

# Naturalism's Incapacity to Capture the Good Will

Dallas Willard

Read at the Waco Conference on The Nature of Nature, April 13-15, 2000. Symposium with Professor Larry Arnhart.

---

One area that has been a problem for the Naturalistic outlook has been the ethical. Judgments about who is a good or bad person, what is the right or wrong act and what ought or ought not to be done have proven resistant, to say the least, to translation into or replacement by judgments about material or physical reality. Moral judgments frankly seem, on almost any reading, to be about something other than that reality. Conversely, one can say that Naturalism (in the modern sense of the term) has presented a problem for morality, and has seemed to many to undermine any prospect of a moral basis for individual or collective human life.

But it is very difficult, I find, clearly to join the issue or issues involved here. My initial clarifications, in the effort to get at those issues, will be rather lengthy, so let me state my position at the outset in order that we can be clear about where we are going, and I will try to get there by the time I quit.

## I

There are four different understandings of "Naturalism" that need to be kept in mind in a discussion of "naturalism and ethics." The first is the one which identifies the ethical course of life as one that is "according to nature." In this sense, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Epictetus, Aquinas, Butler, and Kant--and Professor Arnhart as well as myself--adhere to naturalism in ethics. Naturalism in this sense makes human nature the point of reference for the understanding of ethical (moral) reality, but does not necessarily or usually restrict human nature to the categories of the sense perceptible, quantifiable or causal. This sense of "naturalism" can be set aside for present purposes, because "nature" in this more inclusive sense does not pose the issues for ethics (the reductive issues, we may say) that are of interest in this conference, and may even stand in opposition to "naturalism" as most commonly understood today.

The second understanding of Naturalism is defined in opposition to the "intuitionist" ethical theorists of the first half of the 20th Century: Moore, Prichard, Ross, and Ewing. Naturalism here is the view that there are no irreducibly moral properties. This is close to the "Naturalism" at issue in this conference, but retains a certain distance nonetheless. This is because there might be no irreducible moral properties and the properties to which moral properties reduce still not be parts of "nature" as many would understand the term.

The third understanding of Naturalism is closely related to the second. It attempts to take science as its point of reference, and holds that ethical distinctions must, somehow, fall within or be accounted for from within the sciences and the domains of reality they deal with. There is a great deal of semantical and logical "wiggle" in this position. For example, one may or may not insist on the primacy of Physics in such a way that Naturalism becomes, in fact, Physicsism--a contemporary form of Scientism. And there are several ways of doing or not doing this. I shall argue that this third understanding of Naturalism cannot be stated in such a way that it is of any use in philosophical or theoretical discussions.

The fourth understanding of Naturalism amounts to straightforward Materialism or Physicalism. Sometimes the attempt is made to deduce Materialism or Physicalism from Physicsism. If I am

right, that really can't be done. So Naturalism in this sense must certify itself rationally by engaging in a priori argument or "first philosophy." But it is hard to see any way to make its thesis consistent with that mode of self-justification. Its justification would have to come from the sciences for it to be a self-consistent one. But it really can't. In any case, I shall argue, the basic moral distinctions cannot be drawn from within the resources of a straightforward physicalism as materialism. That will be my main point.

If I am right about all of this, one might conclude that the discussion of "Naturalism and Ethics" was over and we could go home. But much will also depend on what we take the basic moral distinctions to be. And here, I believe, the disagreements are currently so deep that it is impossible to canvass the field in any really illuminating manner--at least I could not begin to do it in the time (and possibly intelligence) available here. So I will take the course of simply explaining and historically locating what I take "the basic moral distinctions" to be--they will have to do with will and intention, on my view--and then explaining why I think straightforward physicalism is incapable of coming to terms with these distinctions from within its resources. So that is my plan.

## II

First let me explain why I think the third understanding of Naturalism cannot be stated in such a way that it is of any use in philosophical or theoretical discussions.

### Problems with Invoking 'Science'

Methodological monism is an enduring aspect of generic Naturalism, and modern Naturalism is often specified simply in terms of an exclusive application of "scientific method" in all inquiries. But how can that method support claims about the nature of reality as whole. For example, one might state that the only realities are atoms (quarks, strings, etc.) and derivatives thereof. But how is he to support his claim? It certainly cannot be derived from any specific science (physics, chemistry on up to, say, anthropology) or from any conjunction of specific sciences. And it is not to be derived through any application of experimental techniques within any science.

The Naturalist must then have recourse to that popular but philosophically suspect abstraction, 'science' itself, which says even less than the individual sciences about the nature of reality as a whole, because it says nothing at all. It isn't the kind of thing that can say anything, though many individuals--usually, I think, not themselves scientists, and certainly not scientists expressing truths within the competence of their profession--present themselves as speaking for science, and thus as being 'scientific' in some extended but, hopefully, still authoritative sense.

