idea that the world is enchanted with evaluative properties whose normative demands on us, even if now purely secular, move our first person point of view to a responsiveness into moral agency? The diagnosis has many elements and needs more patient elaboration than I can possibly give it here, but one or two of the more straightforward points can be put down briefly.

#### IV.

The core of the diagnosis is that (an alternative and more secular) ideal of enchantment never took hold because there were too many powerful social forces that were complicit in keeping it out.

The conceptual sources of disenchantment that we have traced are various but they were *not* miscellaneous. The diverse conceptual elements of religion, capital, nature, metaphysics, rationality, science, were *tied together* in a highly *deliberate* integration, that is to say in deliberately accruing worldly *alliances*. Newton's and Boyle's metaphysical view of the new science won out over the freethinkers' and became official only because it was sold to the Anglican establishment and, in an alliance with that establishment, to the powerful mercantile and incipient industrial interests of the period in thoroughly predatory

terms. Terms which stressed that how we conceive nature may now be transformed into something, into the *kind* of thing, that is indefinitely available for our economic gain by processes of extraction, processes such as mining, deforestation, plantation agriculture intended essentially as what we today would call ‘agribusiness’. None of these processes could have taken on the *unthinking* and yet *systematic* prevalence that they first began to get in this period unless one had ruthlessly revised existing ideas of a world animated by a divine presence. From an *anima mundi*, one could not simply proceed to take at whim and will. Not that one could not or did not, till then, take at all. But in the past in a wide range of social worlds, such taking as one did had to be accompanied by ritual offerings of reciprocation which were intended to show respect towards as well to restore the balance in nature, offerings made both before and after cycles of planting, and even hunting. The point is that, in general, the revision of such an age-old conception of nature was achieved in tandem with a range of seemingly miscellaneous elements that were brought together in terms that stressed a future of endlessly profitable consequences that would accrue if one embraced this particular metaphysics of the new science and build, in the name of a notion of ‘rationality’ around it, the institutions of an increasingly centralized political oligarchy (an incipient state) and an established religious orthodoxy of Anglicanism that had penetrated the universities as well, to promote these very specific interests. These were the very terms that the freethinkers found alarming for politics and culture, alarming for the local and egalitarian ways of life which some decades earlier the radical elements in the English Revolution such as the Levellers, Diggers, Quakers, Ranters, and other groups had articulated and fought for.

These scientific dissenters themselves often openly avowed that they had inherited the political attitudes of these radical sectaries in England of about fifty years earlier and appealed to their instinctive, hermetic, neo-Platonist, and sacralized views of nature, defending them against the conceptual assaults of the official

Newton/Boyle view of matter. In fact, the natural philosophies of Anthony Collins and John Toland (and their counterparts in the Netherlands drawing inspiration from Spinoza's pantheism, and spreading to France and elsewhere in Europe, and then, when strongly opposed, going into secretive Masonic Lodges and other underground movements) were in many details anticipated by the key figures of the radical groups in that most dynamic period of English history, the 1640s, which had enjoyed hitherto unparalleled freedom of publication for about a decade or more to air their subversive and egalitarian views based on a quite different conception of nature. Gerard Winstanley, one of the most well known among them, declared that "God is in all motion" and "the truth is hid in every *body*" (my italics).<sup>18</sup> This way of thinking about the corporeal realm had for Winstanley, as he puts it, a great 'leveling purpose'. It allowed one to lay the ground, first of all, for a democratization of religion. If God was everywhere, then anyone may perceive the divine or find the divine within him or her, and therefore may be just as able to preach as a university-trained divine.<sup>19</sup> But the opposition to the monopoly of so-called experts was intended to be more general than in just the religious sphere. Through their myriad polemical and instructional pamphlets, figures such as Winstanley, John Lilburne, Richard Overton, and others reached out and created a radical rank and file population which began to demand a variety of other things, including an elimination of tithes, a leveling of the legal sphere by a decentralizing of the courts and the elimination of feed lawyers, as well as the democratization of medicine by drastically reducing, if not eliminating, the costs of medicine, and disallowing canonical and monopoly status to the College of Physicians. The later scientific dissenters were very clear too that these were the very monopolies and undemocratic practices and institutions which would get entrenched if science, conceived in terms of the 'Newtonianism' of the Royal Society, had its ideological victory.

