

Two Directions for Analytic Kantianism: Naturalism and Idealism

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Usually, analytic philosophy is thought of as standing firmly within the tradition of empiricism, but recently attention has been drawn to the strongly *Kantian* features that have characterized this philosophical movement throughout a considerable part of its history.¹ Those charting the history of early analytic philosophy sometimes point to a more Kantian stream of thought feeding it from both Frege and Wittgenstein, and as countering a quite different stream flowing from the early Russell and Moore.² In line with this general assessment, Michael Friedman has pointed to the specifically Kantian features of the approach of Carnap and other members of the Vienna Circle.³ For Friedman, the positivists should be seen as having emerged from the tradition of late nineteenth-century neo-Kantianism. Although they had explicitly rejected Kant's analysis of geometric truth and his key concept of the "synthetic a priori" because of dramatic changes within science itself, this move should not be seen as any simple *abandonment* of Kantianism.⁴ Rather, the positivists had *redefined* the nature of the Kantian a priori, by axiomatizing, relativizing and historicizing it, so as to fit with the results of the contemporary sciences.

Whatever the exact history here, such a broadly Kantian combination of a deflationary rejection of the type of substantive metaphysical knowledge from concepts alone—what Kant had alluded to as "dogmatic metaphysics"—together with a concern with those linguistic or cognitive frameworks that seem presupposed by any cognitively relevant human experience seems to have become a common feature of much post-positivist analytic philosophy. But the type of "Kantianism" that eventually emerged here has strongly tended towards a *naturalized* variant. Thus Carnap's transformation of Kant's synthetic a priori soon became prey to Quine's attack on the analytic-synthetic

¹ See, for example, Mark Sacks, "Naturalism and the Transcendental Turn", *Ratio* 19 (2006), pp. 92-106.

² See, for example, Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, p. 223, and Michael Beaney, "Russell and Frege", in Nicholas Griffin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, Cambridge, 2003, section VI.

³ Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Similarly Sacks notes: "For both Carnap and Quine questions of existence, and the structures we can have knowledge of, are settled by the linguistic apparatus with which we approach them", and this linguistic or conceptual framework "plays the role of transcendental psychology in Kant: it determines or individuates the world which we approach by means of it". Sacks, "Naturalism and the Transcendental Turn", pp. 97–8.

⁴ Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, p. 7.

distinction in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”,⁵ and with this, Carnap’s conventionalised and relativised variant of Kant’s transcendental structure became assimilated to a fully naturalized holistic “web of belief” constituting scientific knowledge.⁶

It is not difficult to feel the attraction of this general conception of the philosophical enterprise: central features of the modern naturalized Kantian picture seem unassailable. First, Kant’s general claim concerning the “mediated” nature of human experience has become a commonplace of much later twentieth-century thought. *Some* version of the idea that our experiential contact with the world is mediated or conditioned by concepts—the concepts that form the nodes, as it were, of the “web” of those beliefs that we accumulate from experience and that in turn form the background to what can further be learned from experience—seems to be found in many parts of modern culture. Next, this “mediationalist” thesis that we lack direct or “unmediated” contact with reality seems to have become a part of a more general view of ourselves as limited, *finite* creatures, the very idea of direct, unmediated contact with reality “as it is in itself” suggesting a picture of the mind out of step with our understanding of ourselves as, in some sense, fully *natural* beings rather than natural beings with some added “supernatural” capacities.

The question soon arises, however, concerning how to cash out this “naturalist” conception of ourselves as albeit, finitely rational beings. On the one hand, some advocates of a broadly naturalistic transcendental philosophy attempt to limit “natural” here to a minimal or “liberal” naturalism. Sami Pihlström, for example, understands a naturalized conception of the transcendental project of philosophy as one that acknowledges the *circularity* of transcendental reasoning: “Very simply, in order to examine the preconditions and limits of cognitive experience, the transcendental philosopher must already operate within the cognitive sphere s/he is examining. ... [T]he transcendental is to be found – reflexively – within our natural practices themselves, not in any supposedly transcendent, metaphysically fixed point beyond our natural world.”⁷ But this broad conception of nature must itself face the question of the *type* of knowledge relevant to understanding these “natural practices”. If they are “natural”, will not the most appropriate form of investigation of them be just the type of investigation

⁵ Willard van Ormond Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953).

⁶ Sacks puts it this way: “But the transcendental turn here is naturalized. It is two steps removed from Kant, and one from the early Wittgenstein. It is not the *apriori* faculties of the mind, as in Kant, that are doing the work, but the structure of language; and, it is not the a priori structure of language, as in the early Wittgenstein, but the empirical linguistic frameworks in which in principle nothing need be held as immune to revision.” Sacks, “Naturalism and the Transcendental Turn”, p. 98.

⁷ Sami Pihlström, “Recent Reinterpretations of the Transcendental” *Inquiry* 47 (2004), p. 294.

that has been so successful with respect to nature in general, that is, the modern natural sciences? But if an *affirmative* answer is given here, many would argue that nothing short of nihilistic destruction of reason threatens.

In the following essay, after examining the nihilistic threats that seem to accompany a naturalized Kantianism, I examine one recent version, Huw Price's "subject naturalism", in terms of its capacity to respond to such threats, and, in the final section, contrast it with another possible way beyond the dilemmas of nihilism, one based on the model of the approach of Kant's explicitly *idealist* successors.

The Project of Naturalizing Transcendental Philosophy

In commenting on the analytic naturalization of the Kantian *a priori*, Mark Sacks has noted two general problems facing such an approach to philosophy. The first concerns the philosophical position's capacity to account for its own status. "Although the given structures that cast the lines of individuation of our empirical reality are themselves not purported to be a priori or transcendental now, still the entire theoretical explanation itself clearly amounts to a synthetic *a priori* claim, and it is not clear how any such claim can be accommodated."⁸ While some might contest the claim that it is *clear* that this "entire theoretical explanation" has the status of a synthetic a priori claim, Sacks points to a definite problem here that I will call this the problem of disciplinary identity. In short, if philosophy *does not* have synthetic a priori status, what then *is* the nature of the knowledge that philosophers aspire to? The common "naturalistic" answer that philosophy is "continuous" with the natural sciences just seems to be the admission that there *is* no basis for philosophy's distinct disciplinary status. "Continuous with" really just means "part of".