John Searle seems to be in this position. He speaks of "our scientific view of the world," which according to him every informed person with her wits about her now believes to be true. He speaks of a view of the world which includes "all of our generally accepted theories about what sort of place the universe is and how it works." (The Rediscovery of the Mind, p. 85) "It includes," he continues, "theories ranging from quantum mechanics and relativity theory to the plate tectonic theory of geology and the DNA theory of hereditary transmission," etc. We might imagine a very long conjunctive sentence--containing the specific theories he has in mind as conjuncts--that would, supposedly, express the "world view" in question.

But this will hardly do what he wants. One thing that will not show up in such a conjunctive sentence is any claim about reality as a whole, "the universe," or about knowledge in general. Such specific scientific theories as those just mentioned--and no matter how many of them we may list--cannot provide an ontology. They never even attempt to determine what it is to exist or what existence is, and cannot, by the nature of their content, provide an exhaustive list of what ultimate sorts of things there are. Their existential claims are always restricted to specific types

of entities as indicated in their basic concepts. This we might have known at least since Aristotle.

We emphasize the point that to suppose that a given scientific theory or conjunction of such theories provides an ontology constitutes a logical mistake, a misreading of what the theories say and imply. Those theories, and the bodies of knowledge wherein they are situated, actually say nothing whatsoever about the universe or about how it--the whole 'thing'--works. This is a merely semantical point about the meaning or logical content of the claims or sentences that make up the sciences. It is to be established or refuted by examining, precisely, those claims and sentences. It turns out that they do not even mention the universe, the totality of all that exists, nor do they say anything about the boundaries of knowledge in general. Such matters simply do not fall within the purview of their methods or findings. They all tacitly specify a delimited "universe of discourse" by the basic concepts they employ.

In support of this claim we ask: Could anyone possibly find the place in some comprehensive and duly accredited scientific text or treatment, or some technical paper, where it is demonstrated or even necessarily assumed by the science concerned that all that exists consists of particles or fields or strings--or of language, culture and 'meanings'--or whatever the proper subject matter of the science is? Would anyone be able to mention the name of the physicist who established this as an "obvious fact of physics"? (Searle, p. xii) Exactly where in the "atomic theory of matter" is the claim about what "the universe consists entirely of" to be found?

"After all," Searle rhetorically asks, "do we not know from the discoveries of science <italics added> that there is really nothing in the universe but physical particles and fields of forces acting on physical particles?" The answer, contrary to his assumption, is surely, "No, we do not." Again, could he possibly just point out when, where, how and by whom this "discovery of science" was made. Has it actually been made?

Also, before the philosopher can use "the discoveries of science" he must determine what "science" says. But this is to reify science, to treat it as an entity that issues "results." Science, as already indicated, says nothing at all. Particular scientists do. Unfortunately they also make unscientific statements. How can we tell when an individual scientist is making scientific statements ex cathedra, as it were, and "science" is therefore speaking, and when they are not? And can a 'scientific' statement be false or perhaps illicitly derived and still be scientific?

If a scientific statement can be false or based on logical errors, then a scientific statement may be less than knowledge. How, then, could it be required that we accept such statements as a basis or framework for philosophical work? History shows that statements accepted as "scientific" have been both false and based on logical errors. Is the advocate of Naturalism then one who works under an authority that may be and has been wrong? He himself would rarely if ever have the competence to do the scientific work and therefore must be taking the statements of "science" on authority. But authority is in fact one of the things we would expect Naturalism to stand against. Historically it has done so, and that has been one of its virtues. How can it avoid resting on blind authority, however, if what Searle and others say is true? And is a philosopher's statement about science, a scientific theory or a scientist to be automatically regarded as itself scientific? What can its status be? Is it a "Naturalistic" statement?

The words "science" and "scientific" frankly do not mean very much in many contexts where they are used. The old problem of "demarcation," discussed so intensely some decades ago, has not really gone away. A good rule might be to never use those words in premisses intended to support a conclusion.

### [The Dilemma of Naturalism](#)

Naturalism staggers back and forth between physicalism (materialism) as a general ontology or first philosophy, and outright physicism or scientism (which need not take the form of physicism)--often, though not always, trying to derive physicism from scientism and then physicalism from physicism. This continues up to the present.

In a recent review Patricia Kitcher chides Stephen Stich for "philosophical Puritanism" when he takes Naturalism to hold that the only real entities are physical. (In her review of Stich's Deconstructing the Mind, in The Journal of Philosophy, 95 (December 1998), 641-644, pp. 641-642) Such a position apparently has now led Stich to give up Naturalism "in favor of an open-ended pluralism." Pluralism, as he takes it, is a position that counts as legitimate all properties "invoked in successful scientific theories." But for Kitcher, it seems, such "Pluralism," tied to "successful science," is just the Naturalism we want. She points out how "the obvious authorities" on naturalistic epistemology (Quine, Goldman) counsel us to "make free use of empirical psychology" and to "reunite epistemology with psychology." (Kitcher, p. 642) Forget physicalism, her point seems to be. A loose scientism is enough to secure Naturalism for us. Indeed, many of the "generous" Naturalists of the mid-20th century gathered around Dewey and Sidney Hook identified Naturalism precisely with acceptance of science and only science as the arbiter of truth and reality, and seemed, at least, to accept whatever came out the end of the pipe of "scientific inquiry" as knowledge and reality.

