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## **Toward a Broader Conception of “Liberal Naturalism”: Widening the Perspective**

### **Abstract**

*The term naturalism is often used to refer to reductive naturalism and is therefore closely linked to physicalism. Various forms of liberal naturalism have been developed as an alternative to reductive naturalism. This paper argues that a further broadening of the concept of naturalism is helpful. A “broad” liberal naturalism is advocated, in which the criterion for naturalistic is not tied to the premise of a specific metaphysics, but to what arguably constitutes naturalism as such: the presence of universal fundamental principles about how the world operates and of regularities or laws of nature describing the concrete behaviour of the world. This type of naturalism allows for the inclusion of non-materialist metaphysics, such as forms of dualism and idealism. This finding is significant because the physicalist position falls short on several issues, most notably the adequate handling of the problem of consciousness. Given the positive connotation of the predicate naturalistic, such inclusion seems helpful in legitimising the potentially fruitful exploration of less conventional alternatives to physicalism and materialism. Moreover, this could prove valuable not only from a theoretical or academic perspective but also from an existential one.*

### **Keywords**

idealism, laws of nature, liberal naturalism, naturalism, physicalism, metaphysics

## **Introduction**

The concept of *naturalism* (or *naturalistic*) is widely regarded positively in contemporary philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The term is often used to refer to *reductive* naturalism, according to which, in principle, everything is reducible to the subject matter of natural sciences.<sup>2</sup> Closely linked to this view is the arguably most widespread metaphysical position today: *physicalism*, the view that everything can be reduced to the physical.

There are reasonably strong arguments to support a metaphysical assumption of reductive naturalism and physicalism, particularly the remarkable success of the natural sciences that began during the Enlightenment and accelerated over the course of subsequent centuries. The sciences explain the behaviour

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Cf. Mario De Caro, David Macarthur, “Introduction: Nature of Naturalism”, in: Mario De Caro, David Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism in Question*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2004, pp. 1–17, here p. 13; David Papineau, “Naturalism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism/> (accessed on 17 November 2020).

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Closely linked to (more or less) excluding epistemological or methodological naturalism, according to which the natural sciences stand as the only – or at least the most important – method with which to uncover the nature of the world.

of the physical world with a very high degree of precision through descriptive laws of nature. However, the reductive, physicalist naturalistic position has faced considerable criticism.<sup>3</sup> In particular, this disposition encounters difficulty when it comes to addressing the problem of free will and normative issues, such as ethics and aesthetics, in an existentially satisfying way: It seems very difficult, if not impossible, not to end up in determinism (or pure indeterminism),<sup>4</sup> which leaves no room for autonomous free will, and in ethical relativism and its consequent moral shortcomings. Importantly, the naturalistic approach has been criticised for failing to adequately explain consciousness and the mind-body relationship. In addition, it has been argued that reductive naturalism is an overly restrictive (and non-self-justifying)<sup>5</sup> conception of naturalism.

One could argue, however, that the first of these criticisms is insufficient to undermine the position of physicalism. While it may be existentially desirable and consistent with our intuition to hold to the assertion of free will and non-arbitrariness in ethical matters, it is perfectly possible to hold a logically coherent worldview that includes the absence of free will and any basis for absolute ethics (even though we might prefer otherwise). The second point of criticism, however, the problem of consciousness, poses a very serious challenge to the reductive, physicalist position, since its explanatory power here seems inadequate – especially for a phenomenon as fundamental as consciousness (this shortcoming has even been characterised as “an utter failure”<sup>6</sup> of physicalism). In addition, even within the realm of the empirical sciences, scholars have released research results that are perplexing and almost inexplicable under an assumption of reductive naturalism.<sup>7</sup> All these factors underpin the third point of criticism: the reductive view is a too limiting conception of naturalism and, following this line of thought, this paper argues for the broadening of the content of the notion *naturalistic*.

### From Reductive to Liberal Naturalism

To characterise the concept of naturalism, Finn Spicer has presented six general assertions<sup>8</sup> that can be used to identify the standard meaning of the concept: The idea of a first philosophy is rejected; philosophy is seen as continuous with the sciences; supernatural entities and processes are disbelieved; mind is understood within a physicalist framework; and non-naturalism with respect to ethics and values is rejected, as is apriorism. With these claims interpreted narrowly,<sup>9</sup> they seem to fittingly describe the basic tenets of reductive naturalism.

As an alternative to reductive naturalism, various forms of *liberal* naturalism have been developed.<sup>10</sup> Here, these six claims are interpreted less narrowly<sup>11</sup> (or, in some cases, rejected).<sup>12</sup> While liberal naturalism “is not a precisely defined credo”,<sup>13</sup> as has been argued, common central features are nevertheless present. In particular, scientific or reductive naturalism is rejected as having an explanatory monopoly. Thus, in contrast to the position of reductive naturalism, certain objects and causes inaccessible to scientific investigation are generally held to exist – for example, persons, reason, and self-awareness (and, consequently, a focus on human nature and not just the non-human) are understood to exist irreducibly. Similarly, ordinary objects are perceived as things that cannot be fully explained by the methods of the natural sciences alone. Finally, normative facts also play a central role. According to the most

widely held view of liberal naturalism, this does not mean that there is a contradiction between the natural sciences and liberal naturalism, with the natural scientific view taking precedence, as would typically be the case when viewed from a reductionist naturalistic perspective. Instead, the two are viewed as different approaches to understanding the same reality.<sup>14</sup>

The “founding fathers of liberal naturalism”, as some have called them,<sup>15</sup> are arguably John McDowell, Hilary Putnam, and Galen Strawson.<sup>16</sup> McDowell

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See: M. De Caro, D. Macarthur, *Naturalism in Question* (particularly John McDowell, “Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind”, pp. 91–105, and Barry Stroud, “The Charm of Naturalism”, pp. 21–35), and Mario De Caro, David Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism and Normativity*, Columbia University Press, New York 2010.

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In Newtonian physics, the physical world constitutes a deterministic system. If quantum mechanics is considered, it is a matter of true indeterminism (albeit *de facto* determinism at the macro scale).

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The position of reductive naturalism is not in itself a scientific result but (merely) a meta-physical generalisation of such results.

