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WHY NATURALISM AND NOT MATERIALISM?

QUESTIONS of terminology are less superficial than is often supposed. Precision in terminology usually accompanies clear thinking, and is at once its condition and effect. In other words, the relation between them is reciprocal. The point in terminology which has increasingly attracted my attention and which I wish to examine in the public way of an article is the exact difference between materialism and naturalism. It seems to me that a discussion of these terms is very much in order. Thus a thinker may call himself a naturalist and be called a materialist by a critic. How shall we differentiate these terms?

We must first of all note that terms change their meaning insensibly as the centuries pass. Realism, materialism, hedonism and idealism are positions which have been reformulated again and again. The realism of to-day differs in many respects from that of yesterday; and the same is true of idealism. The outsider who sees eternal recurrence in philosophy is governed too much by words. Because the words are the same, he tends to believe that the ideas indicated by them are exactly the same. I suppose that the adjectives, like 'new' and 'critical,' which are so frequently attached to these old recurrent terms, represent the effort to guard against this lazy, but natural, assumption of sameness.

What underlies this slow transformation of basic positions? Surely the advance in human thought itself, an advance in methods and knowledge. More information, better analysis, wider generalizations, improved methods, all these play their part and bring it to pass that there is difference and novelty along with an underlying constancy of outlook. This is why the kinds of realism which are to-day struggling for mastery are not identical with any form of medieval realism and why the materialism of the twentieth century shows signs of differing profoundly from the materialism of Democritus, Hobbes and Moleschott. There is, I grant, a certain identity of perspective and of exclusion but there are also marked differences.

Let us concentrate now upon the differences between naturalism and materialism. It may be that we can find a clue in the distinction between cosmology and ontology. I would say that ontology is the more specialized of these two divisions of theory of reality or metaphysics. Materialism is distinctly an ontological theory, a theory of the *stuff* of reality. Its polar opposite is usually taken to be mentalism of some kind. Naturalism, on the other hand, is a cosmological position; its opposite is supernaturalism in the larger meaning of that term. I mean that naturalism takes nature in a definite way as identical with reality, as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality. And by nature is meant the space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed. The whole nature of nature may not be exhaustively known, but its location and general characteristics come under the above categories. Supernaturalism essentially affirms that nature is only a part of reality. This supernaturalism may be of the myth-believing, popular type bound up with traditional religion or it may be quite opposed to the miraculous. For instance, nature is for Bradley only a part of reality and in that sense it is appearance. The status of matter for Plato is another instance of supernaturalism in this large sense.

When naturalism is taken in this cosmological setting, we can readily understand why naturalism is the inevitable philosophy of science and why it stands in opposition to those movements which are called absolute idealism, transcendentalism, theism, in short, for supernaturalism in the large sense. But, of course, it is philosophy and not science which must examine this contrast and defend one side or the other. What is nature? What shall we include under this term? These are, indeed, big questions and they cannot be handled apart from epistemology and a painstaking analysis of all the categories. The present article is no attempt at a short-cut or a quick-and-easy way of dealing with the technical problems of philosophy. These questions I have examined in the leisurely way a book makes possible in my various publications. At present, I am concerned with classification and the indication of relations.

Back of the great struggle between idealism and realism during the nineteenth century lay, in part, the still greater struggle be-

tween naturalism and supernaturalism. Only physical realism could justify the claims of naturalism as science understands nature. Idealism by its very logic cast a fog over this term. What is nature for any form of idealism? A very vague term.

It will be noted that I said physical realism and not merely realism. The characteristic of critical realism, as I have always conceived it, is that it is a realistic theory of knowledge which justifies the distinction between the content of knowledge and its object and permits us to conceive these objects as material when they exist. In other words, physical realism accepts physical objects and justifies nature as science conceives it. Critical realism as an epistemology is the gate of entrance to a naturalistic cosmology. But it is only a gate of entrance. The thinker must deal with space, time, causality, matter, energy, life, mind,—in fact, with all the basic categories—before he has his naturalism as a philosophy.

Now because my own thinking has been along the lines sketched above I have employed the term naturalism as the logical term for my position. In that I have stressed novelty and gradients in nature I have called it evolutionary naturalism.