But if the points made above about science, even "successful science," and about psychology in particular, are true, Kitcher's advice--similar to the advice of a Dewey or Hook--simply cannot be followed. It is vacuous in practice, for there is no way of identifying and accessing the "successful science" which is proposed as defining Naturalism. At most you get "science now," which is really only "some scientist(s) now." And certainly no science (including psychology) that was not Naturalistic in some strongly physicalistic or at least Empiricist sense would be accepted as "successful" by those inclined to Naturalism. Then we are back in the circle: Naturalism in terms of science--but, of course, naturalistic science.

For these reasons I take it that the appeal to science cannot serve to specify naturalism. There are, then, good reasons to be a "Puritan" if you want to advocate Naturalism. Naturalism has to be an honest metaphysics; and that metaphysics has to be "unqualified physicalism" as referred to above. But then a thinker who would be naturalist would feel pressure to have recourse to some specific apriori analyses to render his ontological specification of Naturalism plausible. Short of that one simply can find no reason why naturalistic monism with respect to reality, knowledge or method should be true: no reason why there should not be radically different kinds of realities with correspondingly radically different kinds of knowledge and inquiry. Why a priori should one suppose the sciences could be "unified"? And why should we think that the identifiable sciences together could exhaust knowledge and reality? It is simply a hope that some people have shared. But hopes often lack reason. The lack of reason in the case at hand is, I think, what made A. E. Murphy conclude at the mid-century, in his review of a very important book at the time, Naturalism and the Human Spirit, "that the naturalists, who have so much that is good to offer, still lack and need a philosophy...." (The Journal of Philosophy, 42 (1945), 400-417, p. 417.)

In addition to the difficulty of coming up with the required a priori analyses, however, to turn to such inquiry as might produce them would (as I have already indicated) be to break with the epistemological monism essential to Naturalism and introduce something like a "first philosophy." This would be discontinuous with the empirical methods of the sciences. In showing its justification through apriori analysis, Naturalism would simply give up the game.

In specifying what Naturalism is, therefore, one seems to be faced with an inescapable dilemma. Either one must turn to apriori (non-empirical and extra-scientific) analyses to establish its monism (which will refute Naturalism's basic claim about knowledge and inquiry), or its claim

will have to rest upon a vacuous appeal to what "science" says.

That might seem to end the discussion about Naturalism as a philosophical alternative. But there may be a way to keep it going. One could retreat to a mere methodological Naturalism and say that scientific method--identified somehow--is our only hope as human beings. Whether or not we can adequately specify Naturalism or know it to be true, one might say, the "scientific method" must be exclusively followed for the sake of human well being. Naturalism would then be a humane proposal, not a philosophical claim--and that would, in fact, do justice to a great deal of its history. (Not infrequently one picks up the suggestion that one ethically ought to be a Naturalist, that the "right kind of people" are naturalists. And likewise for the other side, that the right kind of people are anti-Naturalists.) The proposal would be to assume in our inquiries that only the physical (or the empirical) exists and to see if inquiry based upon that assumption is not more successful in promoting human ends (and hence is more morally praiseworthy) than any other type of inquiry. We would not need to insist that non-Naturalistic explanations of some or all events are impossible, just that they are not possibilities that need to be seriously considered in scientific work. (As Steven Weinberg has decided not to worry about fairies.)

But even if we regard Naturalism as merely a humane proposal we must still raise the issue of whether straightforward physicalism (the only version of Naturalism that makes sense) can deal with ethical phenomena or provide an adequate interpretation of the moral life and moral principles.

### III

So now we turn to the other side of the Naturalism/ethics contrast. What are the distinctions, with the corresponding properties and relations, that Naturalism (as Physicalism) would have to account for if it were to encompass the field of ethics successfully? This question requires me to take a position on issues that run very deep in the philosophical understanding of the moral life and of the evaluations of various kinds that accompany it and direct it. To prepare the way for that I need to make some observations about where we stand today in our usual approach to ethical theory.

I think it is not easy to understand why we undertake ethical theory as we now usually do: why we start with the questions we do and confine the discussion in the manner now characteristic in ethical thought. Historical process, it seems to me, has much more to do with all this than does insight into moral phenomena--including moral judgments or, if you like, moral utterances--with their distinctive features.

