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Some Reflections on the Relation between Philosophy and Theology

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATION
BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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Schlüsselworte: Philosophie, Theologie, Naturalismus, Übernatur, Natur, Gnade, Szientismus, Reduktionismus.

1. The question of how we are to view the relation between philosophy and theology demands an understanding of their nature and value, and given that these are matters of philosophical and theological dispute, one might suppose that there can be no satisfactory answer. I shall argue that this conclusion is premature, and that philosophy itself, when understood aright, offers the resources for questioning some of the cruder, atheistic responses which hold sway in much contemporary philosophy. Contemporary philosophy will be my focus, and I shall exploit some of the arguments which have been used to undermine certain forms of naturalism. These arguments are not intended to carry any theological import, but I shall suggest that they can be generalized in this direction so as to lend credence to the idea that philosophy is or at least ought to be theologically significant.

2. Let me begin by considering an answer to our question which was common in the philosophical environment in which I was raised. It is the default position of many of my philosophical contemporaries, and it is summed up in something that a philosophy professor once said to me over an Oxford lunch: ‘the problem with theology is that it doesn’t have a subject-matter’¹.

¹ Another philosophy professor has recently responded to this response as follows: ‘He was right. Theology is like astrology. It has no subject-matter. Religious studies has a subject-matter, but theology does not’.

The colleague in question was certainly no Nietzschean, but he would have agreed with Nietzsche that ‘whoever has theologians’ blood in his veins, sees all things in a distorted and dishonest perspective to begin with’². The theologians’ perspective is distorted and dishonest, according to this way of thinking, because God does not exist. The further implication is that philosophy is required to eliminate theology, in just the way in which it is required to eliminate any other pseudo-discipline – astrology or palm-reading, for example.

It would be natural to protest that it is the perspective of this philosopher that is distorted and dishonest. Not because we can say with certainty that God *does* exist, but because his attitude, taken as it stands, reveals a dogmatism which runs counter to the spirit of philosophical enquiry – a spirit which demands open-mindedness, honesty, and a willingness to approach matters without allowing preconceived opinions to cloud our judgement. My colleague would no doubt applaud this conception of philosophical enquiry. He could argue, however, that there are good philosophical reasons for accepting this conception of theology, and that it is the task of the (open-minded) philosopher to consign this discipline to its rightful place. Theology must be eliminated, and with it the preconceived opinions of the theologian.

3. This attitude was *de rigueur* when the agenda of philosophy was dictated by Logical Positivism. Philosophical theorizing was limited to claims capable of empirical verification, metaphysics was eliminated, and with it, any mode of enquiry which ventured beyond these verificationist strictures. In this way, the claims of theology were exposed as meaningless, and the pretensions of those who had theologians’ blood in their veins – metaphysicians included – were cured with a dose of logical analysis. At least some of the pretensions of Logical Positivism have been exposed as spurious, and no good philosopher or theologian would accept its underlying theory of meaning. Nevertheless, its scientific underpinnings have survived in the work of many contemporary practitioners, giving expression to what Barry Stroud has described as ‘a broadly “naturalistic” turn in recent philosophy’³.

The term ‘naturalism’ is as contestable as the term ‘philosophy’, and on a suitably broad construal of its meaning, it may well be true that ‘(n)aturalism has become a slogan in the name of which the vast majority of work in analytic philosophy is construed’⁴, and that the slogan is not entirely reprehensible. In

² W. Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche*, London 1968, p. 9.

³ *The Charm of Naturalism*, in *Naturalism in Question*, Mario de Caro and David Macarthur (eds.), Harvard 1994, pp. 21–35.

⁴ *Introduction: The Nature of Naturalism*, in *Naturalism in Question*, p. 2. Under the heading of broader, non-reductive forms of naturalism are those that allow that value forms an irreducible part of

its narrower, and perhaps more familiar guise, however, it involves a commitment to the claim that science is the measure of all things⁵, and hence, that nature is to be identified with what natural science can comprehend. This is the position that has come to be known as ‘scientific naturalism’ or ‘reductive naturalism’, and it goes hand in hand with the view that philosophy itself must be continuous with science⁶.

It is indisputable that science is the measure of *some* things, but why suppose that it is the measure of everything? James Griffin suggests that this naturalistic programme has a twofold aim. First, it involves a kind of ontological soundness: ‘(s)uspect entities or properties, which may not even exist, are either eliminated by dissolution into others or legitimated by composition from others’⁷. Second, it seeks to eliminate unnecessary mystery and replace it with ‘epistemological satisfactoriness’: ‘Puzzling explanations are either replaced by explanations on a different, clearer level or legitimated by finding bridges between the two levels’. There is a ‘bias towards the unpuzzling’⁸.