Equally, that is to say, conversely, the Newtonian ideologues of the Royal Society around the Boyle lectures, saw themselves—

without remorse—in just these conservative terms that the dissenters portrayed them in.<sup>20</sup> They explicitly called Toland and a range of other dissenters, ‘enthusiasts’ (a term of opprobrium ever since it had been deployed against the theology and politics of the radical elements of the revolutionary period) and feared that their alternative picture of matter was an intellectual ground for the social unrest of the pre-Restoration period when the radical sectaries had such great, if brief and aborted, popular reach. They were effective in creating with the Anglican establishment a general conviction that the entire polity should take the form of orderly rule (over a populace that had been unruly and restive for two decades) by a state apparatus around a monarch serving the propertied classes and that this was just a mundane reflection, indeed a mundane *version*, of an *externally* imposed divine authority which kept a universe (of brute matter) in orderly motion, rather than an *immanently* present God in all matter and in all persons, inspiring them with the enthusiasms to turn the ‘world upside down’, in Christopher Hill’s memorable, eponymous phrase. To see God in every body and piece of matter, they anxiously argued, was to lay oneself open to a polity and a set of civic and religious institutions that were beholden to popular rather than scriptural and learned judgement and opinion. They were just as effective in forging with the commercial interests over the next century, the idea that a respect for a sacralized universe would be an obstacle to taking with impunity what one could from nature’s bounty. By their lights, the only obstacles that now needed to be acknowledged and addressed had to do with the internal difficulties of advancing an economy geared to profit—the difficulties of transporting goods to markets, of mobilizing labour, and so on. No other factors of a more metaphysical and ideological kind should be allowed to interfere with these pursuits once *nature* had been transformed in our consciousness to a set of impersonally perceived ‘*natural resources*’.

It is these alliances brought together by these anxieties which ensured that the exile of ‘the father’ from his immanent presence

would leave in the world, thus desacralized, no residual evaluative properties that might provide an alternative, more secular, source of enchantment. To repeat, it did so *first* with the argument that the exile would have the effect of creating a religious and metaphysical sensibility which could view nature as desacralized and ready for a predatory form of capitalist extraction, initially via a rapidly expanding system of ‘enclosures’ and then over time in the next century via the industrial technologies that the new science had made possible for European economies. And *second*, a distinct but supplementary argument that in this safeguarding of the father in an inaccessibility, it was only a priestcraft emerging in a class of scripturally trained and learned divines from the universities that could fully comprehend a deity unavailable to the perception and comprehension of ordinary people; and that this was to be integrated—by the very same economic, religious, and scientific alliances—with the elite possession of the *cognitive and informational* sources of power *quite generally*, whether in matters of law or medicine or the offices of government and administration. In a word, a creation of the oligarchic basis for a statecraft needed to ensure the profitable extractive economies that were being generated effectively by and for the propertied classes. From the point of view of this emerging ideology around the new science, the idea that values to live by are available to the ordinary perceptions of a world we live in, would have the effect of demoting these privileged knowledges possessed by the elites to something more arcane, by making the sources of political morality much more democratic.