The second problem to which Sacks alludes is that "once the Kantian transcendental psychology, or the Wittgensteinian *a priori* linguistic form, are each avoided, some of the safeguards of a transcendental idealist turn are undermined. ... We are now faced with a relativism that goes beyond the mere instability of bare naturalism ... different frameworks, or conceptual schemes, will result in different ontologies, different worlds, each of which can be the object of knowledge for those inhabiting the relevant framework, but none of them can lay claim to universality."⁹ These relativistic problems might in turn be seen as an expression of the process of denormalization that, as is commonly said, accompanies the naturalizing of an originally normative discipline. I will refer to this as the *nihilism* problem, a problem consequent on the collapse of some "foundational" discipline that is meant to assure the status of various normative claims. Historically, the model for this concerns the collapse of *religion*, Jacobi having coined the term when pointing to the "fatalism", "atheism" and "nihilism" [*Nihilismus*]" that were the

⁸ Sacks, "Naturalism and the Transcendental Turn", p. 99.

⁹ Ibid.

consequence of a philosophy practiced free from the constraints of religion.¹⁰ In the early modern period, the type of theo-centric *philosophy* of the type that Kant came to criticise as “dogmatic metaphysics” had itself come to assume the foundational role otherwise played by *revelation*, and with Kant, it itself thereby became subject to the same critique. In turn, what we have referred to as the *naturalizing* of the Kantian a priori might itself be seen as representing a *further* stage in this process.

Jacobi’s charge of nihilism had been made during the period of the early reception of Kant’s philosophy, and it was a charge taken seriously by the early post-Kantian idealists like Friedrich von Schelling. In a youthful work, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling had speculated about the consequences of reflective thought, that process in which the knowing subject had, as he put it, “disentangled itself from the fetters of nature and her guardianship” such that that very nature came to be presented as an object knowable *for* that knower.¹¹

Schelling held a distinctly ambiguous, if not contradictory, attitudes towards this reflective disentanglement. On the one hand, reflection *is* the condition of freedom. It would be inconceivable how man had ever left the philosophical state of nature “if we did not know that his spirit, whose element is *freedom*, strives to make *itself* free, to disentangle itself from the fetters of Nature and her guardianship”.¹² This, was the attitude inherited from Kant and Fichte. But at the same time, reflection also seems to *undermine* the capacity for action. Reflection impedes action since “the less [man] reflects upon himself, the more active he is. ... Man is not born to waste his mental power in conflict against the fantasy of an imaginary world, but to exert all his powers upon a world which has influence upon him, lets him feel its forces, and upon which he can react. ... contact and reciprocal action must be possible between the two, for only so does man become man”.¹³ This, with the theme of estrangement from some constituting community with nature, might be thought of as Schelling’s *romantic* inheritance. From Schelling’s point of view, “mere reflection” represents a kind of “spiritual sickness in mankind”.¹⁴ When humans break out of nature, as it were, they upset an original “absolute equilibrium of forces and consciousness”, and although this is

¹⁰ F. H. Jacobi, *On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*, in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. and ed. G. di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), p. *.

¹¹ F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. E. E. Harris and P. Heath, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 10. Schelling adds: “As soon as man sets himself in opposition to the external world ... the first step of philosophy has been taken. With that separation, reflection first begins, he separates from now on what Nature had always united, separates the object from the intuition, the concept from the image, finally (in that he becomes his own *object*) himself from himself.” Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 10–11.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

the pre-condition of their freedom and rationality, the point of such reflection must be to ultimately *re-establish* something like the original equilibrium “through freedom” as “only in equilibrium of forces is there health”. Philosophy, therefore, must assign to reflection “only *negative value*”.¹⁵

This problem of reflection, which, with the post-Kantian idealists, became one of the key problems to address, is still commonly commented on today. As Thomas Nagel has pointed out, while reflection purports or aspires to lead to a kind of aperspectival objectivity, a “view from nowhere” onto the world, it at the same time poses distinct problems for action *in* the world. In short, one can *act* in the world, only from *somewhere in particular*.¹⁶ Among recent analytic philosophers, Bernard Williams in particular has explored the dynamics of such a process in the context of ethics, a context in which, in his memorable phrase, “reflection can destroy knowledge”.¹⁷

Like Nagel, Williams has extensively employed the Kantian metaphor of “perspective” to capture the mediated nature of our cognitive engagement with the world. In particular, he has stressed the necessarily perspectival nature of the *ethical* attitude. “I think about ethical and other goods” he claims, “*from* an ethical point of view that I have already acquired and that is part of what I am. In thinking about ethical and other goods, the agent thinks from a point of view that already places those goods, in general terms, in relation to one another and gives a special significance to ethical goods.”¹⁸ From such a “first person” perspective of the agent, certain objects and states of affairs in the world will be invested with certain “action-guiding” qualities, the sorts of qualities that are expressed in normatively “thick concepts” such as “treachery”, “brutality” or “courage”.¹⁹ However: “Looked at from the outside, this point of view belongs to someone in whom the ethical dispositions he has acquired lie deeper than other wants and preferences.”²⁰ In the “reflective” move between these two points of view, the relationship of values to dispositions has changed. “It is not true from the point of view constituted by the ethical dispositions—the internal perspective—that the only things of value are people’s dispositions; still less that only the agent’s dispositions have value.” Rather, from that point of view, the dispositions are dispositions to respond to the values *themselves*, which are conceived as “objective” and in the world, born by objects holding *normative* significance for the agent. But this realistic attitude does not withstand reflection, and from the point of view which “stands back” and reflects on this situation from “outside”

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* p. 148.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 129. Thick concepts combine descriptive “world-guided” and evaluative “action-guiding” aspects.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

this perspective, “there is a sense in which [the dispositions] are the ultimate supports of ethical value”, not the objects themselves.