My philosophical colleague clearly believed that God falls into the category of ‘suspect entity’ when he complained that theology does not have a subject-matter. No doubt he believed also that talk of God involves unnecessary mystery. We can agree that God is ontologically suspect on the assumption that scientific naturalism is true, for as any theologian or right-minded philosopher would insist, God is not contained within the world, and is to be distinguished from the items with which it is the business of the natural scientist to deal. We can agree also that a commitment to scientific naturalism will render any talk of God epistemologically unsatisfactory. All that this shows, however, is that theology is incompatible with scientific naturalism, and that its subject-matter – God – escapes the ambit of scientific enquiry.

The scientific naturalist would have room for manoeuvre if he could demonstrate that his position is philosophically defensible, or, better still, that it is mandatory. No convincing arguments have been forthcoming, however, and his pretensions have been undermined in various ways by philosophers who

the natural world. See, for example, J. McDowell, J. Griffin, *Value Judgement*, Oxford 1996, ch 3; J. McDowell, *Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World*, reprinted in: *Mind, Value, and Reality*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 112–130; *Two Sorts of Naturalism*, reprinted in: *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp.167–197; D. Wiggins, *Cognitivism, Naturalism, and Normativity*, in: *Reality, Representation, and Projection*, J. Haldane and C. Wright (ed.), Oxford 1993.

⁵ See W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, in: *Science, Perception, and Reality*, London 1963, p.173.

⁶ This view is spelled out in W.V.O Quine’s, *Epistemology Naturalized*, in: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York 1968, and *Two Dogma’s of Empiricism* in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, MA 1953.

⁷ *Value Judgement*, p. 37.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

have sought to question the viability of such an approach⁹. They have done so not merely by reminding us that the considerations in its favour tend to be question-begging, but by making explicit the way in which this ‘idiotic’ bid to make everything ‘conform to the laws of matter’¹⁰ leads to our losing hold of the phenomena we were seeking to explain in this manner. The further complaint is that such an approach leaves us with an impoverished conception of self and world. The overall message then is that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the philosophy of the scientific naturalist, and that we are required by philosophy to question this reductive stance.

Even if we allow that there are more things in heaven and earth than anything dreamt of by the scientific naturalist, there is a question of how far we are permitted to go. The aforementioned contemporary opponents to scientific naturalism do not admit God into their ontology. On the contrary, their interest is in the phenomenon of value, the aim being to show that the natural world is value-involving and that we ourselves, *qua* natural beings are capable of relating to it. They accept the spirit of the scientific naturalist’s demystificatory aim, believing that the nature of value and our relation to it must be rendered intelligible. However, they reject his assumption that this aim can be satisfied only by allowing that the scientist has the measure of reality. The further claim is that, as far as value is concerned, we court unnecessary mystery if we locate it in an ‘other-worldly’ realm. As Griffin puts it: ‘an other-worldly realm of values just produces unnecessary problems about what it could possibly be and how we could learn about it’¹¹.

Given that scientism has been rejected, the denial that values are ‘other-worldly’ and ‘supernatural’ means not that they can be comprehended in scientific terms, but, rather, that ‘they do not need any world except the ordinary world around us – mainly the world of humans and animals and happenings in their lives’¹². So, the ordinary world is a value-involving world, and Griffin refers to the position as ‘expansive naturalism’¹³. It is a form of naturalism in the sense that the value-involving world is the natural world. It is expansive in the sense that its limits outstrip those imposed by the scientific naturalist. As Griffin puts it, ‘the boundaries of the ‘natural’ are pushed outward a bit, in a duly motivated way [...] Values are not reduced; they are swallowed whole’¹⁴.

⁹ Obvious figures in the history of philosophy are Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas. Recent analytic philosophers include John McDowell, James Griffin, David Wiggins, Hilary Putnam, Bernard Williams.

¹⁰ See D. Wiggins, *Cognitivism, Naturalism, and Normativity*, p. 304.

¹¹ *Value Judgement*, p. 44.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 43–44.

¹³ See also J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard: Harvard University Press 1994, p. 109: ‘Since we are setting our faces against bald naturalism, we have to expand nature beyond what is countenanced in a naturalism of the realm of law’.

¹⁴ *Value Judgement*, p. 51.

This expansive exercise would be problematic to the scientific naturalist, for he believes that there is no room in our ontology for things that cannot be measured by science. As he sees it, anything that eludes such measurement is supernatural in the pejorative sense assumed by the expansive naturalist. The expansive naturalist rejects scientism, but agrees that values cannot be supernatural, meaning by this that they are not to be located beyond the ordinary world around us. He insists upon this negative requirement on the ground that we need to be able to make sense of how we can relate to and learn about value. His overall message then is that we are entitled to move beyond the ‘disenchanted’ conception of nature assumed by the scientific naturalist, but that it is *this* world that must be enchanted rather than a second, supernatural world.