It was precisely the threat of the *democratization* of value that was arrested in the Early modern developments I have briefly – much too briefly – sketched. And it was replaced instead by the ideals of civility generated by the courts of a monarch and the propertied classes,<sup>21</sup> a phenomenon well studied by scholars such as Norbert Elias,<sup>22</sup> though I would add one functional gloss to his illuminating survey of its historical importance. These courtly civilities did not merely contrast with the rude social turmoil of a

brute populace, they formed themselves into a screen that had the function of hiding from the early modern European courts and elites themselves, the cruelties of their own perpetration, recognizing cruelties only in the behaviour and life-styles of the brute populace against whom they defined themselves;<sup>23</sup> and this went on to lay the ground for the abstract morphing of these civilities into the codifications of rights and constitutions of later modernity in orthodox liberal frameworks which, despite all the *enormous good* they have done and are *deservedly admired* for, similarly hide from ourselves the cruelties of our own perpetration on distant lands, allowing one to recognize cruelties only in societies where they are unaccompanied by the concealing formalities of such liberal codifications.<sup>24</sup>

## V

These considerations, unearthed in the last three sections, give a sense of the wider significance that historically grounded the dispute over whether or not value may be seen as being in the world, and they show how genealogically loaded the term ‘disenchanted’ is, despite McDowell’s rather bland use of it in the contemporary version of the dispute

It is important to record that the diverse elements in these considerations I have traversed, of metaphysics, theology, politics, political economy and culture, were integrated by these alliances I mentioned in a recurring rhetoric of ‘*rationality*’ and ‘*science*’; and it is this thickly laden ideal of scientific rationality that is entirely missing in the story that is told by contemporary writers such as Dawkins<sup>25</sup> and Dennett<sup>26</sup> and others when they present their much ‘thinner’ ideal of rationality as the outcome of a struggling modernity against a long history of reactionary obscurantism. In our own current philosophical idiom, ‘rationality’ is a rather ‘thin’ and circumscribed ideal, referring mainly to the codifications of inductive, deductive, and decision-theoretic reasoning, with perhaps some more or less elaborated notion of ‘coherence’ thrown in. This is just how it should be. But the term in the earlier much

‘thicker’ sense that I have been outlining was meant to identify much more than the principles that relate observational evidence to theoretical conclusions (principles, that is, which would show the hypothesis of creationism, for instance, to be spectacularly false), or the principles of logical deduction or of practical reason as we now think of it; it was meant to mark an entire way of thinking of nature and its relation to our economic and political interests. This was most evident when these mercantile, political, scientific, and religious alliances produced over time the mentality that justified the colonial conquest of distant lands. The justification was merely an extension of the ideas that I have outlined to colonized lands, which too were to be viewed as brute nature that was available for conquest and control—but only *so long as one was able to portray the inhabitants of the colonized lands in infantilized terms*, as a people who were as yet unprepared—by precisely a *mental lack* of such a notion of *scientific rationality*—to have the right attitudes towards nature and commerce and the statecraft that allows nature to be pursued for commercial gain. It is this integral linking of the new science through its metaphysics with these attitudes that was conveyed by the earlier, thicker understanding of ‘scientific rationality’

It is not as if one cannot find in the writing of philosophers and scientists of an earlier time, the ‘thinner’ and more circumscribed ideal of rationality, and scientific rationality in particular. But part of the point of my tracing the work of a range of worldly alliances in this genealogy of the notion of ‘disenchantment’, is to show how many of them were also, in the name of ‘science’ and a metaphysics growing around the new science, ‘thickening’ what would otherwise have been an innocuous and ‘thin’ notion of scientific rationality.

Once that point is brought on to centre stage, a whole tide of confusingly ambiguous disputation regarding the Enlightenment subsides. The fact is that there was more than one strand in the Enlightenment and some of these strands were so different from one another that it is perhaps best to say that there was more than

one Enlightenment. This has come to be recognized in the recent writing on the idea of a ‘radical Enlightenment’, a label that suits well the late seventeenth century and eighteenth century freethinkers as well as some of the later figures in the British and German Romantic tradition.<sup>27</sup> What distinguishes this radical tradition from the more orthodox and canonical strand of the Enlightenment has partly at least got to do with differing attitudes towards what I have called the ‘thick’ notion of scientific rationality. In fact, once we disambiguate the notion of scientific rationality in its thick and thin meanings, a standard strategy of the orthodox Enlightenment against fundamental criticisms raised against it, is exposed as defensive posturing. It would be quite wrong and anachronistic to dismiss this initial and early intellectual—and, as I said, perfectly *scientific*—source of critique in the seventeenth and eighteenth century that I have expounded in the last three sections, from which later critiques of the orthodox Enlightenment derived, as being irrational (as was sometimes done), once one disambiguates the term ‘rational’, as I just have. Far from being irrationalist, opponents of the incipient values of the Enlightenment, these early dissenters, whose ideas have clear affinities with recurring heterodox traditions in the West since their time, constitute what can rightly be thought of as the early phase of ‘the Radical Enlightenment’.