Williams formulates his critique in terms of the distinctness of “ethical” knowledge, but it is far from clear that theoretical knowledge *itself* escapes the corrosive effects of such reflection. Thus, for example, the idea that *epistemological reflection* can “destroy knowledge” in the *theoretical* context as well has been made by others such as David Lewis.²¹ Here too, then, reflection, might destroy knowledge—such would seem to be the nihilistic situation of modern culture and its reflective propensities, predicted by Jacobi and popularised by Nietzsche. While few analytic philosophers have seemed to have treated the topic as having such general significance, few would claim that the problem had been solved or had otherwise gone away.

Huw Price’s “Subject Naturalism”

In a series of papers Huw Price has suggested a novel way of conceiving the naturalization of philosophy that both problematizes the way of thinking of this process that has hitherto dominated analytic philosophy, and promises to avoid the problems of scientism and nihilism.²² Moreover, Price’s alternative, especially as recently expressed in the form of a “subject naturalism”,²³ does this in a way that manifests the distinctly *Kantian* features discussed above. Hitherto, naturalistic conceptions of philosophy, he claims, have regarded philosophy as taking as *its* object the world as science describes it. Such approaches then see their own task as one of finding a place for certain objects *in* this scientifically described world—objects that are not easily so located, such as those having to do with morality, meaning, or mathematics. Conceived in this way, philosophy typically addresses what he calls “placement problems”. “[A] typical placement problem” he notes, “seeks to understand how some object, property, or fact can be a *natural* object, property, or fact”.²⁴ One popular strategy is to *reduce* such objects, properties or facts to the unproblematic ones of science. But there may be hidden assumptions implicit in this approach that are actually incompatible with a genuinely naturalistic view of *ourselves* as the subjects capable of such knowledge. Hence Price contrasts the “object naturalism” of such reductionist orientations with his own “subject naturalist” approach which attempts to make explicit and hold on to a

²¹ Lewis wonders whether “when we look hard at our knowledge, it goes away”. David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge” in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, especially p. 434.

²² See, for example, Huw Price, “Metaphysical Pluralism”, *The Journal of Philosophy* (89, 8), 1992, 387–409; “Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 7 (1997), pp. 247–267; and “Naturalism without Representation”, in Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (eds), *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²³ Price, “Naturalism without Representation”.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. *.

naturalistic approach to the knowing subject *prior* to the cutting in of the problematic hidden assumptions of object naturalism.

Price's deflationary critique of object naturalism starts with a distinction between two possible interpretations within which the placement problem might be posed. The "material conception" of the problem starts with a consideration of the problematic objects, properties, or facts themselves: "We are simply acquainted with X, and hence—in the light of a commitment to object naturalism—come to wonder how this thing-with-which-we-are-acquainted could be the kind of thing studied by science".²⁵ In contrast, the "linguistic conception" starts with our *talk* about these things, facts, and so on. Here, "we note that humans (ourselves or others) employ the term "X" in language, or the concept X, in thought". But for the object naturalist, this linguistic framing of the placement problem quickly reduces to the material conception. "In the light of a commitment to object naturalism" he states, "we come to wonder how what these speakers are thereby talking or thinking *about* could be the kind of thing studied by science".²⁶ But this quick reversion to the material conception on the part of the object naturalist reveals a substantive assumption about the linguistic practices themselves—the assumption that they are to be understood *representationally*, that is, understood in terms of the things they are *about*. This representationalist assumption, Price says, "grounds our shift in focus from the *term* "X" or concept X to its assumed *object*, X",²⁷ and it is far from innocent. To bring out its problematic nature Price next invokes Quine's deflationary approach to semantic notions.

The representationalist move from linguistic practices to the objects they are about, he points out, should *not* be seen as a move down a Quinean deflationary semantic ladder, as deflationism is precisely meant to avoid the type of substantial metaphysical commitments implicit in the representationalist's approach. Thus, on Quine's own deflationary account, we start with talk about objects, and then any subsequent "ascent" to talk about the meanings of words or the truth of sentences is only an *apparent* one as for Quine talk of "the *truth* of the sentence "X is F," is just another way of talking about the *object*, X".²⁸ But conversely, if, reversing Quine's approach, we *actually* start with talk of our linguistic practices, neither should we then properly "descend" to talk of the objects these practices are purportedly about. The assumption that we *do*, the representationalist assumption, thus begs "substantial, non-deflationary semantic

²⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

²⁸ Ibid.

notions”.²⁹ But these notions are typical of the problematic ones that reductionists hope to naturalize.

Kantian features indeed seem very close to the surface of Price’s “subject naturalism”.³⁰ One might say that Kant had adopted a stance towards traditional metaphysicians analogous to that of Price toward the object naturalist, in that it was central to Kant’s philosophical project to bring into question untheorized assumptions about the conception of representation implicit in traditional metaphysics. The centrality of this semantic issue is clear in a letter by Kant during the period of the gestation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In 1772 Kant writes to Marcus Herz that up to that time his philosophy had “lacked something essential, something that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact, constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics”. This neglected topic concerned the nature of representation. “I asked myself”, Kant goes on, “What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call “representation” to the object?”.³¹

More particularly, we might consider Kant’s critical attitude to Locke in the first *Critique* as analogous to Price’s deflationary subject naturalist critique of the “object naturalist’s” implicit semantic theory. In his “physiological” approach to the mind, Locke had given a causal explanation of the relation of mental representations to the world, however, it is clear from the combination of Kant’s letter to Herz and his comments in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that Kant doesn’t regard *this* as an answer to *his* question of the “ground” of the relation of representation to thing.³² Rather, in giving a causal account of representation Locke had just begged the question of what it is that makes a representation of an object that caused it *a representation* of that object, and not just

²⁹ In short, an object naturalism which starts from the linguistic realm and descends to the level of objects and facts “rests on substantial theoretical assumptions about what we humans do with language—roughly, the assumption that substantial “word-world” semantic relations are part of the best scientific account of our use of the relevant terms” (Ibid., p. 78).