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Michael C. Rea, “How Successful is Naturalism?”, in: Georg Gasser (ed.), *How Successful is Naturalism?*, Ontos Verlag, Heusenstamm 2007, pp. 105–116, here p. 105.

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Such as: Sam Parnia *et al.*, “AWARE – AWAreness during REsuscitation – A prospective study”, *Resuscitation* 85 (2014) 12, pp. 1799–1805, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resuscitation.2014.09.004>.

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Paul Giladi, “Liberal Naturalism: The Curious Case of Hegel”, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 22 (2014) 2, pp. 248 – 270, here p. 248, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2014.886280> (based on Finn Spicer, “Intuitions in Naturalistic Philosophy”, a paper presented at the Lancaster Philosophy research seminar 2011; and Alison Stone, “Hegel, Naturalism, and the Philosophy of Nature,” *Hegel Bulletin* 34 (2013) 1, pp. 57–78, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2013.2>.

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That is, the rejection of the idea of metaphysics, philosophy being an extension of the natural sciences, disbelief in supernatural entities and processes, reductive materialism regarding the mind, opposition to non-natural ethics and values, and rejection of any

inquiry not based on empirical data. – Cf. Paul Giladi, “Liberal Naturalism: The Curious Case of Hegel”, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 22 (2014) 2, pp. 248–270, here p. 249, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2014.886280>.

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Recent advocates of liberal naturalism include Mario De Caro, Alberto Voltolini, “Is Liberal Naturalism Possible?”, in: M. De Caro, D. Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism and Normativity*, pp. 69–88; P. Giladi, “Liberal Naturalism”; David Macarthur, “Liberal Naturalism and the Philosophy of the Manifest Image”, in: Arran Gare, Wayne Hudson (eds.), *For a New Naturalism*, Telos Press Publishing, Candor 2017, pp. 50–65. Anthologies on the topic of liberal naturalism include M. De Caro, D. Macarthur, *Naturalism and Normativity*; M. De Caro, D. Macarthur, *Naturalism in Question*.

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Cf. P. Giladi, “Liberal Naturalism”, pp. 249–250.

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For example: Daniel D. Hutto, *Beyond Physicalism*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam 2000; Gregg H. Rosenberg, *A Place for Consciousness: Probing the Deep Structure of the Natural World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004; see discussion below.

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M. De Caro, D. Macarthur, *Naturalism and Normativity*, p. 9.

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*Ibid.*, pp. 1–9.

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Mario De Caro, “Putnam’s Liberal Naturalism”, in: Michael Frauchiger (ed.), *Mind and Meaning: Themes from Putnam*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 2018, section 2. For example, McDowell explicitly uses the term “liberal naturalism” as opposed to “restrictive naturalism”, i.e., reductive naturalism, when describing his position (J. McDowell, “Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind”, p. 95).

operates with the concept of “first” and “second” nature, where the latter, culture, is a part of nature (as traditionally understood), without this resulting in reductionism. Human thought and, consequently, activities, e.g., ethical acts, are not to be understood through reduction and the natural sciences but are given explanatory independence hereof (without this indicating that scientific explanations are to be disregarded).<sup>17</sup> Putnam agrees with this view<sup>18</sup> – he professes a position of realism regarding the sciences but rejects reductionism.<sup>19</sup> As for Strawson, he defends a view he calls “realistic physicalism”<sup>20</sup> (which should not, he emphasises, be confused with *physicalism*,<sup>21</sup> i.e., reductive physicalism), where consciousness phenomena are understood as “physical” in the sense that they are real, but not separate from the physical. Continuing this line of thought, he advocates for panpsychism,<sup>22</sup> the view that consciousness is ubiquitous. While all reject physicalist, reductive naturalism, there is a considerable gap between these three liberal naturalist views. Most contemporary liberal naturalist positions are arguably closer to McDowell’s and Putnam’s views than Strawson’s more controversial position.<sup>23</sup>

### The Ever-Looming Problem of Consciousness

Liberal naturalist positions generally try to avoid the problem of consciousness by perceiving themselves as merely an alternative approach to examining reality with, for example, a “person” understood simply as an irreducible entity. While this is a legitimate approach to handle this problem – liberal naturalism thus may well allow for consciousness, when suitably conceived – it is arguably not intellectually satisfying if one aims for a more explanatory and coherent worldview, i.e., a comprehensive, consistent and coherent metaphysics. In part, this aim follows naturally according to the principled virtue of philosophy that one’s philosophical views ought to be consistent, i.e., that aporetic views are to be avoided.<sup>24</sup>

While liberal naturalism not, unlike reductive naturalism, it could be argued,<sup>25</sup> suffers from being inconsistent as such, one might still find it unsatisfying to simply define certain problematic things as irreducible entities. Especially if one aims for a greater degree of coherency and unity of one’s overarching metaphysical belief and given the possibility that those things might, at least potentially, be explained more adequately if another route of inquiry is chosen.<sup>26</sup> Given this perspective, merely avoiding the problem of consciousness by introducing another, completely separate approach to explain the world seems unattractive. Thus, it seems worthwhile to face and attempt to handle the problem of consciousness in a more direct way.

Following this line of thought, Daniel Hutto, among others, advocates an even more far-reaching expansion of the concept of (reductive) naturalism than liberal naturalism (as described above) proposes. Concerning the dominant concept in modern Western thought that the universe is fundamentally material and behaves according to mathematically descriptive laws of nature, he writes:

“[I]t is the general unquestioned philosophical backdrop of physicalism that frames discussions and debates concerning the naturalness or otherwise of various phenomena [e.g., consciousness] [...]. This is the real source of the metaphysical problem [of how to understand the relation of consciousness to the physical].”<sup>27</sup>

According to Hutto, then, it is precisely the assumption of physicalism that leads to the problem of consciousness. Thus, if that assumption is abandoned, the problem can be avoided. Hutto instead suggests – quite unconventionally<sup>28</sup> – endorsing absolute idealism, as this position, he argues, shows significant advantages over physicalism.<sup>29</sup> Hutto’s line of thought exemplifies an

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And “whose grandfather is John Dewey”, it is added. – M. De Caro, “Putnam’s Liberal Naturalism”, section 2; cf. M. De Caro, D. Macarthur, *Naturalism and Normativity*, p. 17.

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John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1994.