To dismiss their pantheistic tendencies as being unscientific and in violation of norms of rationality, as was done by their orthodox contemporaries, would be to run together in a blatant slippage the general and ‘thin’ use of terms like ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ with just this ‘thick’ notion of scientific rationality that we have identified above, which played a justificatory role in the development both of a predatory form of capitalism as well as later colonial conquest, and it is only this ‘thick’ notion that the dissenters were so jittery about. They had nothing against any more attenuated notion of rationality whatever and were themselves, as I said, quite on board with the details of the scientific laws. Later dismissals of later critiques of the orthodox



Enlightenment exploit the same slippage—and the entire appeal to ‘scientific rationality’ as a defining feature of our modernity trades constantly on just such a slippage, subliminally appealing to the hurrah element of the general and ‘thin’ terms ‘rational’ and ‘scientific’, which we all applaud, to tarnish serious criticism of the orthodox Enlightenment, while ignoring the fact that the in their critique the opposition is to the thicker notion of scientific rationality, that was defined in terms of very specific scientific, religious, and commercial alliances.

Were we to apply the *thin* conception of ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ (the one that is widely accepted among philosophers today), the plain fact is that *nobody* in that period was, in any case, getting prizes for leaving God out of the world-view of science. That one should think of God as voluntaristically affecting nature from the outside (as the Newtonians did) rather than sacralizing it from within (as the freethinkers insisted), was not in any way to improve on the *science* involved. Both views were therefore just as ‘unscientific’, just as much in violation of scientific rationality, in the ‘thin’ sense of that term that we would now take for granted. What was in dispute had nothing to do with science or rationality in that sense at all. What the early dissenting tradition was opposed to is the *metaphysical* orthodoxy that grew around Newtonian science and its implications for broader issues of culture and politics. This orthodoxy with all of its wider implications is what successive critiques of the mainstream of the Enlightenment have opposed; and the sleight of hand in the frequent dismissals of all opposition to the Enlightenment as being irrationalist, lies precisely in the hope that accusations of irrationality, because of the *general* stigma that the term imparts in its ‘*thin*’ usage, will disguise the very specific and ‘thick’ sense of rationality and irrationality that are actually being deployed by the opposition. Such (thick) *irrationalism* is precisely what the dissenters yearned for and hindsight shows what an admirable yearning it was.

Part of my motivation for giving this genealogy of the debates around naturalism is to help bring out how that genealogy provides

for a disambiguation of the term ‘scientific rationality’, which would expose this sleight of hand. If Dawkins and Dennett and others, rightly inveighing against our current irrationalism of clinging to the figure of a father whose demise followed upon our embrace in Late modernity of a ‘thin’ notion of rationality, had also acknowledged the wide range of issues that centred on the exile of the father in Early Modernity and the ‘thick’ notion of rationality that it engendered, their books might have a much greater interest for those who are trying to come to a deep understanding of the widespread religiosity in our midst in our own time.