³⁰ These Kantian features are further apparent in Price’s writings on time in that Price rejects a realistic interpretation of the asymmetry of past and future and the notion of cause that accompanies it. See, for example, *Time’s Arrow & Archimedes’ Point: New Directions for the Physics of Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Such asymmetry is, on his account, a feature that is projected onto time from certain features of our own practices.

³¹ Kant to Marcus Herz, February 21 1772, in Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, ed. Arnulf Zweig, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 132–3.

³² Kant frames his comments on Locke in terms of the impossibility of an empirical deduction of the pure a priori concepts, that is, the concepts to which an empirical concept must conform in order to count as having a representational function. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A86–7/B120.

some *effect* of it.³³ It is crucial, of course, that for Locke such an effect *is* a representation, the possession of which will count as *knowledge*. Hence Locke's causal account seems to have begged what Price refers to as "substantial, non-deflationary semantic notions", and it is just *these* notions that Kant wanted to bring into question.

Much of the force and attraction of Kant's raising the question of the grounds of our capacity for representation comes from the mere fact of doing so, rather than the particularities of his answer. Kant's point is that there must be *something* about we humans whereby our mental contents can purport to have representational status, and his approach of contrasting the human capacity here with some divine infinite capacity surely suggests a type of "subject naturalism". Once the question of the grounds of the representational relation is made an issue, it looks as if Locke has been by default committed to a mysterious, indeed magical, conception of his own mental powers. Lockean ideas just seem to be *intrinsically* representational.

In contrast, in his own complex account of our representational capacity understood in terms of the dual functions of intuitions and concepts, Kant contrasts our *finite* capacity for representation with God's purportedly *infinite* representational capacity. While God might have the capacity to directly intuit individual "things in themselves" we, restricted by our need to be sensuously affected by objects in the world, can only aspire to discursive representations of things which then appear to us relative to the specific conditions enabling our representational capacity. Indeed, the representational capacity that Locke assumes we humans to have, looks like the one Kant attributes to God. It is just this implicit, Godly or magical representational capacity, one that seems to presuppose the operation of what Hilary Putnam was later to capture with the phrase "metaphysical glue",³⁴ that Kant is anxious to expose in the thought of his predecessors.³⁵

³³ Using a legal analogy, Kant accuses Locke of confusing a question of *fact* with a question of *right* or *law*. Locke's causal explanation cannot give an account of the normative status that adheres to the ideal of knowledge or representation. The "right" of some mental state, as it were, to be called a "representation". "Since this attempted physiological derivation concerns a *questio facti*, it cannot strictly be called deduction". Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A87/B120. A few pages earlier Kant had introduced the distinction between "questions of right (*quid juris*)" and "questions of fact (*quid facti*)" in relation to the transcendental "deduction" he uses to establish the normative status of the a priori concepts which are the necessary conditions of the *representational function* of any empirical concept. *Ibid.*, A84-5/B116-7.

³⁴ Hilary Putnam, *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 18.

³⁵ Putnam links his own critique of "magical" theories of reference to Kant's critical philosophy in *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 60-4.

Can “Subject Naturalism” Save the Naturalizing Project?

What might Price’s subject naturalism have to say in face of the problems sketched by Sacks—the problems I have labelled as those of disciplinary identity and nihilism? Price is clearly aware of the latter as a problem: “The tide of naturalism has been rising since the seventeenth century”, he notes, and “the regions under threat are some of the most central in human life”.³⁶ The subject naturalist fights along side the nonnaturalists to protect these regions, and does so by developing a critique of the scientific excesses of earlier “object” naturalists. But the pluralism at the heart of this critique is often thought to hold dangers for philosophy’s disciplinary integrity as much as does scientism. Here Price’s strategy, I suggest, is to secure the disciplinary identity for *philosophy* by assimilating it to natural science. That is, “soft” or liberal naturalism is secured in the culture generally by the strategy of strict or scientific naturalism *within* philosophy.

Subject naturalism aspires to combine the metaphysical economy of naturalism without the expense of nihilism. While it is “naturalist in spirit” it “offers an olive branch to nonnaturalists”³⁷ because the nihilistic culprit was object naturalism: “Object naturalism gives science not just center stage but the whole stage, taking scientific knowledge to be the only knowledge there is (at least in some sense). Subject naturalism suggests that science might properly take a more modest view of its own importance. It imagines a scientific discovery that science is not all there is—that science is just one thing among many that we do with ‘representational’ discourse.”³⁸ While this may seem good news for those hoping for a liberal naturalism, closer scrutiny reveals that subject naturalism does not offer support to liberal naturalists where they often want it—*within philosophy itself*. Like the object naturalist, the subject naturalist wants to completely assimilate *philosophy* to natural science: naturalism *per se* is just “the view that the project of metaphysics can properly be conducted from the standpoint of natural science”,³⁹ and the problem with object naturalism is that it is *bad science*. The solution, it is clear, is that it should be replaced by *better science*. “The story then has the following satisfying moral. If we do science better in philosophy, we’ll be less inclined to think that science is all there is to do.”⁴⁰

The point at which Price’s purportedly pluralistic naturalism threatens to slide into strict *philosophical* scientism is apparent when he shifts from the seemingly innocent idea that philosophy must start with the notion that “we humans are natural creatures” to the idea that it must start with “what *science* tells us about ourselves”,⁴¹ because what science tells us is “that we humans are natural creatures”. But the critic may ask: Why

³⁶ Price, “Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds”, p. 247.