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He explicitly states so (Hilary Putnam, “The Content and Appeal of ‘Naturalism’”, in: M. De Caro, D. Macarthur, *Naturalism in Question*, pp. 59–70). For considerations of Putnam’s thoughts as having a liberal naturalistic character, see: M. De Caro, “Putnam’s Liberal Naturalism”.

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Hilary Putnam, “From Quantum Mechanics to Ethics and Back Again”, in: Mario De Caro, David Macarthur (eds.), *Philosophy in an Age of Science: Physics, Mathematics, and Skepticism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2012, pp. 51–71, here pp. 63–65.

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Or “realistic monism”. Cf. Galen Strawson, “Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 13 (2006) 10–11, pp. 3–31, doi: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199267422.003.0003](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199267422.003.0003).

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*Ibid.*, p. 4.

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Cf. Pierfrancesco Basile, “It Must Be True – But How Can It Be? Some Remarks on Panpsychism and Mental Composition”, in: Pierfrancesco Basile, Julian Kiverstein, Pauline Phemister (eds.), *The Metaphysics of Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 93–112, here p. 96.

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E.g., M. De Caro, A. Voltolini, *Naturalism and Normativity*; P. Giladi, “Liberal Naturalism”, D. Macarthur, “Liberal Naturalism and the Philosophy of the Manifest Image”.

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See: Nicholas Rescher, *Philosophical Dialectics: An Essay on Metaphilosophy*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2006.

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It can be argued that a plurality of contradictory self-descriptions, such as a conflicting reductive naturalistic, deterministic self-description and a moral self-description that requires personal responsibility and free will, poses an existential problem for the individual. Dieter Henrich puts forward this argument (Dieter Henrich, “Was ist Metaphysik – was Moderne? Zwölf Thesen gegen Habermas”, in: Dieter Henrich, *Konzepte: Essays zur Philosophie in der Zeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1987, pp. 11–43, here p. 13), inspired by the ideas of German idealism: the human being, being rational in nature, cannot be content with such contradictory self-descriptions. In an immediate and direct way, it experiences itself as one and undivided, and with the presence of such incomplete and contradictory explanations and their conflict with reason and a life directed by reason, it is existentially essential to find consistency in such explanations.

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Such as by changing the metaphysical premise of an inquiry from materialism to, for example, idealism (see below).

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D. Hutto, *Beyond Physicalism*, p. 10.

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With the general acceptance of the seemingly successful refutation of absolute idealism advanced not least in the context of the emergence of analytical philosophy in the early 20th century, a claim of absolute idealism is quite controversial in contemporary philosophical thinking (with Timothy L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1983; and Timothy L. S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, standing out as noteworthy exceptions). Recently, the validity of Russell’s and Moore’s refutations have been seriously questioned, however (e.g., William J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, p. 544).

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D. Hutto, *Beyond Physicalism*, pp. 150–186.

important concept: since the crucial problem of consciousness is so difficult to solve within a physicalist and metaphysical materialist framework, it is worth exploring alternative metaphysical views (even those not fashionable in contemporary philosophy). Moreover, Hutto links this to the question of when a view can be considered *naturalistic*, concurring with the purpose of the current paper to expand the perspective of the content of this term.

To expand the substance of the concept of naturalism beyond physicalism and even beyond “regular” liberal naturalism is not embraced only by Hutto: variants of panpsychism, for example, have been described as naturalistic.<sup>30</sup> Further, this can be the case for even metaphysical idealism. For example, Berkeley’s idealistic position has been reconstructed<sup>31</sup> “in a more naturalistic way”,<sup>32</sup> as it is termed, and David Chalmers talks about “naturalistic idealism”.<sup>33</sup>

These examples thus indicate (albeit very different) suggestions, in some cases implicit, from recent philosophical debates that the widespread assumption of reductive naturalism should be reconsidered. Given the limitations of “regular” liberal naturalism as a basis for consistent philosophical understanding, it seems of philosophical value to extend the concept of *naturalism* even further and to admit even such controversial views as metaphysical idealism.

### ***Nature as an All-Encompassing Ontological Category***

The term *nature* can be used in a number of different ways. For example, it may refer to the opposite of that which is man-made or opposed to the human environment, or concern something distinctively human. In addition – and related to this – the term *natural* can be used as the antithesis to the transcendent, abstract, or non-empirical (a distinction which is to some extent found in the categorization of the empirical sciences as opposed to the humanities).

As mentioned above, these opposites of nature (in a somewhat narrow sense) vs., e.g., societal or cultural conditions, have been subject to attempts to overcome this predicament by incorporating these conditions into the concept of *nature* as more broadly understood. In such considerations of the relationship between nature and culture, assumptions about an underlying metaphysics are sometimes present but often appear in relatively implicit form.

When the perspective is extended from considerations of nature vs. culture to actual ontological questions, however, the concept of naturalism can also be found in conjunction with those metaphysical views that are of “absolute” naturalistic character, i.e., the conception that *nature* constitutes an ontological category of totality – that is, being *all-encompassing* and in that sense unbounded and absolute. Here, nature is characterised by precisely its boundlessness rather than, as is the case in the oppositional views of nature, by its delimitation. While these absolute naturalistic views might be materialistic in character, this is not necessarily the case.

Spinoza’s identity of the Substance, God, and Nature can be interpreted as a classic example of such absolute naturalism. In later philosophy, features of such a conception of naturalism can also be found, for example, in Dewey,<sup>34</sup> and the contemporary debate includes liberal naturalistic views such as those mentioned above. Nature, understood as a category of totality in this sense, forms the basis for the considerations of an extension of the concept of naturalism that follows below.