## VI.

I have sketched why, for considerations that have a significance well outside of philosophy, indeed strictly outside of science as well (since it is the *reception* of the new science by worldly alliances formed around it that was the moving force and not the scientific ideas and laws themselves), a *sacralized version* of a certain conception of value that I tried to motivate in Section I, was very aggressively opposed in the late seventeenth century. Those alliances won out and their philosophical position that Weber described with the term ‘disenchantment’ was consolidated over the next two or three hundred years for the sorts of worldly reasons I have briefly sketched. Such a philosophical position may accurately be described in hindsight and in our own vocabulary as an early form of ‘naturalism’ that would not countenance *in* the world anything that was not susceptible to study by the methods of natural science. It is not that in that earlier period nothing was countenanced to exist at all that was not susceptible to scientific inquiry as we conceive of it now. But since ‘the father’ had been exiled to a place outside the universe, no such countenanced thing or property was *in the world* (except under the exceptional and occasional category of ‘miracles’ .<sup>28</sup> ) The subsequent ‘death’ of the ‘father’ then transformed the philosophical doctrine of

naturalism to its more current forms that will not brook even the *secular version* of enchantment that a position like Aristotle's, urges. That lands us with our current disputation over naturalism with which I began.

I had pointed out that some key concessions that were made to anti-naturalism by naturalists in the history of this dispute between these two philosophies of value, merely extended the reach and scope of naturalism from the natural to the social sciences. Far from conceding anything deep to anti-naturalism, this form of concession to our agency and the first person point of view on the world (which allows the world to contain 'opportunities', i.e., properties that fall outside of the reach of the *natural* sciences because they prompt our agential, first person responses to the world) promoted a certain scientific conception of the *social* sciences. *And this too had its wider significance*. It extended the alienating elements of a disenchanted world by explicitly making it a site of instrumentality. With this concession, the ideal of scientific rationality in its '*thin*' version can now be presented as being more than the codifications of confirmation theory and inductive logic. It can be presented as the frameworking ideal of the disciplinary regimes of the social sciences as follows: rational human behaviour consists in acting so as to satisfy our desires on the basis of these perceptions of opportunities in the world. So the world, in containing opportunities, contains things that go beyond what the natural sciences study but it contains nothing that this specific understanding of the social and behavioural sciences cannot bring within *their* purview. And now the surrounding metaphysical or philosophical picture in which the world is viewed as a site of opportunities of this form can generate its own more specifically '*thick*' version of rationality a century and more after the Early Modern period I was discussing. The thickening this time is also, as always, via worldly alliances, though with far less input from the protestant religious establishment than in the earlier period and with the far more overtly developed industrial technologies to tap these 'opportunities' the world contains. The

effects on us and the world wrought by this thick ideal deserve—and get—a more detailed specification than is given by Weber’s earlier and very general term ‘disenchantment’ with the later rhetoric of terms such as ‘commodification’, ‘alienation’, ...and so on that one finds in Marx and those influenced by him.

But the very fact that Weber and Marx were able to mobilize terms such as ‘disenchantment’ and ‘commodification’ and ‘alienation’ at all against these thick notions of rationality makes absolutely clear—what I have tried to motivate in the first half of this paper—the deep connections that exist between value and agency and a certain conception of the perceptible world which we inhabit as agents. These are all terms that describe how our relations to the world were impoverished in ways that desolate us, once we sever these deep connections in our conceptual and material lives. This was the wider significance of the disputation about naturalism in the Early Modern period that I have tried to excavate genealogically.

The extent to which that wider significance survives *in our own time* is a fascinating question but it is a very hard question to answer in depth and detail with full attention to the range of different interests that it integrates. It would be no bad thing for analytic philosophers, who are engaged with issues of naturalism, to allow themselves to be mobilized by these broader terms that Weber and Marx deployed, and to come out of their more cramped focus and idiom, to do their bit in answering it.

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<sup>1</sup> Though, the debate has spread widely across the discipline of Anglophone philosophy in the last few years, naturalists continue to be the overwhelming majority in the discipline, with volumes like the present one and its predecessor, *Naturalism in Question*, eds. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) gathering the voices of a recently emerging opposition.