Undeniably there are other species of naturalism resting upon a different epistemology. Thus there is the pragmatic kind of naturalism with its beloved word *experience*. I am quite ready to acknowledge that there is much in the drift and tendency of pragmatism with which I have sympathy; and yet the neglect of epistemology and the almost complete lack of cosmology debar me from anything but a very general feeling of kinship. It still strikes me as a *pseudo*-naturalism, an outlook which is too much of a holdover from idealism to represent the nature of common sense and science. Panpsychism is another species of naturalism which cannot be ignored. At one time, it was the expression of Kantian phenomenalism and was well under the control of idealistic motives—as witness James Ward's and Mr. Carr's revival of monadism—but in the hands of Professors Strong and Drake the naturalistic perspective has come to the front. For this reason, panpsychism must be considered a species of naturalism.

Taken in the large, then, there would seem to be three species of naturalism to-day competing for favor in philosophy; evolu-

tionary, or emergent, naturalism, pragmatic naturalism and panpsychistic naturalism. I have already pointed out the chief technical difference between evolutionary naturalism and pragmatic naturalism. The divergence between it and panpsychism is subtle, and I shall have occasion to say more about it when I come to the ontological side of naturalism. In a summary fashion, the points of contention concern the degree of novelty admitted for evolution and the correctness of taking the psychical as a self-sufficient stuff. On the whole, the panpsychist takes the principle of continuity very literally and, since the psychical is for him a stuff, he regards emergence as a semi-miracle to be disputed. His tradition is the introspective, analogical tradition. The evolutionary naturalist, on the other hand, takes the organism as the unit for the study of the mind-body problem, does not conceive the psychical as a stuff but rather as a patterned event, or qualitative dimension, of a more inclusive system, and takes novelty of organization and properties as an empirical fact. We may say that he takes the categories of physical science a little more seriously and has a flavor of behaviorism in his psychology.

The general situation of naturalism having thus been studied we must pass to ontology. It will be remembered that we said that naturalism has been, traditionally, a cosmological term championing the self-sufficiency of nature and rejecting even the subtler forms of supernaturalism such as transcendentalism and objective idealism.

From the time of the Greek physicists the prime question in ontology has been, What is the stuff of reality? Answers to this question lost their simplicity because philosophy soon became like a three-ringed circus with controversies in cosmology, ontology, and epistemology going on simultaneously. The approach to the prime question became increasingly complicated. I am inclined to think that the human mind is at last getting ready to get back to ontology and to answer the question, What is the stuff of reality?

What possibilities seem open to a naturalistic cosmology on the ontological side? At first glance, certainly, the choice seems to lie between panpsychism, neutralism, experientialism and ma-

terialism. Is there any other possibility? Must the evolutionary naturalist find his ontology in a development of materialism? It is this question which I shall have chiefly in mind in the remainder of the article.

It is needless to point out that physical realism opposes experientialism. As for neutralism, this term has been the expression of the epistemological monism of the Mach-James-Russell movement. The critical realism which underlies evolutionary naturalism precludes the appeal to a neutral, semi-experiential stuff which can be taken alternately as mental and physical according to context. The distinction between the content and the object of knowledge and the frank acceptance of consciousness as an existentially—though not a cognitively—private domain prevents this hypothesis and makes it irrelevant. No; neutralism is a *tour de force* which has no significance for evolutionary naturalism. By rejecting panpsychism must evolutionary naturalism fall back upon materialism? Let us see.

I shall largely disregard the extrinsic weaknesses of materialism and stress its intrinsic weaknesses as conceived in the past. I mean by extrinsic weaknesses those which flow from the contradiction of cherished beliefs; and by intrinsic weaknesses those which are due to the logical inadequacy of a doctrine to the facts it must cover. These have, of course, been connected. Some of the opprobrium under which materialism has suffered has been due to its logical inadequacy.

There is small doubt in my mind that the extrinsic weaknesses of materialism have had their influence upon even the philosophic standing of materialism. The philosopher has usually been an academic man, and the academic man has been under pressure of various sorts to maintain a genteel tradition. Besides, to be called a materialist has been like being fired at by a blunderbuss. It has come to mean for many irreligion in the sense almost of immorality, lowness of ideals, etc. The extrinsic weaknesses of naturalism have not been as great, although many philosophers have attempted to identify it with complete control by instincts, with psychological hedonism, etc. The truth is that naturalism was never quite so specific an ontological theory as materialism. It was, as I have pointed out, more markedly

cosmological. I could spend time usefully showing that these reproaches were only partially justified, but my present purpose forbids.