## Emphasising the Significance of Basic Natural Laws

The idea of broadening the concept of nature is not new in contemporary philosophy. For example, even before the full emergence of liberal naturalism *per se*, David Chalmers has advocated a position he calls “naturalistic dualism”,<sup>35</sup> motivated specifically by the problem of consciousness. In order to explain consciousness, new fundamental laws are needed, he argues, as laws of physics are not enough. This position, he maintains

“... is entirely naturalistic. On this view, the world still consists of a network of fundamental properties related to basic laws, and everything is to be ultimately explained in these terms. [...] It is naturalistic because it posits that everything is a consequence of a network of basic properties or laws, and because it is compatible with all the results of contemporary science. [...] There needs to be nothing transcendental about consciousness; it is just another natural phenomenon. All that has happened is that our picture of nature has expanded. Sometimes ‘naturalism’ is taken to be synonymous with ‘materialism’, but it seems to me that a commitment to a naturalistic understanding of the world can survive the failure of materialism.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the crucial criteria for Chalmers regarding naturalism are the presence of universal basic properties and laws and compatibility with the *results* of science (but not, notably, the metaphysical *assumptions* usually found in connection with modern science). Thus, he contends that naturalism can be the case without it requiring metaphysical materialism (and consequently not physicalism).<sup>37</sup>

In addition to this dualistic position, Chalmers also recognises that, alternatively, a monistic dual-aspect theory within a naturalistic framework might be possible.<sup>38</sup> One example of a view that moves even further in this direction is the thesis of Gregg Rosenberg, who operates according to a dual-aspect theory, which he simply calls “liberal naturalism”<sup>39</sup> (presenting a more controversial view than the “regular” variants of liberal naturalism mentioned above). Along with Chalmers, he finds parallels (to a greater or lesser extent) to his

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Godehard Brüntrup, Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017, p. 3.

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Helen Yetter-Chappell, “Idealism Without God”, in: Tyron Goldschmidt, Kenneth L. Pearce (eds.), *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, pp. 66–81.

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T. Goldschmidt, K. Pearce, *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*, p. x.

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David John Chalmers, “Idealism and the Mind-Body Problem”, in: William Seager (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*, Routledge, New York – London 2019, pp. 353–373, here p. 354.

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John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Open Court, Chicago 1925.

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David John Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search for a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York 1996, p. 127.

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Ibid., pp. 127–128.

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It should be noted, though, that Chalmers’ “naturalistic dualism” is not a variant of interactionist substance dualism. Rather, consciousness is understood as supervening naturally on the physical, without supervening logically or metaphysically. So, it is a type of dualism that, after all, appears to be predominantly oriented towards materialism (see, for example, *ibid.*, p. 162); Chalmers notes that those who endorse such naturalistic dualism “may be temperamentally closer to materialists than to dualists of other varieties” (*ibid.*, p. 128).

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Ibid., pp. 127–129.

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G. Rosenberg, *A Place for Consciousness*.

liberal naturalism in Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, Thomas Nagel, Timothy Sprigge, and Galen Strawson, among others.<sup>40</sup> Rosenberg, too, introduces the concept of properties and fundamental laws that are not physical properties and laws. He notes, by extension:

“The Liberal Naturalists recognize the possibility that the specifications of physics and what could subsist in a world wholly portrayed by physics may not circumscribe nature’s limits. That allows the Liberal Naturalist to step comfortably outside the standard physicalist ontology while retaining a naturalist outlook.”<sup>41</sup>

Rosenberg thus introduces the concept of non-physical properties and laws but nonetheless maintains that it is still naturalism, not least due to the weighting of the presence of fundamental laws (including non-physical laws), similar to Chalmers’ view. Further, Rosenberg, again like Chalmers, sees no contradiction between a rejection of physicalism and an acceptance of the results of the natural sciences.<sup>42</sup>

A similar point has been made within the context of metaphysical idealism – which is otherwise perceived as the direct antithesis of materialism and thus of (reductive) naturalism. An example here is Hutto, who, as mentioned above, suggests that a metaphysics of absolute idealism may provide the framework needed to solve the problem of consciousness “without forcing us to abandon naturalism”.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, he maintains, this is a “more tolerant naturalism”,<sup>44</sup> which is not at odds with the natural sciences themselves (only with the metaphysics guided by them).<sup>45</sup> Again, we see the emphasis on compatibility between the natural sciences (insofar as they are kept separate from the metaphysical assumptions usually associated with them) and a metaphysics of a non-materialist kind.

Thus, the views mentioned here outline positions that characterise themselves as naturalistic, despite the fact that attachment to materialism or physicalism is explicitly reduced or even rejected – a claim that, while unconventional, is not uncommon in the philosophical debates of the recent past. In classifying their positions as naturalistic, Chalmers, Rosenberg, and Hutto emphasise that, first, their positions include the existence of basic laws, and second – although they do not restrict the concept of naturalism to cover the subject area of the natural sciences – assert compatibility with the results of contemporary science. This idea forms the basis for the following considerations to broaden the concept of naturalism, not just *naturalism* as commonly understood, i.e., reductive naturalism, but also as understood in the (already somewhat broad) context of “regular” liberal naturalism.

## Broad Liberal Naturalism

Given the shortcomings of physicalism (and metaphysical materialism in general) and its limited explanatory power regarding central philosophical problems, not least the problem of consciousness, it seems worthwhile, as already touched upon, to take a closer, unbiased look at other approaches to metaphysical questions. In other words, it seems appropriate not to commit oneself *a priori* to a particular metaphysical position, but to weigh the various positions on the basis of relevant arguments, not least explanatory power.

This opening to other metaphysical positions, including controversial views such as metaphysical idealism, radically shifts the premises for inquiry, since at least four of the above claims about what constitutes naturalism no longer



hold: the rejection of the concepts of first philosophy and apriorism, the consideration of philosophy as a continuation of the sciences, and the mind as understood within a physicalist framework. Since physical realism is not a firm premise in this case, the empirical study of the physical cannot be the ultimate basis on which the nature of reality is studied, and so it becomes instead a matter of practicing metaphysics as traditionally understood.<sup>46</sup> Meta-metaphysically speaking, the neo-Aristotelian approach, dealing with the fundamental structures of reality, is centred instead of the Quinean approach, which focuses on the existence of entities.<sup>47</sup>

Given this gap toward conventional understanding, is it then still reasonable to use the term *naturalism*? On the basis of the view that the concept of *nature* is conceived as a category of ontological totality, as discussed earlier, a positive response seems defensible, not least taking the previous arguments into account.

As emphasised above, the methodological basis of the natural sciences is the idea that there are particular regularities or laws that express an apparently fixed natural order,<sup>48</sup> and which thus either determine (or if, as in quantum mechanics, they are regarded as not absolutely deterministic, probabilistically direct) the behavior of nature or describe the necessities or regularities<sup>49</sup> embedded therein. Scientific laws can then be seen as a theoretical approximation of the concrete physical manifestation of laws of nature expressing such basic lawfulness or regularity. It is this basic idea that forms the fundament of

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Ibid., p. 9, 78.