Since Hume, at least, discussions in ethical theory have been driven by epistemology: by views concerning what can and cannot be known, and how knowledge must work in particular areas. Not, of course, that reflections on ethical matters before Hume had nothing essentially to do with epistemological considerations. The two areas have always been intertwined. But in Hume and afterwards epistemological considerations became the dominant (though often silent) ones in determining what the moral judgment is and what it is about. Hedonistic Utilitarianism (Bentham, Mill), for example, or Emotivism, could never have risen to prominence as a theory of the moral life had it not been for the assumption that value must be something empirical, something feelable. And that is, of course, precisely Hume's assumption, which took a lengthy period of time after Hume to develop into an assumption that could be relied upon in public discussions of what ought to be done and what is right or wrong.

The emergence of non-cognitivism in ethical theory was, I believe, quite inevitable, given the ascendancy of Empiricism to dominance in the theory of knowledge and the domination of ethical reflections by the theory of knowledge. Naturalism is the current reformulation of classical Empiricism. One might easily suspect that if Empiricism is the correct analysis of

knowledge, there will certainly be no moral knowledge, because the substance of the moral life is not empirical. It is not something that is feeling or sensation or is of what can be felt or sensed.

The fateful alternative that G. E. Moore so innocently posed was bound to be resolved in the direction he thought unthinkable:

"...If it is not the case that 'good' denotes something simple and indefinable, only two alternatives are possible: either it is a complex, a given whole, about the correct analysis of which there may be disagreement; or else it means nothing at all, and there is no such subject as Ethics." (Principia Ethica, § 15) "Okay," the response was, "so there is no such subject." And with that we have Emotivism and Non-Cognitivism.

Just a little more of recent history of the field as I perceive it: To be blunt, we have not really begun to recover from non-cognitivism in the field of ethical theory, for all its frenzied activity. The growth industry of applied, professional and social-issues "ethics" conceals the fact that matters of principle raised by non-cognitivism have remained unbudged. The effort to dig out by means of the analysis of language really did not succeed; for, frankly, the multitude of claims made about ethical language are hardly more "empirical" or "naturalistic" than claims made about ethical phenomena themselves, and hardly more a matter of general agreement. It is not easy to find a good reason for not being an "Emotivist" with reference to semantics and logic, if you have already accepted the grounds which drove people to Emotivism in ethical theory.

Then (in the mid-sixties and following) the demands of social, legal and professional life in this country forced the issue of the justification of various and scattered moral claims having to do with justice (primarily civil rights: discrimination, the draft, etc. etc). These claims, it was thought, had to have a cognitive right or wrong, ought or ought not to them. Had to. But the urgency of those demands did not resolve the underlying issue. Namely, the issue of the nature of moral phenomena and knowledge thereof. Those issues are still hanging fire today, and that fact also makes the problem of understanding the connection between ethics (or the moral life) and naturalism difficult to state in any satisfactory way. There is very little agreement as to what it is we are trying to relate Naturalism to when we try to relate it to the moral life and, by extension, to ethics.

A striking illustration of the obscurity about what the central moral phenomena are is provided, it seems to me, by the career of John Rawls. Possibly no work in the field of ethics received more attention during the last quarter of the century than did his A Theory of Justice (1971). This fact is inseparable from the just-noted emergence of the demands of social, legal and professional issues in the sixties. Rawls and others such as Robert Nozick received the hearing they did because of the pressing need to determine what, morally, was right or wrong, obligatory or not, with reference to certain social and professional issues.

But by the mid-eighties or thereabouts, Rawl's view "is that his theory of justice is best understood as a political rather than as a moral doctrine--and as such is committed to no metaphysical theses.... Rawls draws a new distinction which is basic to his discussions: a distinction 'between a political conception of justice and a comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine.' What he seeks to provide is a public philosophy which does not incorporate or amount to any comprehensive doctrine." (from Chandran Kukathas and Philip Pettit, Rawls: A Theory of Justice and It's Critics, Stanford University Press, 1990, pp. 134-135; referring to Rawls' "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" and "The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good," in Philosophy and Public Affairs, vols. 14 and 17)

One cannot but wonder what kind of mistake or shift this represents. How could one make a mistake like this? Apparently Rawls (and certainly multitudes of others) thought he was

advancing a moral theory of Justice, and then discovered that he was not, that the theory was not a moral theory of justice after all.

How could one be mistaken about something like that? I believe this is explained by how moral reflection was taken up after the non-cognitivist eruption and the, to me at least, pretty obvious inability of the analysis of language, and of moral language in particular, to do anything to counter non-cognitivism and provide a cognitive basis for ethical claims about social and "applied" issues. "Rights" talk was exempted from the non-cognitive status by force of social events, and philosophers stepped into the "rights" arena as if it were the arena of moral phenomena and ethical analysis. Rationality (understood in one way or another, but always "formally") then became the ultimate point of reference for the certification of specific normative claims, insofar as any certification was thought possible. The good person or society was to be the (in some sense) rational person or society, and the bad person--the Nazi is the set case--or the wrong action--discrimination, for example--must be irrational (in some formal sense). And if they are not irrational they are morally okay, at least. And rationality here was not be a deep matter of some kind, such as one might find in Plato, Aristotle or Kant. It was to be a matter of behavior, for most thinkers, and one in which it will, supposedly, make sense to discuss the question of whether and under what conditions a computer or computer program or robot could be rational or irrational. (Peter Unger is one of very few contemporary thinkers to question the idea of a tight connection between morality and rationality. See pp. 21-22 of his Living High and Letting Die, Oxford U. P. 1996.)