³⁷ Price, “Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds”, p. 248.

³⁸ Price, “Naturalism without Representationalism”, p. 88.

³⁹ Price, “Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds”, p. 247, n1.

⁴⁰ Price, “Naturalism without Representationalism”, p. 88.

⁴¹ Emphasis added.

science in particular—cannot non-scientific disciplines tell us important things about ourselves? And, in any case, if science, *which* science?

The idea that science is the place to start in the effort to learn about ourselves suggests that whatever the functions of non-scientific discourses, these cannot include that of telling us anything important about ourselves. But that the idea that one can *only* learn about ourselves from science is, many will think, ludicrous. For starters, novels overwhelmingly portray human life in non-magical, broadly naturalistic ways,⁴² and effectively the same could be said of many other literary and artistic genres. In fact it could be argued (and has been) that different artistic forms, say painting and poetry, can “tell us something about ourselves” as natural material creatures—say, reveal to us otherwise unnoticed dimensions of the sensuous phenomenology of our lives, in ways that are very difficult if not impossible to convey in a maximally conceptualised medium like that to which the sciences aspire. Price wants to protect the non-scientific discourses from the rising tide of scientific naturalism. But, if they have nothing important to say to us it’s unclear why this is worth the effort.

Viewed in terms of its positive aspect, Price’s dictum seems to fare no better. For one, it’s still not clear that the “science” that we are to do “better” in philosophy is a natural kind term. Rather than “science”, a familiar objection goes, there are just many *sciences*, all of which tell us about ourselves as natural creatures in some particular way or another. Physics, for example, tells us about ourselves *qua* physical beings, biology about ourselves *qua* biological beings, sociology about ourselves *qua* social beings (social, by our nature, as it were), and so on. Price is vague as to the identity of the science he recommends. The general idea that it studies the *functions* of different ways of talking suggests a science something like anthropology, say, or linguistics. Indeed, in one place, when singling out representatives of the type of appropriate form of approach within contemporary philosophy, he describes them as “addressing deep issues in socio-linguistic theory”.⁴³ Naturalists are typically drawn to the “harder” sciences like physics, and avoid “human sciences” like linguistics or anthropology or sociology, disciplines that are themselves crossed by doctrinal disputes about the ultimate terms in which such human fields should be described.

Take, for example, the classic distinction between the natural sciences and the cultural or human sciences (“*Geisteswissenschaften*”) such as history or ethnography. In very broad terms, conceived in the latter way, an *appropriately* “scientific” approach to humans is typically seen as interpretative rather than explanatory, or at least as having

⁴² That novels are fictional in no way impugns this if we take the Aristotelian point that such representations novels are about *possible* human lives rather than *actual* ones.

⁴³ John O’Leary-Hawthorne and Huw Price, “How To Stand Up for Non-Cognitivism” *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996), p. 290, n. 21.

its explanations mediated by interpretations concerning the intentions attributed to agents, and so on. As such, the human sciences are seen as engaging not simply with “brute” facts that we take to be independent of any awareness of them, but also “institutional” facts that obtain only in virtue of the fact that they are recognized as so obtaining by the “bearers” of those institutions.⁴⁴ Linked to this, this approach tends to interpret regularities in human affairs in terms of patterns of rule-following rather than the causal regularities of the contrasting natural sciences. Such a human sciences approach can, of course, still treat humans as natural in some broad sense in which there is nothing godly or magical separating humans from the rest of nature, but once this is done, its advocates will typically stress the *discontinuities*.⁴⁵ But if the *Geisteswissenschaften* were allowed into the constitution of the philosophical standpoint, it is unclear why the result would be a form of *naturalism* rather than, say “historicism”. As Price makes clear, naturalism in philosophy is just “the view that the project of metaphysics can properly be conducted from the standpoint of *natural* science”.⁴⁶

Conceding the term “naturalism” to Price, we may ask whether his compelling points against “object naturalism” could be made within a *non-scientistic* and yet non-“supernaturalist” conception of *philosophy*? I think it can if it follows the route taken by one of his erstwhile allies in struggles against the type of representationalist approach to language he opposes, Robert Brandom. This is the route of *idealism*. Of course many analytic philosophers may react to such a suggestion with nothing short of horror or mirth. While the idealist tradition had been held in high regard in English-speaking philosophy in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it has rarely even been considered as a possible way of doing philosophy since. Idealism was, as everyone knows, vanquished by Russell and Moore at the turn of the twentieth.⁴⁷ Or at least, this was, until recently, the generally unchallenged *official* story. Brandom suggests an alternative account of the recent trajectory of analytic philosophy which sees in it not the *naturalization* of Kantian transcendentalism but its *Hegelianization*.⁴⁸ After some brief, but hopefully horror-allaying, comments on the much misunderstood term “idealism”, I

⁴⁴ That Melinda is married to Jack is an institutional fact. That Melinda is in bed with Ralph is a brute fact.

⁴⁵ Here, the culture–nature distinction is made internal to some more inclusive sense of nature.

⁴⁶ Price, “Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds”, p. 247, n. 1, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ For a telling reassessment of the usual story here, see Stewart Candlish, *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and its Significance for Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴⁸ Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994) and *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002). Richard Rorty describes Brandom himself as attempting to “usher analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage”. Richard Rorty, “Introduction” to Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 8–9.

will try to say in very general terms something of what I would see as an *idealistic* re-interpretation of Price's subject naturalism as involving. But rather than Brandom's self-consciously Hegelian orientation, I will appeal to the work of a philosopher who, on the face of it, shares Price's more Humean sympathies: Bernard Williams.