Let us, then, pass to a consideration of the intrinsic weaknesses of past materialism. If materialism can be redeemed from these, I shall have no objection to evolutionary naturalism's ontology being called materialism. It might then be called the new materialism, or emergent materialism, or critical materialism as I have often called it. Let the reader recall what I said in regard to recurrence in philosophy; it is always recurrence with a difference.

The following doctrines are those which materialism has been identified with in the past and which have been held up as folly: (1) physical realism, (2) mechanism, (3) epiphenomenalism, (4) denial of the significance of values and ideals, and (5) stress on stuff rather than on organization. Now I do think that some of these doctrines are erroneous and that, if materialism inevitably implies them, evolutionary naturalism will refuse to be called materialism. I am frank to confess that some of the extrinsic weaknesses of materialism have followed from intrinsic weaknesses. Not all, of course, for even a materialism which had outgrown its former weaknesses would not be liked by the mythically minded. It is my belief, however, that many who are essentially humanists would find their opposition waning.

The evolutionary naturalist has physical realism in common with the materialist. He would not separate himself on this count. True that the epistemology of materialism has usually been extremely vague and even nonchalant. Development and supplementation would here be all that would be necessary.

Another weakness of materialism was its whole-hearted identification of itself with the principles of an elementary mechanics. It was too naively scientific. We may call this species of materialism *reductive materialism*.

By its very principles, evolutionary naturalism is opposed to reductive materialism. It is not finalistic, or teleological, in the old sense whether Aristotelian or theological, but it does not hold that relations in nature are external and that things are machines of atomic complexity. Organization and wholes are genuinely

significant. It is on this point that evolutionary naturalism parts company with traditional materialism. But I see no reason to believe that materialism will not adapt itself to this change in the outlook of science itself, for it has no will of its own in the matter, being, by its very motivation, a philosophical reflection of the generalizations of science.

But epiphenomenalism is a more serious matter. I doubt that materialism could overcome this obstacle without a philosophic acuity greater than it has shown. Even Santayana seems to me to have fallen short at this point. The cause of this dogma is the neglect to realize the limitations of the knowledge of things gained through external observation alone. The concept of the physical was thus one-sided and external. When we remember that there was added to this abstractness of the idea of the physical the acceptance of extreme mechanicalism, we do not wonder at epiphenomenalism.

Evolutionary naturalism has brought in this double correction. On the one hand with behaviorism it takes mind to be a category of the physical sciences for a kind of functioning and response and, on the other hand, it deepens its knowledge of a highly integrated physical system, the organism, by supplementary self-acquaintance. Into the subtleties of this double-knowledge view this is not the place to enter. Suffice it to point out that it modifies traditional materialism considerably. The brickbat conception of matter has vanished.

With the admission of levels in nature and the efficacy of mind as a living kind of organization, the rejection of the significance of values and ideals as effective elements in the functioning of a human organism is undermined. Ethics and sociology become natural sciences resting on psychology, just as psychology becomes continuous with biology. The day of the complete supremacy of physics and chemistry has passed with reductive assumptions.

To me the inadequacy of traditional materialism stands out startlingly when it is confronted with political and social problems. What relevance has the movement of atoms in a mechanical way to the growth of institutions and the establishment of associations with their purposes and objectives! The theory

does not connect up with the data which are to be interpreted and explained. There is basic irrelevance.

These intrinsic weaknesses of materialism make it hard to reform. And yet it stands for the self-sufficiency of the physical world, of nature, for a certain unity of process and material. All events are in the one world, and there are currents passing back and forth with nothing alien and imported from outside. Evolution and devolution, the higher and the lower, the simple and the complex, are components of the one great physical theatre. But it is this that naturalism likewise stresses.