Moral phenomena are, accordingly, pushed into the public arena of the behavioral and the social. Needless to say, this is a definite advantage for anyone who wants to naturalize ethics--though by no means is that the end of the story. One can see here, I believe, the continued subservience of ethical theory to the "Empiricist Imperative," we might call it. Richard Brandt in his Ethical Theory (1959) says: "The essential thesis of naturalism is the proposal that ethical statements can, after all, be confirmed, ethical questions answered, by observation and inductive reasoning of the very sort that we use to confirm statements in the empirical sciences.... [T]he meaning of ethical statements is such that we can verify them just like the statements of psychology or chemistry." (p. 152) That is, they refer, in the end, to sense-perceptible or at least 'feelable' facts (such as desire or pleasure or pain or social behavior). The appeal to rationality as the ultimate point of reference in moral judgment might with some justification be seen as the most recent effort to "save" moral phenomena for Empiricism, currently called Naturalism. By it moral phenomena are completely externalized.

Well, but one might also say that this is only "saving" moral phenomena by abandoning them altogether and substituting something else. (Like "liberating" villages by destroying them.) A well-known statement by Elizabeth Anscombe from 1958 was "that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that it should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking." She went on to say that "the differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance," and that we should try to stop using "right," "wrong," "ought," etc. in a moral sense, because they are derivative "from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it." (Opening ¶ of her "Modern Moral Philosophy," first published in Philosophy 33 (January 1958)) I don't think anything that has happened since she published her paper in 1958 would have changed her view of the difficulties into which ethical theory has fallen.

These claims by Anscombe should be placed along side the "Disquieting Suggestion" of chapter 1 of Alisdair MacIntyre's After Virtue, that "we have--very largely, if not entirely--lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality." (2nd ed., p. 2) Both what Anscombe has to say about "giving up" attempts to theorize about morality and the very language of morality until something (an "adequate philosophy of psychology") is developed, and what MacIntyre has to say about the loss of a functional language of morality, and therewith the

power of moral concepts and principles to govern life (until "community" is somehow restored)-both of these points would make considerable sense if one simply assumed that our attempts to theorize and live the moral life had shifted away from its actual center or basic subject matter, objectively considered. And this might be understood as having happened because of the adoption of a theory of knowledge according to which the genuine organizational center of moral reality and moral phenomena is unknowable. That would leave us a choice between adopting explicit non-cognitivism (which seems to me to be impossible in practice) or trying to deal with the moral life and ethical theory in terms of aspects of it (rights, 'justice,' 'professional ethics,' and 'applied' ethics, whatever) that are completely peripheral and therefore incapable of providing practical or theoretical unity to the moral life.

This, I think, is what has actually happened. Whether or not Naturalism is compatible with ethics in this external and fragmentized sense is an issue that very likely cannot be clearly stated or resolved, and, in any case, might not much matter. If we consider ethics and the moral life from another perspective, however, and one that is not constantly worrying about meeting the demands of the Empiricist Imperative, a clear issue can be joined with Naturalism, and clearly resolved, and it can be seen that this is an issue that matters a great deal to the understanding and conduct of the moral life.

#### IV

All of this to suggest how the primary moral phenomena could have been lost from view and replaced by the externalities of actions and social structures and processes. What then should we say about the basic good and evil in the moral realm? "The external performance," Hume says, "has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality...." (T 477-478) I agree. For him, the moral distinctions fall between what he calls "qualities of mind." These are his virtues and vices. Not actions but the sources of action in the human system are the fundamental subjects of moral appraisal. Moral appraisal is not basically about what people do, but about what they would do, could do. What they actually do is, from the moral point of view, of interest primarily because it is revelatory of what they would or would not do, could or could not bring themselves to do, and therefore of their moral identity. (Of course actions have interests and values other than moral ones.)

Hume never arrived at a unitary conceptualization of virtue (or vice) precisely because he tried to confine his investigation to an empirical survey. All he could come up with was: "Personal Merit <virtue> consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others." (Opening sentence to Section IX, "Conclusion," of An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.) But Kant was not so restricted and he identifies the central moral phenomenon as the good will. This, he famously says, is the only thing good without qualification, good regardless of whatever else may be true. Again, I believe he was entirely correct about this. The good will is the primary moral phenomena. Kant's efforts to characterize the good will in merely formal terms may have been less than spectacularly successful; but that is not the only way he characterizes it, and he insists in his doctrine of virtue that the good will has two a priori (non-empirical) ends: one's own moral perfection and the happiness of others. These are the material ends of the good will for Kant, imposing obligations in their own right.