Idealism and recent analytic non-naturalism

The term "idealism" is, in Anglophone circles, almost invariably associated with the figure of George Berkeley, but if Berkeley *can* intelligibly be referred to as an idealist, a characterization denied by a number of major interpreters,⁴⁹ then he is surely the *least* representative of the species. Berkeley himself didn't refer to his stance as idealism, and used the much more descriptive "immaterialism", but perhaps a *better* name is the one used by his 19th century editor, Alexander Campbell Frazer, who called it "spiritual realism".⁵⁰ It is the commonplace conflation of idealism with this version of *realism* that has mired the interpretation of the movement of "German idealism" that immediately following Kant, and that is usually characterized by the three central figures, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.

From the time of the initial reception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had objected to the claim of critics that his "transcendental" idealism was a species of Berkeley's doctrine, and much confusion here, I think, is caused by the failure to attend to the *Aristotelian* dimension of Kant's own way of expressing his difference to the doctrine to which he referred as "material idealism". To be a "material idealist" is to be an idealist about "matter"—to reduce matter to the status of "ideas" in the mind of some subject, ultimately, for Berkeley, the mind of God. Thus "material idealism" or "immaterialism" was, as we have seen, just a consequence of Berkeley's spiritual *realism*. But Kant was *not* an idealist about matter, but rather an idealist about *form*, and in this sense his philosophy was the exact *opposite* of Berkeley's.

The extent that kantian *formal* "idealism" is alive in contemporary philosophical approaches to the *form* of experience and thought is consonant with the generally *non-supernaturalistic* character of Kant's idealism when contrasted with its Berkeleian opposite. Berkeley was, of course, a theist: the ultimate reality was the mind of God. Very generally, it might be said that the idea of the mind of God was one which had developed in the early christian period to designate the "place", as it were, where Platonic ideas were to be regarded as located. Here, the Pricean nature of Kant's *non-*

⁴⁹ A. A. Luce, for example, denies that Berkeley was "an idealist" if, by that term is meant "the type of philosophical doctrine found in the recognized idealists—Kant, Hegel, and Bradley. If those three are idealists, then Berkeley is not". A. A. Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism: A Commentary on his "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge"* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1945), p. 25. See also John Russell Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob - The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ Alexander Campbell Frazer, *Berkeley and Spiritual Realism* (London: Constable, 1908).

representationalist strategy can be clearly seen in Kant's treatment of ideas like that of "God". Effectively, what Kant did was to point out that concepts like "God" do not *function* like ordinary referring empirical concepts like "duck" or "electron". In his terminology, they are not "constitutive" concepts that are applied in judgments but "regulative" ones, regulating our theoretical and practical reasoning processes. We might say that for metaphysical notions like "God", Kant's slogan was something like the non-representationalist Wittgensteinian one that Price takes to heart: look to *the use*, not to the (supposed) referent.

But if Kant passes muster on this count, surely it will be objected, that *his* healthy and restraining sense of the finitude of human beings was in turn overthrown by the later idealists who returned to just this type of "spiritualistic" thought? After all, didn't Hegel embrace the notion of "spirit" with a vengeance? Two things should be noted here. First, Hegel belonged to a tradition of post-Kantian thinkers who, coming on the scene after the "pantheism dispute" of the mid 1780s, tried in some way to reconcile the philosophies of Kant and Spinoza. While Hegel had a concept of "spirit", it was clearly not an *immaterialist one* like that of Berkeley.⁵¹ Next, while it is still a relatively common view of Hegel that he reverted to the type of "dogmatic" metaphysical philosophy of which Kant was critical, according to many recent interpreters, this is radically mistaken: on their "post-Kantian" reading, rather than reverting to dogmatic metaphysics, Hegel had *extended* the type of Kantian critique, and retrospectively applied it to remnants of the dogmatic metaphysics that, he thought, afflicted Kant.⁵² And just as Kant had shown that one doesn't need to be a philosophical theist to have a philosophical theology, Hegel showed that neither does one need to be a spiritual *realist* to have an account of *spirit*.

Here the notion of "objective spirit [*Geist*]" found in the human sciences (in German, the *Geisteswissenschaften*) is relevant. Indeed, this very notion had been introduced into discussions of the human sciences by a philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey, who had taken the idea from Hegel. The idea itself is not a particularly mysterious one, the realm of *objectiver Geist* as opposed to *Natur*, effectively appealing to the distinction between the realms of "institutional" and "brute" facts as described by analytic philosophers like Anscombe and Searle. Using a helpful locution of Bernard Williams, we might refer to the conception of "brute" facts, as facts about "what is there anyway", effectively *nature*

⁵¹ See, for example, the history of this movement as given by Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁵² Two well-known advocates of this view are Robert B. Pippin (*Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)) and Terry Pinkard (*Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)). My own *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) shares much the same ambitions.

as its revealed by science. Clearly, institutional facts are not easily thought of in this way, that is, as being there “anyway”, independently of how they are conceived and talked about.⁵³ This is a commonplace of ethnographical methodology. If one were talking about a culture in which, say, there were *no* words that *in any way* functioned like our words, “marry”, “spouse”, “wedding”, etc., etc., it would be very questionable to describe person X as *married* to person Y. In short, we might think of the realm of “institutional facts” as, along with those evaluatively “thick” facts of ethical knowledge, as belonging to a realm accessible only to a person able to deploy all those relevant culturally transmitted perspectival concepts described by Williams, that is, by someone located within some collective “first-person” standpoint.

