



What is the Deep Structure of "Naturalism"?

Thorson's dilemma with "Naturalism" exposes its inherent lack of precision for dealing with the deep structure of its referent. After all, despite the tyranny of words, "naturalism" need not unequivocally be crudely construed, *naturalistically*. His *tour de force* touches upon several aspects of deep structure without drawing explicit attention to this complex feature. Besides terminological issues, deep structure would, in the first instance, include: the concept of nature and related epistemological issues; nature as reality replete with varied metaphysical content and interpretation; theological alternatives and meta-scientific aspects; nature as the proper subject matter of scientific investigation; nature as the source of appropriate terms of legitimization for such investigation; and also the primary content of a nature that may well be laden with hidden meaning and significance.

Thorson argues that the received *naturalistic* viewpoint, largely restricted to physicalist notions, requires emancipation not least because *hard* naturalism cannot cope with *functional* aspects appropriate to the logic of life. This distinction between structure and function exposes a truly differentiated reality within the very subject matter of natural science.

An enriched concept of naturalism capable of embracing *meta-scientific* aspects of reality beyond more traditional scientific aspects, whether physical or biological, would more easily avoid unreflective adoption by default of only a superficial standard scientific-level of understanding. Incorporating meta-scientific aspects like metaphysical and theological considerations is certainly important. While atheism, for example, may *prima facie* appear to be devoid of any theological or belief component, presuppositional beliefs actually do operate across the entire "belief" spectrum. *A fortiori*, taken even at a rudimentary level, naturalism *intrinsically* entails some "theological" foundation.

Though the tacit deeper foundation typically remains hidden and unrecognized, it continually provides terms of legitimization appropriate for the operation of science. As well, this tacit basis also establishes the range of science, demarcating it from any particular theological foundation, whether theistic or atheistic.

It is neither essential nor even appropriate in the normal operation of science to engage in ongoing reflection upon these "given" terms of legitimization. That is, the "game" of science is legitimated in its own right without having continually to reflect upon such foundational considerations. Nevertheless, scientists as full persons may well search the rich veins of meaning more deeply, beyond the immediate or primary findings of science.¹

Searching for possible deeper veins of meaning necessarily transcends the normal or acceptable operational domain of science. Furthermore, not all such meta-scientific issues are equally useful. While of considerable interest from a personal perspective, exploring "intelligent design" as quasi-science, though well-intentioned, nevertheless is inherently quite incapable of providing scientifically decidable information or universally valid decision criteria with respect to deeper considerations.

In particular, the operation of evolution may exemplify "the orderly and regulative laws of nature," as Warfield might note, without expecting decisive scientific evidence regarding divine design. We are not privy to the *structure of randomness* that abounds in nature, the often-unpredictable causality of chance that yields true novelty. Therefore, chance-like stochastic events remain enigmatically moot, beyond the "no peeking" veil,

Thaddeus Trenn, born in Chicago 65 years ago, has taught in Europe, America and Canada. Currently in Toronto, he is an associate scholar of the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology specializing in the History of Science and Religion. He is an elected Fellow of the ASA/CSCA. His email address is: ttrenn@eagle.ca

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Dialogue: Response

Method or Metaphysics?

as it were. Theologically, it is hardly appropriate to suggest that God would orchestrate such random acts of novelty when Nature itself could be so endowed to handle this process. In any case, available evidence simply remains underdetermined in principle for theists and atheists alike.²

However, paradoxical as it may seem, attitude often counts too. At the level of discovery, exemplified by luminaries like Faraday and Maxwell, scientific knowing can be enriched through a scientist's personal encounter with "relational" knowledge that is capable of engaging the heart in search of deeper meaning.

In summary, attending to the complex deep structure of Naturalism may assist in clarifying a few salient points: The operation of science is inherently neutral vis a vis foundational principles. Yet, the context of science is pregnant with deeper meaning. Searching for deeper meaning is not the proper purview of normal scientific activity. The findings of science, however derived, cannot legitimately attempt to resolve meta-scientific or foundational issues. Nevertheless, scientists, as persons, can encounter a greater depth of meaning through integrated *knowing* that holistically engages the heart as well as the mind. ◇

Notes

- ¹ C. A. Coulson, *Science & Christian Belief* (1955).
- ² Heb 11:1–4 & John 20:29; Book review in *PSCF* 53, no. 2 (2001): 122.

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Method or Metaphysics?

I have long had a great respect for Walter Thorson's work in the philosophy of science. He it was who first introduced me—in the pages of this journal—to Michael Polanyi, whose philosophy I continue to learn from. I recall with special pleasure the hours Thorson and I spent chatting under the trees in *Sunset Magazine's* gardens near Stanford almost twenty years ago.

I have again found much to impress me in Thorson's two-part article. I am pleased that Thorson rejects both *mechanistic reductionism* and *methodological naturalism*, the reigning presupposition of many Christians who are scientists. His proposal—"naturalism"—is a step forward, as is his adoption of Polanyi's view that there is a "logically distinct aspect or 'level' of creation from the purely physical" (p. 3). In short, granted Thorson's theological foundation, his understanding of science is both insightful and consistent.

Here, however, lies my problem. Has Thorson correctly interpreted Scripture and fashioned a convincing theological framework for this understanding? Thorson rejects *imago Dei* as a foundation because its over-emphasis triggered the Enlightenment notion of the *autonomy of human reason*. I instead would attribute the privileging of human reason to both the misreading of Genesis 1 by Christians and the rejection of God's existence by secular thinkers. When Genesis 1 is read in light of both Genesis 2 and Genesis 3, it need not spawn such an illegitimate child. Of course, human reason is limited; we cannot by our own unaided, unredeemed, untransformed reason argue from creation to the creator. Both human reason and the creation are fallen. The noetic consequences of sin are profound.

Thorson too places limits on human reason, not so much because of the noetic power of sin as because he sees science as an instance of the ability God gave Adam when he named the animals. Adam, of course, did not name God. Nor should we. However, why suppose that in naming the animals, Adam was not seeing the hand of the creator

James W. Sire, ASA Associate Member, is the author of *The Universe Next Door* and, most recently, *Habits of the Mind and Václav Havel: The Intellectual Conscience of International Politics*. He can be contacted by email at: jsire@prodigy.net