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Ibid., p. 9.

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Ibid., p. x.

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Daniel D. Hutto, “An Ideal Solution to the Problems of Consciousness”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5 (1998) 3, pp. 328–343, here p. 328.

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Ibid., p. 336.

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D. Hutto, *Beyond Physicalism*, pp. 10–11.

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Such an approach can of course be criticised, for example, by referring to Kant’s influential rejection of the possibility of gaining knowledge of noumenal reality, but, it can be counter-argued, whether it is possible or not to gain such knowledge is an epistemological and ultimately a metaphysical question (see, e.g., Ernest J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, pp. 7–9), thus requiring *metaphysical* considerations of the fundamental structures of reality. The question on the validity of metaphysics in the traditional sense, however, is a complex issue, and falls beyond the scope of this inquiry.

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See Tuomas E. Tahko (ed.), *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2012, for an anthology discussing the neo-Aristotelian approach.

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See, e.g., Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 1995, p. 607.

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The first of these positions constitutes the necessitarian view, according to which the behavior of the physical world is a matter of nomic necessity, while according to the second view, this behavior is regarded as the expression of mere regularities that do not occur with necessity. Apparently, these two positions agree (see, e.g., Norman Swartz, “Laws of Nature”, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 3. Available at <https://iep.utm.edu/lawofnat/> [accessed on 17 November 2020]) on a number of properties required for laws of nature: they are factual truths (rather than logical truths), are true for every place and every time, contain no proper names, are universal or statistical claims, and are conditional (rather than categorical) claims. According to the realist view of laws of nature, however, a sixth condition – necessity – is also required.

metaphysical naturalism, an idea that must therefore be acknowledged as the crucial and decisive characteristic of a *naturalistic* view.

Thus, the concept of *nature* must necessarily either occasion the view that certain universal laws govern the behavior of nature or, alternatively, that they are embedded within it. It can be a matter of deterministic causal relations or of non-deterministic relationships that nevertheless follow established statistical patterns or of well-defined principles or underlying structures that at a more general level govern or describe the dynamics and characteristics of nature<sup>50</sup> (this is not an uncommon belief – the importance of knowing the principles behind the laws of nature has been emphasized in both historical and contemporary contexts).<sup>51</sup>

That this is the case does not mean, as has already been illustrated, that the concept of *naturalism*<sup>52</sup> is then limited to physicalism or even metaphysical materialism. The idea that naturalism rests on the notion that particular laws or regularities are linked to the structure and behaviour of reality is theoretically compatible with most traditional metaphysical positions, including variants of dualism,<sup>53</sup> dual-aspect theory, and metaphysical idealism. In such cases, this conception of naturalism is often linked to a hierarchical view of the structure of reality. The laws of nature are perceived as the realisation of fundamental metaphysical principles, which can be concretely manifested and expressed (e.g., the laws of physics), with these fundamental principles or laws underlying the dynamic aspects of reality.

This is, of course, a very broad understanding of naturalism. However, an additional condition which provides some demarcation follows from the above: the existence of an autonomous, transcendent entity, which is not subject to these governing principles or laws of nature – which are required to be of precisely *universal* character – such as a theistic god, is not compatible with this conception of naturalism. Hence, although *naturalism* is here conceived as a category of ontological totality and thus extraordinarily broadly embraced, it is nevertheless demarcated by traditional religious belief systems, in which the objective existence of such a god is acknowledged.<sup>54</sup>

This demarcation of the concept of *naturalism* arguably increases the likelihood that the question of the conception of naturalism becomes of actual existential relevance. Whether a given metaphysics is perceived as existentially relevant is to a large extent based on the perception of the plausibility of that metaphysics for the individual in question. In the context of modernity, it seems reasonable to assume that such plausibility, at least the rational or philosophical kind, for many people would be reduced should an objectively existing nature-transcending power or entity comprise one part of the metaphysics. Thus, should metaphysics be characterized as *naturalistic*, this arguably – all else being equal – increases the possibility of existential relevance in the context of modernity.

As discussed, the concept of naturalism has already been extended, to some degree, from the traditional reductive to the “regular” liberal naturalism. However, it is the view of the present paper that a further extension is, so to speak, natural. It is the conception of the presence of universal laws, regularities, or governing principles of nature’s behaviour (and thus the absence of autonomous entities) that is crucial when it comes to *naturalism*, not a requirement of attachment to some specific metaphysical position such as physicalism (although, it could be added along the lines of Chalmers’,

Rosenberg’s, and Hutto’s thoughts, that compatibility with the results of the natural sciences is of importance).

## The Question of Supernaturalism

Liberal naturalism has been subject to the criticism that it cannot inhabit a logical space:<sup>55</sup> If things such as objects, properties, and events are recognized as reducible to the purview of science and, at least in principle, can be explained by science,<sup>56</sup> the position is too close to reductive or scientific naturalism to dissociate itself from it, i.e., not sufficiently liberal. And, on the other hand, if such a reduction is not recognised, then liberal naturalism becomes too liberal and unacceptable to those committed to a scientific worldview, it is argued. Thus, the liberal naturalist must navigate between, as it has been phrased, “the Scylla of Scientific Naturalism and the Charybdis of supernaturalism”<sup>57</sup> when attempting to counter this criticism and justify that there is, in fact, a logical space for the position.<sup>58</sup>

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Examples of scientific theories that exemplify these three types are: classical Newtonian physics and relativity, both of which are deterministic; quantum mechanics, according to which individual quantum processes are non-deterministic (Copenhagen interpretation) but nevertheless follow well-defined probability distributions (and thus in principle exhibit approximate but in practice deterministic behavior when observed at the macro level – as, for example, in Newtonian physics); and biological evolutionary theory, both in the original form put forward by Darwin and in its modern neo-Darwinian form – here the basic principles of variation and selection are seen as crucial to the factors that determine the evolution of species and their characteristics. For an interpretation of the governing mechanisms of this theory as comparable to Newton’s laws of physics, viz. perceived as actual laws of nature, see: Robert N. Brandon, “The Principle of Drift: Biology’s First Law”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 103 (2006) 7, pp. 319–335, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2006103723>.

51

See, e.g., Nicholas Rescher, “Principia Philosophiae: On the Nature of Philosophical Principles”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 56 (2002) 1, pp. 3–17, here p. 4.