We might think of such “institutional facts” as accessed from a type of first-person plural perspective as the sorts of facts of interest to those humanistic parts of our culture such as history or ethnography—that is, to the sorts of non-naturalistic areas of our culture that Price wants to protect from the treatment they receive at the hands of his object-naturalist rivals.⁵⁴ Price’s strategy is, as we have seen, to question the naturalistic *credentials* of those who propose reductionist or eliminativist responses to the so-called “placement problem”. His strategy is one of claiming to be “more naturalist in metaphysics” than those he opposes. The shared assumption, however, is that metaphysics *should* be naturalist. But one can, of course, question this assumption, as does Bernard Williams when he claims philosophy for the human sciences in the paper, “Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline”.⁵⁵

There, Williams responds to the charge of scientism made by Hilary Putnam. Williams is well-known for having made a distinction akin to Price’s between the functioning of concepts in the discourses of the natural sciences on the one hand, and in evaluative or normative forms of talk, on the other. Moreover, his motivation here has features akin to Price’s: while wanting to *deny* that, say, ethical judgments have the sort of objectivity characteristic of the natural sciences (they are not a part of the way the world is “anyway”), he had wanted to avoid common naturalist strategies such as reductionism or eliminativism. Williams had made this distinction by appealing to an “absolute conception” of the world on which the discourses of the natural sciences, but

⁵³ In Hegel’s terms, independently of creatures with *subjective* spirit—what we might call “intentionality”.

⁵⁴ For example, the object naturalist may try to “reduce” institutional facts to some array of underlying brute facts. The claim will be something like that the truth of a sentence like “Max is married to Mary” necessarily supervenes on the truth of a whole lot of unknown, perhaps ultimately unknowable, natural or “brute” facts. Hence for “practical purposes” the “reductionist” may, of course, not insist, as did some naturalists of the late nineteenth century, that all historical explanation be reduced to some naturalistic account.

⁵⁵ Bernard Williams, “Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline”, *Philosophy* vol. 75 (2000), pp. 477–496.

not those of the ethical realm, converge, and it was just this notion that was invoked by Putnam in his accusation of scientism.

But, Williams protests, he had never regarded *philosophy* as aiming at the absolute conception,⁵⁶ and specifically rejects such an idea for the same reasons invoked by Putnam. Philosophy must account for relations such as semantic ones that are *normative*. While our account of semantics must, of course be *consistent* with physics, it is obvious, he thinks, that “any attempt to *reduce* semantic relations to concepts of physics is doomed”.⁵⁷ Moreover, this is not a problem about physics *per se*, *no* science conceived in the natural explanatory mode, it would seem, could be adequate. While evolutionary explanations might, for example, seem better candidates in accounting for our linguistic practices, natural selection does not explain human cultural practices *per se*, “but rather the universal human characteristic of having cultural practices, and human beings’ capacity to do so”.⁵⁸ Presumably these same considerations would stretch to *any* empirical “socio-linguistics” of the type Price seems to suggest. Regardless of the identity of the science in question, if the normativity of semantic relations prevent them from being part of the “absolute conception of the world”, this only brings out the fact that achieving such a view “would not be particularly serviceable to us for many of our purposes, such as making sense of our intellectual and other activities. For those purposes—in particular, in seeking to understand ourselves—we need concepts and explanations which are rooted in our more local practices, our culture, and our history.”⁵⁹

For Williams, then, philosophy should *not* aspire to an account of the way the world is “anyway” or, we might say, as it is “in itself”. This we might describe as Williams’s *Kantian* dimension. But we might regard his claim that our philosophical concepts and explanations are *necessarily* “rooted in our more local practices, our culture, and our history”—that is, rooted in our “objective spirit” whose norms must somehow *remain* normative for us—as manifesting his *Hegelian* dimension. Like Schelling, Hegel had criticised the idea that philosophy be done entirely from the *reflective* position to which

⁵⁶ Williams asks, “should the idea that science and only science describes the world as it is in itself, independent of perspective, mean that there is no independent philosophical enterprise? That would follow only on the assumption that if there is an independent philosophical enterprise, its aim is to describe the world as it is in itself, independent of perspective. And why should we accept that?” Williams, “Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline”, p. 481. Williams had first introduced the idea of an “absolute conception of the world” in his *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 64. Hilary Putnam had attacked this in *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), ch 5.

⁵⁷ Williams, “Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline”, p. 484. This loss of normativity is just an other example of what we have referred to as the nihilism problem facing philosophical naturalism.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 485.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 484.

natural science aspires. What Schelling had treated as “disentanglement” Hegel treats in terms of the notion of “negation”, and philosophy involves the *negation* of the initial “negation” of disentanglement: the philosopher needs to return to that entanglement with the world that reflection denied.⁶⁰

Like Hegel, Williams appeals to the necessarily *historical* dimension of philosophical reflection. Such a philosophical “memory”, internal to the practice philosophy itself, must address the relation between our present normative orientations and commitments (such as a commitment to science or certain liberal political values, for example) and the earlier configurations from which they arose and which they replaced. Here historical reflection cannot aspire to the type of “objectivity” that is the goal even of the of the empirical *Geisteswissenschaften*, as this is the type of historical narration that would lead to relativistic nihilism. Rather, such histories need to be recounted from the normative commitments *of the present point of view* from which our present commitments will be regarded as more rational than those they replaced: it will in some sense, therefore, be whiggish or, as Williams says, “vindicatory”, lest “the history of our outlook ... interfere with our commitment to it, and in particular with a philosophical attempt to work within it and develop its arguments”.⁶¹ Williams notes that the type of “wide-screen versions” of stories about the “unfolding of reason” or the “fuller realization of freedom and autonomy” as told by Hegel and Marx are not at all popular within contemporary philosophy. But “we *must* attend to it, if we are to know what reflective attitude to take to our own conceptions”.⁶²

Williams’s gestures towards a type of Hegelianism here are, of course, not meant to suggest a commitment to the “wide-screen” version of the “unfolding of reason” that is associated with traditional pictures of Hegel, but *such a conception* of Hegel is not that found in the interpretations of the contemporary “post-Kantians” for whom Hegel has been traditionally *mis-construed* as a type of spiritual realist rather than an idealist.⁶³ In fact, many contemporary accounts of Hegel see in his theory of *Geist* an approach that has more in common with what, in the context of contemporary non-naturalist accounts

⁶⁰ As with the idealists, for Williams, it could be said that the appropriate way of conceiving of philosophy is not on the “reflective” model of “consciousness”—with its abstract opposition between the knower and the known—but on that of a collective “*self-consciousness*” in which the idea of such an ultimate separation does not make sense. And as is the case with Hegel in particular, *Ibid.*, p. 488.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 488. On the extent of Williams’s Hegelian tendencies, especially in relation to his critique of Kantian moral philosophy, see Mark P. Jenkins, *Bernard Williams* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), pp. 84–6.

