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# Review

**P. Giladi (ed.). *Responses to Naturalism. Critical Perspectives from Idealism and Pragmatism*. New York: Routledge, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-138-74474-5 (hbk). ISBN: 978-1-315-18085-4 (ebk). Pp. 320. £120.**

Idealism and pragmatism have not previously been valued as 'responses to naturalism'. Idealism has often been seen as the antechamber of supernaturalism, while pragmatism is usually considered to be more flexible and more suitable to be matched with a naturalistic framework. The idea of this collection of essays edited by Paul Giladi is different: 'this volume […] is an effort to respond to naturalism from the perspectives of Kantian idealism, Hegelian idealism, British idealism, and pragmatism in order to illuminate the distinctive set of *metaphilosophical* assumptions underpinning it' (12).

The endeavour is definitely original. Traditionally, responses to naturalism have tried to broaden the concept of 'nature', while the attempt here pursued is to enrich the very idea of 'reason'—namely, to articulate a (meta)philosophical proposal that, starting from the multi-dimensionality of discourse about the natural world and normativity, is eventually able to remove the most persistent theoretical as well as historiographical totems of naturalism.

Katerina Deligiorgi, debating the case of neo-Aristotelianism in some trends of contemporary moral philosophy, manages to dissolve the apparent Kantian dichotomy between 'natural' and 'moral' (i.e., 'formal') norms. The theme of practical rationality undermines in fact the assumption that some guiding principles of the Aristotelian ethics can be fully accommodated within the framework of contemporary naturalisms. As Deligiorgi recalls: 'The point of the story is that though it is possible to include in a natural history of humanity practical rationality, once you have accounted for its functioning, then you have allowed for a gap to emerge between the individual who makes use of his reason and the natural goodness that is explicable in terms of facts about things that belong to the natural world' (28). Kant's insistence on *law* and *deontic prescriptions* is not a kind of 'rule fetishism', but rather is intended to help identify a space for ends which Kant calls 'ends of reasons', that are ends proper to *moral beings* (31). The notion of a rational being, as Deligiorgi writes, is not something 'stamped on our hide', such that we can tell who is rational just by looking. Rather, in order to lead a moral life, we cannot rest content with just the human form, but we need 'to keep the door that reason wedges open so as not to be left with a diminished form of the human' (38).

Johannes Haag describes with great skill how Kant manages to reconcile his particular type of normative naturalism with the primacy of the practical interest of reason. The latter presents some propositions (namely, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God) that sound like a 'foreign offering' to theoretical reason. The accord between the general cognitive framework sketched in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (which transcendentally grounds the possibility of a mechanistic explanation of natural phenomena) and the original principle of *a priori* practical reason reaches a delicate balance in the *Critique of Judgement*. This last work can be seen as the point of balance that somehow holds together the interest of practical reason and the safeguarding of the philosophical naturalism practised in the specific form of a transcendental idealism (46). It is important to understand—as Haag correctly emphasises—that the form of theoretical reason and the form of practical reason can be seen as but two forms of what is ultimately one and the same reason. And that the concept of objective purposiveness in natural ends plays a decisive role in achieving this twofold aim (55).

Paul Giladi points out that the common features of these idealist responses to naturalism consist not so much in broadening the concept of nature as that of reason: the idea is that reason performs a plurality of functions not all flattened by 'one-dimensional nomothetic rationality' (76). Rather than solve the Placement Problem, which frames the legitimacy of normative factors in terms of whether or not they can be placed in the world described by the natural sciences, we should dissolve it in a Hegelian manner. One of the symptoms of the dehumanisation produced by regarding nomothetic rationality as exhaustive of meaningful rational discourse, Giladi says, in one of the most interesting points of his analysis, is manifested in the banning of the term *Geist* (81). Giladi's strong thesis, recalled also in his Introduction to the volume, is that the vocabulary of the ideal scientific image is 'epistemically authoritarian and imperialistic by forcing other forms of inquiry to adopt the discursive recourses and grammars of formal disciplines that are different in various ways to the manifest image's web of meaning' (85). His thesis, therefore, seems to be characterised by political as well as philosophical nuances. Naturalism is more than a theoretical episode, rather it is a properly *ideological* discourse bound up with the institutional form of contemporary Western society. This is a point of great relevance, which should perhaps be deepened by some further historical references: Already in 1945, for example, Arthur E. Murphy (writing a review of *Naturalism and the Human Spirit* in *The Journal of Philosophy*) denounced the authoritarian character of American naturalism: 'naturalists seem at times to be maintaining that no one can differ from them […] without thereby showing himself to be at least a crypto-fascist and enemy of free inquiry' (404). Indeed, an analysis of the historical processes that in the 1940s caused the American naturalist debate to go beyond the form of a philosophical



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discourse to become embodied in academies, institutions and worldwide organisations would add further historical depth to Giladi's analyses.

Paul Redding's essay also merits a separate evaluation. For many years, Redding has undertaken a research path that aims to dissolve the alleged contrast between analytical and continental approaches in philosophy. In his chapter here, he adds another piece to his enterprise by deconstructing the theoretical reasons for what is perhaps the heart of this opposition, namely the supposed antithesis between naturalism and idealism. He construes the Hegelian idealism in modal terms, interpreting it as a type of 'modal actualism'—presenting it as an alternative to both orthodox analytic naturalism and its Pricean alternative (126). Interpreting idealism as a type of actualism, Redding claims, allows us to sketch a powerful alternative to naturalism. Hegel's actualism is a form of idealism, but this need not have the type of counterintuitive connotations usually attributed to it. It is not counterintuitive, Redding argues, to think of the actual world as containing minds, in the sense of containing ourselves as minded beings—as long as construing a world containing minds is not conceived in terms of the realisation of some cosmic plan (134). Needless to say, there may be some reservations about the 'actualist' reading defended by Redding, especially among Hegelian scholars. However, this type of interpretation has the undoubted merit, especially for non-continental readers, of helping to reconsider idealism as a serious alternative to the much-troubled naturalistic metaphysics of analytic philosophy (139).