The last doctrine which I identified with traditional materialism was the emphasis upon stuff rather than upon organization. Clearly this emphasis was an expression of the mechanical ideal itself in its atomic form. If relations are external and integration not recognized as intrinsic and strategic, the stuff of nature simmers down to the bare elements which are tossed hither and thither like flotsam and jetsam. Pattern and fibres of connection are ignored; the whole is but the parts or, to put it more exactly, there is no whole. But, as I understand the drift of science and the logic of the facts, integration and organized response are intrinsic to physical things and find expression in behavior and in the energies which are accumulated and discharged. In the strict sense, in short, matter is only a part of a *material system*. There is energy; there is the fact of pattern; there are all sorts of intimate relations. There has been, in other words, something of the abstract and reductive about our thought of matter and of material systems. There is heterogeneity, qualitative diversity in the material world. *The truth of materialism was in its naturalism more than in its oversimplified ontology.* It expressed the faith that everything real must have a locus in nature and have a function to perform in its economy.

Such, in outline, were some of the intrinsic weaknesses of materialism as an ontology. It remains a question in my mind how far the term can be reformed and modified to express our present idea of textures; energies, functions, consciousness, properties. Purely dispersive, granular ontologies must give way to a sense of systems, integrations, *Gestalten*. The concept of stuff must lose much of its character of geometrical exclusiveness

and unrelatedness. Materiality must take on the meaning of a common denominator quite harmonious with all sorts of variations in material systems. I am inclined to believe that a transformation of this sort is taking place into a new, or emergent, materialism. But, then, I would point out that some of the old contrasts would at the same time disappear. If mind and consciousness become intrinsic to material systems this means that an outlook has developed far different from the old materialism and the old idealistic mentalism.

The result of such a movement would be a subtler ontology of an empirical flavor recognizing each system in nature for what it is. It would do equal justice to personality, social groups and inorganic things. And yet there would remain that sense of 'involution,' as Mr. Lloyd Morgan calls it, that sense of genetic relations between the complex and the simple.

As I think of it, what comes home to my mind is the greater need of categories in our ontology. Matter, or stuff, needs to be supplemented by terms like integration, pattern, function. Picture-thinking must be replaced by genuine thought. Matter is a material system, and there are levels of material systems.

Let me in conclusion refer to a criticism of my position by Professor Thilly in a recent article in this REVIEW.¹ Before he begins his summary and criticism of my outlook, he makes this statement: "To regard the living human organism as the locus of consciousness is not materialism *unless the organism is in turn reduced to a mere physical mechanical system.*"² But that is precisely what the evolutionary naturalist refuses to do. He stresses levels in nature with new properties and different patterns. There are qualitatively different systems in nature with different modes of causality. Thus teleology is a characteristic feature of human organisms. I am sure that my critic will admit that he did injustice to my position by not emphasizing this essential feature which differentiates it from traditional materialism. And I fear me that he was in part misled by Professor Pratt who also neglected to give due attention to it. In the second place, I do not believe that Professor Thilly has

¹ Vol. XXXV, No. 6.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 535.

grasped the full significance of what I have called the double-knowledge approach to the organism. Systems of philosophy are fairly subtle things and can be judged adequately only if the whole is analyzed. I may make my position clearer, perhaps, by pointing out that my view of the mind-body situation is a development of the double-aspect theory in the light of evolutionary levels in nature and critical realism. For me, consciousness is intrinsic to the functioning organism but cannot be perceived from the outside.

In the light of these added interpretations I can, perhaps, avert his judgment. To have a consciousness intrinsic to the cortex, a factor in its responses, does not seem to me a "full-fledged interactionist dualism." It is only to admit the efficacy of consciousness after its own nature and in its own locus. Perhaps Mr. Thilly was once again misled by Mr. Pratt, who strangely interpreted me as holding that neural activity is one variant and consciousness another. My point was that neural activity could be known from the outside only in terms of the physical sciences including behaviorism, *while the same neural activity could be known from the inside also in some degree by means of the individual's consciousness which was intrinsic to it.*

Why, then, have I spoken of consciousness as a variant? Because I do not think of it as a stuff so much as an ever-changing qualitative component of the functioning of the brain. It is here that I differ from panpsychism. But it is a variant which has for us a unique status, for in it alone are we conscious, in it alone are we on the inside of nature as conscious beings. It is for this reason that it is a variant in a somewhat different way from that in which "the ether-wave is a variant from the air-wave."

I am convinced that I am right in refusing to call myself a materialist and in rebelling when others call me one until these points of difference from traditional materialism are fully grasped and reckoned with.

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