I mention Hume and Kant not to enter into exposition of them, but simply to locate a broad tradition of ethical theorizing that locates moral value not in action but in the sources of action, and not in the formal features of moral experience, but in the material aims of action and dispositions organized around them. This is a tradition that reached a sort of maturity in the work of late 19th century thinkers such as Sidgwick, Bradley and especially T. H. Green, and I want to identify with that tradition. For the following one hundred years after these thinkers this tradition has been paralyzed if not killed off by the effects of Moore and his followers and critics. It was a tradition that focussed upon the will and the role of the will in the organization

of the "ideal self." The 'ideal self' was, of course, the good person, which everyone finds themselves obliged to be.

## V

### The Good Person: A Matter of the Heart

The morally good person, I would say, is a person who is intent upon advancing the various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact, in a manner that respects their relative degrees of importance and the extent to which the actions of the person in question can actually promote the existence and maintenance of those goods.

The person who is morally bad or evil is one who is intent upon the destruction of the various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact, or who is indifferent to the existence and maintenance of those goods.

Being morally good or evil clearly will be a matter of degree and there surely will be few if any actual human beings who exist at the extreme ends of the scale. (An interesting but largely pointless question might be how humanity distributes on the scale: a nice bell curve or...what?)

Here, I submit, is the fundamental moral distinction: the one which is of primary human interest, and from which all the others, moving toward the periphery of the moral life and ethical theory, can be clarified. For example: the moral value of acts (positive and negative); the nature of moral obligation and responsibility; virtues and vices; the nature and limitations of rights, punishment, rewards, justice and related issues; the morality of laws and institutions; and what is to be made of moral progress and moral education. A coherent theory of these matters can, I suggest, be developed only if we start from the distinction between the good and bad will or person--which, admittedly, almost no one is currently prepared to discuss. That is one of the outcomes of ethical theorizing through the 20th Century.

I believe that this is the fundamental moral distinction because I believe that it is the one that ordinary human beings constantly employ in the ordinary contexts of life, both with reference to themselves (a touchstone for moral theory, in my opinion) and with reference to others (where it is employed with much less clarity and assurance). And I also believe that this is the fundamental moral distinction because it seems to me the one most consistently present at the heart of the tradition of moral thought that runs from Socrates to Sidgwick--all of the twists and turns of that tradition notwithstanding.

Just consider the role of "the good" in Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, for example, stripped, if possible, of all the intellectual campaigns and skirmishes surrounding it. Consider Aquinas' statement that "this is the first precept of law, that good is to be done and promoted, and evil is to be avoided. All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this; so that all the things which the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good belong to the precepts of the natural law under the form of things to be done or avoided." (Treatise on Law, Question XCIV, Second Article) Or consider how Sidgwick arrives at his "maxim of Benevolence"--"that each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own, except in so far as he judges it to be less, when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable by him." (Methods of Ethics, Book III, Chap. XIII, 7th edition [p. 382 of the Dover edition, New York, 1966] Sidgwick was of course very careful to incorporate his intuitions of justice and prudence into this crowning maxim.)

A few further clarifications must be made before turning to my final argument:

1. I have spoken of the goods of human life in the plural, and have spoken of goods with which we are in effective contact, i.e. can do something about. The good will is manifested in its active caring for particular goods that we can do something about, not in dreaming of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" or even of my own 'happiness' or of "duty for duty's sake." Generally speaking, thinking in high level abstractions will always defeat moral will. As Bradley and others before him clearly saw, "my station and its duties" is nearly, but not quite, the whole moral scene, and can never be simply bypassed on the way to "larger" things. One of the major miscues of ethical theory since the sixties has been, in my opinion, its almost total absorption in social and political issues. Of course these issues also concern vital human goods. But moral theory simply will not coherently and comprehensively come together from their point of view. They do not essentially involve the center of moral reality, the will.

2. Among human goods--things that are good for human beings and enable them to flourish--are human beings and certain relationships to them, and, especially, good human beings. That is, human beings that fit the above description. One's own well-being is a human good, to one's self and to others, as is what Kant called the moral "perfection" of oneself. Of course non-toxic water and food, a clean and safe environment, opportunities to learn and to work, stable family and community relations, and so forth, all fall on the list of particular human goods. (Most of the stuff for sale in our society probably does not.)