The contributions of the second part of the volume, dedicated to the topics of pragmatism, are helpful as well, insofar as they problematise the often taken-for-granted relationship between pragmatism and naturalism—as if pragmatism was just an uncritical acceptance of naturalistic instances.

Shannon Dea and Nathan Haydon examine the case of Peirce, showing that naturalism and idealism should not always be thought of as opposites. Peirce was both a methodological and a metaphysical naturalist. But he was also a theological naturalist and a naturalistic idealist. Peirce's naturalism is at once realist and idealist (167). He developed an epistemology modelled on the experimentalist's disposition. For Peirce, in fact, what is essential to scientific practice is *the experimentalist's disposition*: the typical scientist, according to him, thinks of everything broadly as a matter of experimentation. The focus on the disposition of the scientist rather than specific experimental methods demonstrates his commitment to epistemic fallibilism as well as the importance of the evolving nature of science itself (173).

Mario De Caro defends fallibilism and ontological pluralism by reconstructing the views of the late Putnam. He retraces, in the good company of Putnam, the compelling reasons provided by the *via media* of liberal naturalism. On the one hand, the thesis contends that not all the real features of the world can be reduced to scientifically describable features, yet a liberal naturalist cannot accept any entity



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in her ontology or any view in her epistemology that would contradict the current scientific worldview (200).

David Macarthur, on his side, also defends the idea that the traditional opposition between German Idealism (as a form of non-naturalism) and pragmatism (as a form of naturalism) should be overcome as they are both expressions of a 'rational normativity' that is indispensable to construe the sense of ourselves as rational agents (271).

Willem deVries reminds us that one can be a naturalist while retaining important insights from idealism. He identifies in the Sellarsian notion of 'picturing' the theoretical middle ground between crass naturalism and German classical Idealism. In a nutshell, deVries suggests interpreting picturing as a design-level provision that provides a necessary condition for the existence of properly intentional-level activity (231). Language is not only a descriptive tool, but also a sort of environmental map produced by evolution. We humans are part of that evolutionary history and have been designed by evolution to develop fairly complex maps or pictures of our environment. In our case, the pictures we are able to construct of the world around us have been recruited into another system as well, a socially shared system with significant conventional aspects to it: the full expressive power of a natural language (245). We could not only reason about how the world wags, but also about how we reason and the adequacy of the concepts with which we reason (245–46). The moral of the story is that Sellars, without relying on semantic *relations,* can nonetheless both tie an otherwise seemingly independent intentional realm to the actual world, whilst also accounting for the possibility of progress in our comprehension of the world (246). DeVries's interpretation of 'picturing' is exemplary in its clarity. It remains to be asked, however, how convincing some aspects of Sellars's naturalism are; and, from this point of view, Steven Levine's subsequent essay helps the reader to focus on some possible internal difficulties in Sellars's own position.

Levine's chapter also deals with the topic of how Sellars's philosophy fits normativity into a naturalistic picture of the world. Yet Levine argues that this strategy cannot succeed because the notion of causal reduction at play admits two different interpretations, both of them leading to unacceptable theoretical consequences. The first leads to a 'separated off' account of person-in-the-world, while the second leads to certain paradoxical conclusions (250). While some Sellarsian scholars (e.g., James O'Shea) have ascribed to Sellars a complex position, according to which normative principles are logically irreducible, yet at the same time causally reducible, to certain non-normative patterns in the natural world, Levine reckons that this interpretive strategy is not entirely successful. The attempt to operate a complete causal reduction leads in fact to some theoretical inconsistencies which end up opening a regress argument which is difficult to handle. The latter, however, could be modified, leading to a more robust pragmatic naturalism (251).



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Levine's essay, like many of those contained in *Responses to Naturalism* is extremely rich, articulate and is perfectly framed within the general objectives of the volume edited by Giladi.

At the end of this brief overview, I would like to offer the reader some personal considerations regarding the sort of philosophical proposal that seems to emerge from the volume in its entirety. From a certain point of view, the 'responses to naturalism' consist in a defence of the reasons of philosophy, in the sense that the topic of an autonomous philosophical rationality (not overlaid with the grammar of scientific discourse), is strongly recommended. One would be wrong, however, to think that the authors defend an idea of philosophy as a rational space *opposed* to science. On the contrary, philosophy and science are both essential parts of a collective enterprise that has to do with the ability of knowing how to orient oneself in the great scheme of things. The autonomy of the philosophical discourse erupts precisely when we try to give a name to this 'collective enterprise', namely when we try to articulate the intelligible dimension of this 'us'—naming, so to say, the subject of that history.

It is typical of naturalism, instead, to set up epistemic hierarchies, creating *ex post* the history of a contrast (between philosophy and science) that often did not exist, or at least not in those forms in which it is reported. Naturalism in fact—and this is a point that is perhaps missing in the volume—is not only a general notion that denominates a long-term historical process (naturalism as the 'outcome of modernity') and is not even just a metaphilosophical category (it is such, but it is not only that). Naturalism is also a *historically determined* philosophical movement that gained strength—and became independent, producing its own manifestos—in the debates developed in the American intellectual arena of the 1930s and 1940s. Reconstructing the reasons for that story is fundamental in order to stop being subjected to it and to place it in a perspective of proper historical distance. But this is, hopefully, material for a further volume.

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