<sup>2</sup> One caveat: I am using the term ‘naturalism’ in a rather restricted way, limiting the term to a scientific form of the philosophical position. So, the naturalism of Wittgenstein or John McDowell, or even P.F. Strawson falls outside of this usage. In fact all three of these philosophers are explicitly opposed to naturalism in the sense that I am using the term. Perhaps ‘scientism’ would be the better word for the philosophical position that is the centre of the dispute I want to discuss. It accommodates a certain attitude exemplified in naturalism that is present in a certain way of understanding the nature of the *social and behavioural* sciences. I will say more about this later. David Macarthur, an editor of this volume, explicitly asked me if I had any objection to a term he favours and uses in his Introduction, ‘*liberal* naturalism’, to describe a position distinct from ‘naturalism’ in the narrow scientific sense that I mean, a position which accommodates the kind of naturalism that McDowell and Strawson and Wittgenstein embrace. I have no objection to that term or the position it describes, no more than I do to Marxists aspiring to ‘*people’s* democracy’.

<sup>3</sup> The range of such dependency relations goes from various versions of what is called ‘non-reductive materialism’ to versions of what is called ‘supervenience’. The former doctrine and label surfaces more in naturalism about intentional states in particular rather than value, though it is perhaps extendable in its proponents’ ambitions to the latter. My own commitment to anti-naturalism that

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will emerge *in the present paper* is opposed to most, if not, all of these views. I have argued elsewhere—see *Self-Knowledge and Resentment*, chapter 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008)—that even the weakest form of the supervenience thesis is not quite coherently assessable. But that is a strong claim (stronger than anything even in John McDowell with whom I wrestle in that chapter on this very subject) and I doubt that anything I say in the present paper presupposes the truth of that claim. So its diagnosis of these issues should be acceptable to those like McDowell, who do embrace some version of supervenience of evaluative properties on natural properties, understood as properties countenanced by the methods of natural science. See footnote 10 below for more on this.

<sup>4</sup> Davidson in a number of articles—see especially his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980)—was perhaps the first to introduce value or normative considerations in the understanding of intentionality, though he was much less clear than he might have been about the extent to which intentional states are just a special instance of values (or commitments), that is, are themselves values or commitments of a special sort. Once one is clear about this, one can see the naturalistic irreducibility of intentional states as just a special case of the naturalistic irreducibility of value. There is, then, no need to think of there being *two* irreducibilities, one of intentionality to the properties of the central nervous system, and the other of value to the natural properties studied by the natural sciences. The latter irreducibility subsumes the former. See chapter 5 of my *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) for a detailed discussion of this issue.

<sup>5</sup> See McDowell, “Virtue and Reason”, *The Monist* lxii (1979). Among contemporary Humean positions on value, the most resolute is Simon Blackburn’s which is presented in some of the

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writings in his *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). There are several contemporary Kantians too, of course, such as Nagel, Scanlon, Parfit, Korsgaard... The classic statement is Nagel's *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). For Hume and Kant themselves see respectively any of the various editions of, *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Stuart Hampshire's book on Spinoza, first published in 1951 and republished as *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Hampshire's *Freedom of the Individual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975)

<sup>7</sup> Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 225.

<sup>8</sup> The alert reader will recognize this to be an extension of G.E.Moore's open question argument. For more on this subject, see Chapter 5 of my *Self-Knowledge and Resentment*.

<sup>9</sup> This failing in Davidson has a clear antecedent in Weber himself, who was one of the very first to have made this further concession I am discussing, saying that the human subject, individual and collective, cannot be studied by methods that fail to acknowledge that any domain of study in which human subjectivity is to be found, is value-laden. But he nowhere linked this influential observation with his own influential lament about the disenchantment of the world. Such concessions to the irreducibility of the human subject and to the value-ladenness of the human sciences which study it, though not false, remains incomplete and shallow without a full acknowledgement of the fact that the world itself (including nature) is naturalistically

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irreducible, that it is enchanted with evaluative properties that move us to practical engagement with the world.