⁶³ In earlier work, Williams himself had drawn attention to the incoherence of those usual conceptions of any type of socialized Cartesian mind—what he calls “aggregated solipsism”—that might be invoked in relation to idealism. Bernard Williams, “Wittgenstein and Idealism”, in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

of practical reason, has been called, the “second-person” standpoint.⁶⁴ According to Stephen Darwall, this approach, which is seen in contemporary versions of contractualism such as that of T. M. Scanlon,⁶⁵ finds an early exemplar in the post-Kantian idealist J. G. Fichte, who employed the idea of “reciprocal recognition” in the context of his theory of “rights”.⁶⁶ Indeed, many contemporary Hegelians see Hegel as having developed just such a “recognitive” approach to spirit on the basis of Fichte’s starting point.⁶⁷

According to Darwall, the second-person perspective is a version of the *first-person* perspective, the agentive perspective that grasps the world in terms of non-natural normative concepts. In particular, it is the stance adopted in contexts of dialogical or reciprocal address, most obviously in the context of speech acts at the centre of *practical reason* such as those of commanding or reproaching.⁶⁸ But Robert Brandom, following Wilfrid Sellars, also sees the paradigmatic act of *theoretical* reason—that of *asserting*—in these terms.⁶⁹ When I tell somebody something, he thinks, I undertake various types of commitment to which my interlocutor can hold me to account. For example, I implicitly undertake to give them *reasons* for accepting what I have told them, should they find reasons for doubting it, and I also commit myself to those assertions that logically follow from the original claim. In Brandom’s “deontic scorekeeping” approach to reason, to assert a sentence is to place it in what Sellars called “the logical space of reasons,”⁷⁰ a

⁶⁴ Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁶⁵ T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶⁶ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right: According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 20–22. Scanlon characterizes the social relation underlying moral obligation in terms of the notion of “reciprocal recognition” in *What We Owe Each Other*, p. 162.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992), and my *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*.

⁶⁸ These are acts which, as Darwall points “are “grounded in (*de jure*) authority relations that an addresser takes to hold between him and his addressee”. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, p. 2.

⁶⁹ See especially, Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994) and *Articulating Reasons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). In contrast, Darwall does not see theoretical reason as ultimately resting on the same dialogical grounds. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–60. This seems a key distinction in separating the more Hegelian approach of Brandom from the more Kantian one of Darwall. I have explored the relation of Brandom’s approach to the tradition of Kant and Hegel in *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 76.

justificatory “space” within which the “moves” of both theoretical and practical forms of reasoning unfold.⁷¹

While there are differences among the various approaches in contemporary philosophy that appeal to something like the “second-person standpoint”, there are a number of common features. First, approaching speech acts in this way tends to circumvent the tendency to think of their content “representationally” in relation to how the world is “in itself”. This is most apparent in Brandom’s “inferentialist” account of semantics that he draws from this approach, but it is also apparent, for example, in R. Jay Wallace’s account of responsibility, in which there is a deflationary shift from more “metaphysical” questions such as “What is it to be a morally responsible agent?”, to more pragmatic ones like “What is it to treat someone as a morally responsible agent, or to hold a person morally responsible?”⁷² Next, it becomes apparent that from this starting point even the *aspiration* to the aperspectival “absolute conception” is unlikely to come into view. Addressing another from the second-person standpoint presupposes that you are both committed to an at least overlapping set of norms that makes one’s address intelligible. As Darwall makes clear, the picture that comes along with the second-person perspective is that of a *circle*: in particular a “circle of irreducibly second-personal concepts” into which “there is no way to break” from anywhere “outside”.⁷³

While the adoption of the second-person stance has become advocated as a way of thinking about the nature of moral philosophy that has a certain continuity with the Kantian approach, its extension to philosophy in general, as advocated by Brandom extends this in the direction of Hegel. We might now use this to answer William’s metaphilosophical need when he insists that philosophy should not even aim at the aperspectival “absolute” point of view, as is implicit in contemporary naturalism. What can be seen emerging in these contemporary debates, I suggest, is a metaphilosophical analogue of what had been known in the nineteenth century as “idealism”. Such an

⁷¹ See, in particular, Wilfrid Sellars, “Language Rules and Behavior” in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. and intro., J. F. Sicha (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1980).

⁷² R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 1. Wallace claims that “metaphysical interpretations” that “postulate facts about responsibility that are completely prior to and independent of our practice of holding people responsible” as ones that “out to be avoided, if possible”. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–5. Analogously, Robert Brandom advocates a “pragmatic phenomenalist” approach of knowledge. Rather than pursue the question what it is *to be* a knower, the pragmatic phenomenalist approach will pursue the different question of what is entailed by *taking* another to be a knower. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 297.

⁷³ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 11–12. “What the second-person stance excludes is the third-person perspective, that is, regarding, for practical purposes, others (and oneself), not in relation to oneself, but as they are (or one is) “objectively” or “agent-neutrally”. *Ibid.* p. 9.

“idealism”, I suggest, with its insistence on the irreducibility of the normative, looks better equipped than contemporary philosophical naturalism to answer two problems that have plagued much modern philosophy: those of its disciplinary identity, on the one hand, and that of its nihilistic tendencies, on the other.