52

*Metaphysical*, not methodological or epistemological, naturalism.

53

However, interactionist substance dualism appears to be an ambiguous position since it involves the breakage of the causal closure of the physical world. This seems to be incompatible with the physical laws of nature, and a

fundamental metaphysical principle or law (as yet unknown) would have to be established to explain it.

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The conception of naturalism advocated here can thus be understood as defined not least through its demarcation from traditional religious views, i.e., views that involve explanations or powers above and thus not subject to universal lawfulness in the world or the general principles on which it is based.

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Ram Neta, “Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, eds., *Naturalism in Question*”, *Philosophical Review* 116 (2007) 4, pp. 657–663, here p. 662, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2007-020>; see: M. De Caro, A. Voltolini, “Is Liberal Naturalism Possible?”, p. 69.

56

That is, according to Neta’s criticism, if an account of the mechanisms that enable “digestion, respiration, reasoning, or anything else” to occur are recognized to suffice for a reductive account of their nature, i.e., “their nature [is] consisting simply in the mechanisms that enable them to occur”. – R. Neta, “Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, eds., *Naturalism in Question*”, p. 662.

57

M. De Caro, A. Voltolini, “Is Liberal Naturalism Possible?”, p. 70.

58

Accordingly, arguments defending such justifications are not uncommon in the works of the proponents of liberal naturalism (e.g., M. De Caro, A. Voltolini, “Is Liberal Naturalism Possible?”, p. 70; D. Macarthur,



The “regular” variants of liberal naturalism are, as noted previously, generally placed within an albeit not reductive physicalist, not overly controversial materialistically-oriented framework. However, this is clearly not the case for the broader form of liberal naturalism advocated in this paper. Here, the complex navigation is not particularly oriented – staying in the imagery – to avoid Scylla, i.e., a too-close connection to physicalist naturalism, but instead to circumnavigate Charybdis without being engulfed by the whirlpool, i.e., to maintain a distinction between this broad liberal naturalism and actual supernaturalism.

One particular form of supernaturalism is, as identified by Mario De Caro and Alberto Voltolini, “theistic supernaturalism”,<sup>59</sup> according to which God exists outside of nature, the existence of nature depends on God, and God is able to intervene in the world (in a way that cannot be explained through the laws of nature). However, they continue, theistic supernaturalism contradicts the “constitutive claim of contemporary naturalism”.<sup>60</sup> If the existence or truth of an entity or explanation negates the laws of nature, insofar as we know them, such entity or explanation should not be accepted. This view is completely in line with the broad liberal naturalism proposed above.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, when it comes to De Caro and Voltolini’s understanding of supernaturalism in general – which, in light of the earlier discussion, can be seen as fairly representative of the most common form of liberal naturalism – it is not compatible with the broader and more inclusive form of liberal naturalism advocated in this paper. They consider a view supernatural if it is “committed to the existence of *any* entity or force that is in principle unaccountable by science, inimitable from our ontology, and contradictory to scientific knowledge”<sup>62</sup> or if it contains “entities or forces that are like utterly detached from the natural world and therefore do not interfere in any way with natural causal processes”.<sup>63</sup> They illustrate with examples including the eternal and unchanging Being of Parmenides, the absolute and divine found in some variants of Neoplatonism, and the Nirvana of Buddhism, since these views appeal to particular epistemological conditions, often mystic in character, to obtain knowledge.

Following this line of thought, a position like metaphysical idealism, not least the variants of absolute idealism as touched upon above, would be considered non-naturalistic. However, views such as these are not precluded from characterisation as *naturalistic* under the broader understanding of naturalism outlined above. What is decisive in this more inclusive understanding of (metaphysical) naturalism is not concrete scientific theories or the empirical method but, rather, whether the metaphysics in question include fundamental principles or inherent structures that form the basis of universal lawfulness and lack the presence of entities autonomous of these laws or principles, such as a theistic god.

On the surface, a metaphysics such as the absolute idealism mentioned above might appear to violate the constitutive claim of contemporary naturalism in that it breaks the causal closure of the physical world and thus, it seems, negates the physical laws of nature. While metaphysical idealism *eo ipso* implies physical antirealism, this does not mean, however, that what we experience as the physical world does not operate according to specific laws or principles. In this case, instead of genuine physical laws, it would then be metaphysical laws appearing as physical laws. Especially in the case of absolute idealism (as opposed to, e.g., traditional subjective idealism) – where it is not a matter

of antirealism of the world as such, but instead of the seemingly independent physical world being the appearance of an underlying, actually existing reality – positing the existence of metaphysical principles governing the details of that appearance seems reasonable, not least given the well-defined patterns of the behaviour of that appearance. This does not negate the laws of nature as we know them since they can then be interpreted simply as the manifestation of the non-physical laws governing the behaviour of that part of our experience that appears to us in the form of the physical world.

The principle of causal closure must be viewed as a metaphysical assumption rather than a scientific result. The laws of physics are based on the generalizations of results obtained by causal experiments, where influences from autonomous external sources, such as the acts of conscious beings, are carefully avoided. Thus, the notion of causal closure arises naturally from such a generalization. As long as the principle of causal closure is conceived as restricted to the (uninfluenced) behaviour of the apparently physical world<sup>64</sup> – which is the exact domain of the laws of nature – this principle is arguably compatible with absolute idealism. Further, since the laws of nature, insofar as we know them, are thus not negated, the constitutive claim of contemporary naturalism is arguably not violated when it comes to absolute idealism, allowing for (given that all other requirements are met) that position to be considered *naturalistic* in the broad sense advocated in this paper.

### The Objection of *Naturalism* as an Empty Concept

Thus, broad liberal naturalism does not require materialism (let alone physicalism) as a metaphysical premise. In principle, variants of most of the traditional metaphysical positions can be encompassed in this sort of naturalism. As illustrated above, this understanding matches certain (although uncommon) views seen in contemporary philosophy, where positions based

“Liberal Naturalism and the Philosophy of the Manifest Image”.)

59

M. De Caro, A. Voltolini, “Is Liberal Naturalism Possible?”, p. 73.

60

Ibid., p. 71.