There is no necessity of having a complete list of human goods or a tight definition of what something must be like to be on the list. Marginal issues, "Lifeboat" cases, and the finer points of conceptual distinction are interesting exercises and have a point for philosophical training; but it is not empirically confirmable, to say the least, that the chances of having a good will or being a good person improve with philosophical training in ethical theory as that has been recently understood. It is sufficient to become a good or bad person that one have a good general understanding of human goods and how they are effected by action. And that is also sufficient for the understanding of the good will and the goodness of the individual. We do not have to know what the person would do in a lifeboat situation to know whether or not they have good will, though what they do in such situations may throw light on who they are, or on how good (or bad) they are. The appropriate response to actions in extreme situations may not be a moral judgement at all, but one of pity or admiration, of the tragic sense of life or amazement at what humans are capable of, etc. etc.

3. The will to advance the goods of human life with which one comes into contact is inseparable from the will to find out how to do it and do it appropriately. If one truly wills the end one wills the means, and coming to understand the goods which we effect, and their conditions and interconnections, is inseparable from the objectives of the good person and the good will. Thus, knowledge, understanding and rationality are themselves human goods, to be appropriately pursued for their own sakes, but also because they are absolutely necessary for moral self-realization. Formal rationality is fundamental to the good will, but is not sufficient to it. It must be acknowledged that one of the moral strong points of Naturalism is its concern about advancing the goods of human life and about combatting the forces of ignorance and superstition that work against those goods. One cannot understand Naturalism as a historical reality or a present fact if one does not take this point into consideration.

4. Thus the morally good (or evil) will or person will necessarily incorporate the following elements at least:

a. Consciousness, the various intentional states that make up the mental life.

b. Knowledge of the various goods of human life and of their conditions and interconnections. This will include much knowledge of fact, but also logical relations, as well as the capacity to comprehend them to form hypothetical judgments and to reach conclusions on the basis of

premises.

c. The capacity to form and sustain long-range, even life-long intentions. One is not a morally good person by accident or drift, but by a choice settled into character: a choice to live as a person who is intent upon advancing the various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact, etc. The corresponding is true of a morally evil person. Intention--settled intention, or disposition--is the fundamental locus of moral value, deeper than will as a mere faculty (which does not by itself yield moral value) or as an act of will or choice (which is momentary, as character is not). It is this type of intention, worked into the substance of one's life, that is moral identity. And it is the moral identity of persons that Naturalism would have to account for if it were successfully to accommodate the moral life and ethical theory.

## VI

### The Argument--Finally

Can the moral identity of the good (or evil) person be captured within the categories of Naturalism as Physicalism? I believe it clearly cannot. The argument against it is an old and simple one.

Suppose that we have an acceptable list of physical properties and relations. We might take them from physical theory, as the properties and relations corresponding to the concepts of current physics: location, mass, momentum and so forth. (Who knows what the future or ultimate physics will look like?) Or, moved by the above doubts about what philosophy can soundly derive from the sciences, we could turn to the "primary qualities" of Modern philosophy, and, for that matter, add on the "secondary" ones as well: color, odor, etc. I don't think we need, for present purposes, to be very scrupulous about this list either. Let us agree that whatever goes on such a list will count as physical properties, and that narrow Naturalism is the proposal to confine our inquiries and conclusions to whatever shows up on the list and combinations thereof.

The argument, then, is simply that no such physical property or combination of thereof constitutes the basic components of the good will or person, such as intentionality, knowledge, choice or the settled intentions that make up moral identity and character. At the simplest level, none of those properties or their combinations constitute a representation of anything, or qualifies their bearer as being of or about anything. The properties of those properties (and of combinations thereof) are not the same as the properties of representations (ideas, thoughts, propositions, beliefs, statements), much less of intentions, decisions and the permanent inclinations that make up character. If this is correct, and if the narrower Naturalism admits only these "physical" properties, then there are no good or bad wills or persons in the world of the narrower Naturalism.

Of course if there are no representations, there is no knowledge or choice, and if there is no knowledge or choice, there are no settled intentions with reference to anything, much less the goods of human life. The logical relations required in thought, knowledge and choice also will not show up in the world of Naturalism. The ontological structure of the good will therefore cannot be present in the world of narrower Naturalism--nor, for that matter, in the world of the actual sciences as now commonly understood.

Note that my claim is that such physical properties never constitute the good (or bad) will and its sub-components. I say nothing here about the latter not emerging from the physical properties of, say, the human brain. This is not because I think they may so emerge, although some form of interaction between them and the brain, body and social world, for example, surely does take place. Rather, it is because I can only regard talk of the emergence of irreducibly mental properties from the brain or the central nervous system as mere property dualism cum apologies.

I accept that emergence can be employed as a valid and useful concept in numerous domains, e.g., chemistry, sociology and the arts. But its valid employment requires some degree of insight into why this emerges from that. Such insight is lacking, in my opinion, in the case of the brain and experiences generally, and certainly with respect to the substructures of the morally good (or bad) will.