<sup>10</sup> See McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities”, in Ted Honderich, ed., *Morality and Objectivity* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985). The analogy is a limited one, more limited than McDowell takes it to be, and, in particular, it is limited to the fact that both with colour and with value, the subject is ineliminably involved in the kinds of property colour and value are. I think the right way to put it is that red cannot be perceived as red by all subjects, only by those subjects with a certain visual sensibility. So also value properties are only perceived as such, by subjects possessed of a certain relatively rich capacity for agency. Those without such agency will see darkness where agents see value in the world. Beyond this affinity, the analogy of value with colour breaks down. In particular, the claim that value is supervenient on physical properties is not an assessable claim, whereas the claim that colour properties are supervenient on primary (physical) properties, is not only assessable, it is to be assessed, I believe, as a true claim. I am being careful to formulate the breakdown of the analogy in just these terms because I don’t think we should *deny* the claim that value properties are supervenient on physical properties. To deny a claim (or assert it), one presupposes that one can assess the claim in the first place. It is that presupposition that is false. The reason for saying it is false has to do with the fact that something like agency (in a very rich sense) is deeply involved with the perception of value in a way that it is not with colour. I discuss these points about supervenience and value at length in Chapter 5 of my book, *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (Harvard University Press, 2010) and am highly critical of John McDowell, who (like G.E. Moore), believes in the supervenience of value on physical properties, and, in doing so, betrays his failure to fully grasp the deep links between his own



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Aristotelian conception of value and the notion of agency. See also my “Replies to Critics” in the symposium on my book ‘Self-Knowledge and Resentment’, in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, (vol. 61.3, November 2010.)

<sup>11</sup> See Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978)

<sup>12</sup> I am deliberately focusing on a later period and not tracing some of these tendencies to the more general and somewhat earlier *mechanistic* turn which is so often emphasized in the literature of Early Modern intellectual history partly because the *worldly* motivations to support a certain incipiently ‘naturalist’ metaphysics was most explicitly formulated by figures in the Royal Society *after* Newton and it is they who formed the alliances with the Anglican religious interests as well as the commercial and mercantile interests that I want to emphasize. I am grateful to Mario De Caro for insisting that I explain in a footnote why I focus on this later period.

<sup>13</sup> In a series of works, starting with *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1696, more explicitly pantheistic in statement in the discussion of Spinoza in *Letters to Serena* (1704) and then in the late work *Pantheisticon* (1724). These writings are extensively discussed in Margaret Jacob’s excellent work, *The Radical Enlightenment* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> The point is not that there was contempt for nature after the exile of God. God’s creation and ward could be something that one could respect with wondrous awe, even as miraculous, as scientists often did. The point rather (see below for more on this) was that the exile, by removing from nature any ingredient *within it* that would prevent its being viewed primarily as natural resources,

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gave sanction via a set of worldly alliances, to a certain form of political economy and political culture.

<sup>15</sup> In his will, Boyle endowed these lectures saying that there were to be given by a chosen London clergyman eight times a year and they were ‘for proving the Christian religion against notorious infidels, viz., Atheists, Theists, Pagans, Jews and Mahometans, not descending lower to any controversies among Christians themselves.’ (Quoted in John J. Dahm, “Science and Apologetics in the Early Boyle Lectures,” *Church History* 39, No. 2. (1970): 172-186.

<sup>16</sup> The history of this heterodox pantheism is disparate and not without its inner transformations. The leaders of radical groups such as the Levellers and Diggers during the English revolution, (figures such as Overton and Winstanley) wrote and spoke of the presence of God in all things and all matter. For them, to resist the gap between God and His Creation was part of their resistance to the privileged place given to an elite clergy that could claim to mediate that gap. This entire resistance both in its metaphysical and its political aspects was anxiously dismissed by the Anglican establishment as ‘enthusiasm’ preached on behalf of the aspiring lower classes that would destabilize the order that had finally come with the Restoration. Successive Boyle lecturers inveighed against the legacy of ‘enthusiasm’ and the unrest of the revolutionary period that was generated in its name. I say more about this below. The dissenters against the Newtonians’ ‘holy alliance’ (as it was called) with the Anglican establishment, also invoked pantheism some decades after the revolutionary period of the forties. Toland had studied Bruno’s Italian works of a century earlier and was much influenced by its neo-platonist, hermeticist ideas, but possibly because of the tremendous hostility to ‘enthusiasm’ in the previous few decades, he had begun to eschew the mystical elements in Bruno, and seemed to subscribe to a more

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domesticated, more ‘rational’, form of hermeticism, though he still declared himself a pantheist.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Christopher Hill in his *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin, 1975), 293, from *The Works of Gerard Winstanley*, ed. G.H. Sabine (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1941).