61

It could be argued that even under the assumption of this broad liberal naturalism there is no reason to affirm or deny the existence of supernatural entities since they (if they exist) by definition are outside nature, and what we can assert is simply that, if they exist, they are not natural – the only condition would be that they do not affect or act against the laws of nature. The assessment of such a claim depends on what we define as *supernatural*. In the context of the broad liberal naturalism of this paper, *nature* is understood as an all-encompassing ontological category, and, consequently, nothing exists outside nature in an absolute sense – thus, *supernatural* entities do not exist under this kind of naturalism. However,

the existence of *supernatural* entities in the more common usage of the term, i.e., entities existing beyond the physical realm – such as spiritual beings or Cartesian minds – is indeed neither affirmed nor denied by this conception of naturalism (neither are *supernatural* epistemic faculties such as mystical insight), unlike most contemporary conceptions of naturalism. Cf. Mario De Caro, David Macarthur, “Introduction: Science, Naturalism, and the Problem of Normativity”, in: M. De Caro, D. Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism and Normativity*, pp. 1–22, here p. 3.

62

M. De Caro, A. Voltolini, “Is Liberal Naturalism Possible?”, p. 74 (emphasis in the original).

63

Ibid.

64

Which seems reasonable, given the premise of absolute idealism rather than physicalism or materialism.

on (property) dualism, dual-aspect theory, and absolute idealism have been defined as having a naturalistic character. Rejecting this understanding of naturalism, an objection could be raised that while broad liberal naturalism is exempted from the premise of accepting a specific metaphysical position, such as materialism, in advance, it at the same time requires, as a premise, that *nature* is conceived as an all-encompassing ontological category. However, it can be counter-argued that *naturalism* as such, unlike metaphysical positions like materialism, substance dualism, and idealism, does not constitute an actual metaphysics *per se*.

As is evident from the previous discussion, the concept of naturalism is rather indeterminate and ambiguous; it is related to how the world is understood and explained rather than what it substantially *is*, in a metaphysical sense. Thus, a distinction must be made between *naturalistic* monism, of which the broad liberal naturalism advocated here is an example, and *ontological* monism, such as metaphysical materialism. Consequently, it seems justified to separate the premise of naturalism as an all-encompassing ontological category from the premise of exemption from a specific metaphysical position being subscribed to in advance.

With *nature* thus understood as an ontological category of totality, it could further be objected that the term *nature* is then conceptually empty – as it simply covers everything that exists, it is no longer meaningful – and because broad liberal naturalism is based on a premise of this specific understanding of *nature*, this form of naturalism is undermined. However, broad liberal naturalism can be interpreted as reductive, in the sense that all phenomena ultimately are grounded in governing principles and laws or regularities. Thus, any metaphysics that does not meet this requirement is not *naturalistic*. It follows that the concept *naturalistic*, understood in this way, possesses actual – and crucial and decisive – content. As noted, any theistic metaphysics, for example, are excluded. The world is, in this view, simply *natural*.

That this form of naturalism is reductive (in this sense) could lead to the further objection that it is then too close to regular reductive or physicalist naturalism. When it comes to the more common variants of liberal naturalism, it is exactly the element of irreducibility that constitutes the defining core – these variants are characterised precisely by an approach differentiated from the scientific method, that is, by not embracing physical reductionism.<sup>65</sup> For the broad liberal naturalism outlined above, however, the predicate “liberal” is not to be understood in this sense, viz. as based on strict irreducibility. Instead, it refers to the more open-minded or liberal approach also found in “regular” liberal naturalism, but also, in a loose sense, to the “liberation” from the requirement of a premise of physicalist or scientifically oriented reductionism – an exemption from this premise is, after all, the primary characteristic of liberal naturalism.

Further, while there is a strong emphasis on underlying principles and laws when it comes to broad liberal naturalism, this is not an unseen feature within certain forms of liberal naturalism, as exemplified previously. As discussed, the main result of the expansion of the most common forms of liberal naturalism to the understanding of naturalism proposed is that actual metaphysics (as traditionally understood) is included herein – the principles and laws or regularities are of *metaphysical* character – occasioning the further predicate “broad”.

## Conclusion

The view of naturalism outlined in this paper is rather expansive in character and is thus termed “broad” liberal naturalism to differentiate it from the more common variants of liberal naturalism, which, despite their liberal character and distance from traditional reductive or physicalist naturalism, are still positioned closer to this kind of naturalism. For the suggested conception of *naturalism*, the focus is instead on the element that arguably constitutes naturalism *per se*: the presence of universal fundamental principles for how the world operates and regularities or laws of nature.

Consequently, this view of naturalism is incompatible with the acceptance of an objectively existing autonomous reality that is not subject to these universal principles and regularities or laws, such as a theistic god, and thus this broad understanding of naturalism is distinct from traditional religious or theistic positions. As very specific requirements are attached to it, it is thus not merely an “empty” concept of nature, and it is therefore justified to use the term *naturalistic* in the context of this inclusive or extended, broad type of naturalism.

In this context, the use of the concept *nature* has a distinct metaphysical bent. Here, *nature* does not refer to particular aspects of the world but instead denotes the world in its entirety, i.e., it does not constitute a demarcation, standing in opposition to other parts of the world, such as to humankind or its cultural creations; on the contrary, it expresses all of it. In this sense, it is a monistic view on naturalism, consistent with the idea that a monistic view is required to overcome the apparent incompatibility, or gap, between the different ontologies through which objects in the spatio-temporal world and the self-conscious subject respectively are understood. To overcome this would be of value, both intellectually and existentially, given an aim for a coherent and explanatory comprehensive metaphysics. With that in mind, the position advocated in the present paper, with the concept of nature expressing a monistic view on naturalism, seems potentially fruitful.

In particular, the broad liberal conception of naturalism permits the inclusion of metaphysical positions other than the reductive, physicalist position (or materialism in general) – as is already the case in the contemporary philosophical debate regarding such different positions as dual-aspect theory and absolute idealism (and, when suitably conceived, causal closure of the physical seems to be compatible with, e.g., absolute idealism). This is significant because the materialist position, especially the physicalist, falls short on a number of issues, most notably regarding adequate handling of the problem of consciousness. Consequently, it is of considerable interest to investigate views based on other metaphysical positions in the hope of developing suggestions to solutions for important philosophical problems.<sup>66</sup>

Under this broad liberal conception of naturalism, many such views could potentially be characterised as naturalistic: Simply because a metaphysical position different from physicalism (or materialism) forms the basis of a

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See, e.g., J. McDowell, “Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind”, p. 95.