Finally, Naturalism as a world view lives today on promises. "We are going to show how all personal phenomena, including the moral, emerges from the chemistry (brain, DNA) of the human body." And, of course, the actual sciences (specific investigative practices) have made many wonderful discoveries and inventions. But after 300 years or so of promises to "explain everything," the grand promises become a little tiresome, and the strain begins to show. And anyway, nothing in actual practice by scientists going about their work depends upon the grand promises--which can and do force sensible people to say things that have nothing to do with sense or science. A justifiably well regarded worker in the field of cosmology was heard to say at this conference: "It all begins in a state of absolute nothing, which makes a quantum transition to something very small, and then 'inflation' sets in...." What which?

## VII

### Parting Salvo

Tom Nagel has remarked: "Something peculiar happens when we view action from an objective or external standpoint. Some of its most important features seem to vanish under the objective gaze. Actions seem no longer assignable to individual agents as sources, but become instead components of the flux of events in the world of which the agent is a part.... The essential source of the problem is a view of persons and their actions as part of the order of nature.... That conception, if pressed, leads to the feeling that we are not agents at all, that we are helpless and not responsible for what we do. Against this judgment the inner view of the agent rebels. The question is whether it can stand up to the debilitating effects of a naturalistic view." (p. 110 of The View from Nowhere, Oxford U. P. 1986)

Really, all I have said in my basic argument is that a close adherence to science as that would be commonly understood, or to Naturalism as a "first philosophy" (Physicalism/Materialism), has the effect that the primary structures and properties of the moral domain--those involved in the good (or bad) will--are lost sight of, and hence cannot function in the coherent organization of either the understanding (ethical theory) or the practice of the moral life. In Nagel's fine phrase, "Some of its most important features seem to vanish under the objective gaze."

They have vanished at present, and that has led to the current situation (deplored by Anscombe and MacIntyre) where there is no moral knowledge that is publicly accessible in our culture, i.e., that could be taught to individuals by our public institutions as a basis for their development into morally admirable human beings who can be counted on to do the "right thing" when it matters. This is what I call "The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge." That disappearance is now a fact in North American society.

The challenge to Naturalism is, therefore, not just to come up with a convincing theory of the moral life (an analysis of moral concepts, utterances and so forth). If what I have said is true, Naturalism will not be able to do that. But suppose it could. Its work would not be done, but would hardly have begun. It would still have to create a moral culture by which people could live. It would still have the task of providing a body of moral understanding by which ordinary as well as extra-ordinary human beings could direct their own lives. Naturalism has always promised to do this through its leading spokespersons, and continues to do so today--through individuals such as Professor Larry Arnhart (Darwinian Natural Right, etc.) We wish them well.

Theirs is a tremendously important undertaking. But they have much to do. Let them do it.

Naturalism has managed to occupy the intellectual high ground, and in the minds of many the moral high ground, in contemporary society--especially within the academy. It has put the Inquisition as well as the Moral Majority in its place. It is now the authority.

If you want to see how true this is just consider: The leading question of this conference on The Nature of Nature is posed on page 1 of the program booklet. Here it is: "Is the universe self-contained or does it require something beyond itself to explain its existence and internal function?" If, now, you sit in on the courses here at Baylor University, or any other institution of higher learning with an association with religion, you will find that the courses are all taught on the assumption (possibly excepting religion, but that is not necessarily so) that the universe is self-contained and does not require something beyond itself to explain its existence and internal function. The course content in schools with a religious association is exactly the same as in schools with none. This is, commonly, a point of pride among faculty at schools with a religious association. That is exactly what I mean when I say that Naturalism has now won and is the authority.

So, let it lead. Not-being-superstitious-any-more will hardly serve as an adequate positive basis of moral understanding and moral development. Having been saved from the Moral Majority, how will we be saved from the immoral minority--or is that the majority? From Spinoza to Voltaire to Condorcet to Buchner and Hackel, to Dewey and Hook, and into the present, the promise of Naturalism has been one of genuine moral enlightenment. But we cannot any longer live on promises. If Naturalism is to be taken seriously in the capacities it wishes to be taken seriously, the promissory notes have come due. Naturalism must now turn them into cash. The need now is to stand and deliver. Let concrete and abstract, individual and social, moral understanding and guidance come forth from the views of Darwin, Dawkins, Dennett, Searle, Wilson and Arnhart. Let them tell us, corporately and individually, how to become persons of good will, reliably guided by moral obligation to do what is right and honorable.

This is especially relevant because the ultimate human issue back of Naturalism as a movement, and one seldom out of sight in discussions involving it, is: Who shall determine policy. But if I am anywhere close to right in my main argument, the Naturalists do not stand a chance at developing a body of knowledge to serve in concrete moral guidance. Certainly "survival" or "natural selection" will never suffice, though it has a point to make. But actuality would prove possibility. When they do what they have promised (or anything close) we will know they can do it. And we sincerely wish them well, for there is an incredible amount at stake for humanity.