<sup>19</sup> The significance of this is not to be run together with the cliché about the Protestant reformation’s sustained opposition to the priestcraft enshrined in popery. The later scientific dissenters who appealed to Winstanley’s metaphysics and politics found themselves opposing precisely the *Protestant* establishment, which, in explicit alliance with the dominant ideologues of the Royal Society, had exiled God to a place inaccessible to all but the learned scriptural judgement of its university-trained divines.

<sup>20</sup> I say ‘conservative’ but the label may be misleading. On the political landscape, these figures are best described as ‘moderates’. They used arguments derived from the metaphysics around the new science to oppose both the Tory Jacobites, who were supporters of the ‘Catholic King’ (now exiled), James II, as well as opposed the pro-Revolution republican section among the Whigs. I use the term ‘conservative’ only to mark their vehement opposition to the latter. Over the next few decades, it is these ‘moderates’ who dominated the Whig party itself and were entrenched in the ruling oligarchy.

<sup>21</sup> This is the wider political outcome regarding value that came out of the repudiation of the more democratic possibilities that Winstanley and others had hoped for from their quite different conception of value emerging from a quite different understanding

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of the relations between nature and human community. It is what gets lost in the genealogical recesses of our more abstract philosophical understanding of the Humean outcome regarding value that comes from a repudiation of ‘enchantment’ that McDowell speaks of. I will not try and make the links between this more abstract and the more political levels of discussion regarding value here—will simply rest with having tried to reveal some of the wider significance *in the genealogy*.

<sup>22</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> This attitude towards the mass of working people is manifest, for instance, in Boyle, who wrote of the radical sects and their ‘vulgar’ followers with great anxiety and determined opposition. For a good discussion of Boyle’s attitudes in this regard and his highly complicit role in the alliances I have mentioned above, see James R. Jacob, *Robert Boyle and the English Revolution* in the *Studies in the History of Science* series (New York: Burt Franklin and Company, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> The word ‘morph’ might be misleading here, so let me warn against it. I am not suggesting by any means that these civilities are all that there is to the codifications we find in modern constitutions. The arguments given for rights and constitutions are quite distinct from those that ground notions of civility and so is their content and substance. I am saying rather that the screening function of ‘civility’ that I had mentioned, which blinds one to the cruelties that one perpetrates, carried over to ‘rights’ in modern, liberal ideology as it is practiced by advanced, industrial liberal democratic nations of what we have taken to calling ‘the North’ who are also blind to the cruelties they have perpetrated upon countries of ‘the South’, recognizing cruelties only in the form they occur in southern nations that lack constitutions and commitments to rights. I want to stress too that when I make this

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point about this function that rights have in our time, I mean merely what I say and no more. The point is ripe for misunderstanding and should not be taken to express any hostility to rights, whose important and beneficial achievements for modern society is undeniable.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006)

<sup>27</sup> See Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1981) and *Radical Enlightenment* by Jonathan Israel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Israel emphasizes much more than Margaret Jacob does the influence of Spinoza. I should also add that what is meant by ‘radical’ and who the exemplars are of ‘the radical’ in the two works do not by any means coincide.

<sup>28</sup> Why do I emphasize the category of the ‘exceptional’? Because though, miracles were, of course, countenanced as occurring in the world over these centuries, these were essentially considered to be punctuations in an otherwise disenchanted world. They were not pervasively present in the form of enchantment as in the hylozoic or pantheistic picture of the dissenting deists.