<sup>66</sup>

Along these lines, there are signs that views that were largely absent in philosophical

debates just one or two decades ago recently have seen a revival (such as panpsychism, e.g., G. Brüntrup, L. Jaskolla, *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*).

metaphysical thesis, this does not automatically exclude the possibility that the thesis might be characterised as a naturalistic metaphysics. Given the positive connotations of *naturalistic* – characterising a metaphysics as non-naturalistic presumably in itself reduces its general perceived plausibility – this seems to be helpful in legitimising (potentially fruitful) research into unconventional alternatives to physicalism and materialism. This might well turn out to be of value not only from a theoretical or academic perspective but from an existential standpoint as well.\*

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### Prema širem poimanju »liberalnog naturalizma«: širenje perspektive

#### Sažetak

*Izraz naturalizam često se koristi za označavanje reduktivnog naturalizma i stoga je usko povezan s fizikalizmom. Različiti oblici liberalnog naturalizma razvijeni su kao alternativa reduktivnom naturalizmu. U ovom se radu tvrdi da je daljnje proširenje pojma naturalizma od pomoći. Zagovara se »široki« liberalni naturalizam, u kojem kriterij naturalizma nije vezan za premisu specifične metafizike, nego za ono što nedvojbeno čini naturalizam kao takav: prisutnost univerzalnih temeljnih načela o tome kako svijet funkcionira i pravilnosti ili zakoni prirode koji opisuju konkretno ponašanje svijeta. Ova vrsta naturalizma dopušta uključivanje nematerijalističke metafizike, poput oblika dualizma i idealizma. Ovaj je nalaz značajan zato što fizikalističko stajalište pada na nekoliko problema, a ponajviše u odgovarajućem tretmanu problema svijesti. S obzirom na pozitivnu konotaciju predikata naturalistički, takvo se uključivanje čini korisnim u legitimiranju potencijalno plodonosnog istraživanja manje konvencionalnih alternativa fizikalizmu i materijalizmu. Nadalje, to bi se moglo pokazati vrijednim ne samo iz teorijske ili akademske perspektive nego i iz egzistencijalne.*

#### Ključne riječi

idealizam, zakoni prirode, liberalni naturalizam, naturalizam, fizikalizam, metafizika

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### In Richtung einer breiteren Auffassung des „liberalen Naturalismus“: Erweiterung der Perspektive

#### Zusammenfassung

*Der Begriff Naturalismus wird des Öfteren für die Beziehung zum reduktiven Naturalismus verwendet und ist demgemäß eng mit dem Physikalismus verknüpft. Als Alternative zum reduktiven Naturalismus wurden verschiedenartige Formen des liberalen Naturalismus entwickelt. In diesem Paper wird argumentiert, dass eine weitere Erweiterung des Begriffs des Naturalismus hilfreich ist. Es wird für einen „breiten“ liberalen Naturalismus plädiert, bei dem das Kriterium für Naturalisches nicht an die Prämisse einer bestimmten Metaphysik gebunden ist, sondern an das, was wohl den Naturalismus als solchen ausmacht: das Vorhandensein universeller Grundprinzipien über die Funktionsweise der Welt sowie die Präsenz von Regelmäßigkeiten oder Naturgesetzen, die das konkrete Verhalten der Welt beschreiben. Diese Art von Naturalismus berücksichtigt die Einbeziehung nicht materialistischer Metaphysik – wie Formen des Dualismus und des Idealismus. Dieser Befund ist bedeutend, da der physikalistische Standpunkt in mehreren Fragen die Erwartungen nicht erfüllt, vornehmlich in Bezug auf die angemessene Behandlung des Bewusstseinsproblems. Angesichts der positiven Konnotation des Prädikats naturalistisch scheint eine solche Einbeziehung dienlich zu sein, um die potenziell fruchtbare Erforschung der weniger konventionellen Alternativen zum Physikalismus und Materialismus zu legitimieren. Darüber hinaus könnte sich dies nicht nur aus theoretischer oder wissenschaftlicher Perspektive, sondern auch aus existenzieller Sicht als wertvoll erweisen.*

#### Schlüsselwörter

Idealismus, Naturgesetze, liberaler Naturalismus, Naturalismus, Physikalismus, Metaphysik



**Nikolaj Pilgaard Petersen**

**Vers un élargissement de la conception du  
« naturalisme libérale » : élargissement de perspectives**

**Résumé**

*L'expression de naturalisme est utilisée fréquemment pour se référer au naturalisme réductionniste, et est ainsi étroitement liée au physicalisme. Les différentes formes de naturalisme libéral ont été développées pour offrir une alternative au naturalisme réductionniste. Dans ce travail, il est affirmé qu'un nouvel élargissement du concept de naturalisme est d'une grande aide. Un « large » naturalisme libéral est défendu, dans le lequel le critère du naturalisme n'est pas lié à la prémisse de la métaphysique spécifique, mais à ce qui indubitablement constitue le naturalisme comme tel : la présence de principes universels fondamentaux qui explicitent le fonctionnement du monde, ainsi que les régularités ou les lois de la nature qui décrivent le comportement concret du monde. Ce type de naturalisme permet d'introduire de la métaphysique non matérialiste, à l'instar de la figure du dualisme et de l'idéalisme. Ce résultat est d'une grande importance puisque le point de vue physicaliste s'effondre face à plusieurs problèmes, et cela particulièrement dans un examen approprié des problèmes liés à la conscience. En raison de la connotation positive du prédicat naturaliste, une telle inclusion s'avère utile afin de légitimer la recherche potentiellement fertile des alternatives moins conventionnelles du physicalisme et du matérialisme. De plus, cela pourrait se révéler être d'une grande valeur, non seulement sous une perspective théorique ou académique, mais également sous une perspective existentielle.*

**Mots-clés**

idéalisme, lois de la nature, naturalisme libéral, naturalisme, physicalisme, métaphysique

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My thanks to Søren Harnow Klausen as well as to Peter Øhrstrøm, Niels Henrik Gregersen, and Jørgen Huggler for providing valuable

feedback on my thoughts on naturalism, and to anonymous referees for providing useful input during the preparation of this paper.