4. The expansive naturalist denies that the scientist has the monopoly on reality, and claims that scientific naturalism is bad philosophy. He agrees with the scientific naturalist that we should be avoiding unnecessary mystery, and argues that value becomes unnecessarily mysterious if it is located *beyond* the ordinary world in which we live and move and have our being. So we must avoid reference to the supernatural, but ‘supernatural’ in this context is not the logical complement of ‘natural’ as that term is understood by the scientific naturalist. That is to say, it is not equivalent to ‘non-scientific’, for we are permitted to make reference to ingredients which cannot be comprehended by science. Rather, ‘supernatural’ now becomes the logical complement of ‘natural’ as that term is understood in the preferred broader, expansive sense.

So the rejection of scientific naturalism takes us beyond a disenchanted conception of nature and permits us to admit into our ontology things which, from the perspective of the scientific naturalist, are inadmissibly mysterious and supernatural. In particular, we can allow that the natural world is value-involving. The further claim is that we must avoid reference to an ‘other-worldly’ realm of values on the ground that it ‘produces unnecessary problems about what it could possibly be and how we could learn about it.’ These problems are unnecessary because value does not have to be viewed in such terms.

One might suppose that this line of thought is sufficient to block an ascent to God, for God surely has to be viewed in terms which are ‘other-worldly’ and ‘supernatural’ in the sense rejected by the expansive naturalist. That is to say, God’s reality is ‘supernatural’ not just in the sense that it escapes the ambit of scientific investigation (which it does), but in the sense that it exceeds the limits of the broader, value-involving conception of nature under present consideration. That is to say, God lies *beyond* the world in which we live and move and have our being. The idea of a movement *beyond* is not, in itself, philoso-

phically disastrous and may well turn out to be justified. After all, the expansive naturalist moves into a realm which is *beyond* anything permitted by the scientific naturalist, his point being that this move is legitimate provided that the envisaged items are such that we can relate to them. And, in response to one who blocks such an ascent, he objects that a scientific conception of nature is an impoverished one, and that the epistemological and ontological difficulties he envisages are products of his underlying framework. By contrast, if we reject that framework, then we can allow that there are non-scientific ways of relating to and learning about things, and that they are ‘supernatural’ and ‘other-worldly’ only in the innocuous sense that they elude scientific comprehension. It remains open therefore that a similar move is available to the theologian. That is to say, he can propose a further ascent in the direction of God, he can defend this move on the ground that without it we are left with an impoverished conception of nature (and of ourselves *qua* natural beings), and he can try to persuade us that the difficulties envisaged stem from a framework we have every reason to reject.

5. Secular thinkers will remain unconvinced, and I shall return to the question of why this might be so. First though, it is worth noting that a similar sceptical stance has infected some theologians. Thus, we find Eric Mascall complaining in his 1970/1 Gifford Lectures that the concept of the supernatural has been either disowned or pushed into the background in much recent theological writing, and that in John Robinson’s book *Honest to God* ‘it is disowned in scornful terms, usually under the still more contemptible form of ‘supranatural’. This has led to a neglect of the classical theological distinction between the natural and the supernatural, to which Mascall responds as follows:

‘I do not think, however, that we can afford to do without the distinction, though I think that Catholic theology has tended in the past to formulate it in a very rigid and unsatisfactory manner, especially in the textbooks, and that it needs a good deal of reformulation and development’¹⁵.

Robinson’s reservations about the supernatural are not reservations about God, and we shall see that he is in broad agreement with Mascall. He prefers to use the term ‘supranatural’ to refer to the object of his attack not simply because the term ‘supernatural’ tends to be used interchangeably with ‘the divine’ (when it does not mean ‘the spooky’), but because this less familiar word will allow us to see that the issue is not the reality of God as such, but, rather, a particular way of representing or describing it¹⁶.

¹⁵ *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today*, London 1971, p. 151.

¹⁶ *Exploration into God*, London 1967, p. 35.

The caricature of this approach, we are told, is the Deist conception of God: God as the ‘remote watchmaker’ who starts it all up and then leaves us to our own devices. However, it is not enough to shoot down this Deist picture by insisting that God’s relation to the world is personal, for it is not just the *quality* of the relationship that requires to be amended, but also its *structure*. According to the offending structure, God is ‘*a Being whose separate existence over and above the sum of all things has to be demonstrated and established*’¹⁷; ‘*a ‘divine Person behind the scenes...for whose existence the evidence was to say the least doubtful*’¹⁸.

Robinson’s target then is an approach which makes it difficult to allow that we could stand in a personal relation to God, and which implies that His reality is, at best, a hypothetical super-addition to the world – something whose existence we might seek to establish by citing as evidence the experiential materials at our disposal, but whose postulation remains doubtful and, in any case, peripheral to the stuff of human life. As he puts it, God is banished to the edges of life, and becomes, at best, an extra, spooky storey to which we might or might not ascend when the business of living is over.

Mascall shares some of these worries. He bemoans a position which rules out the possibility of there being any ‘real self-communication of God to man, any real elevation of man into the life of God’, claiming that it involves an inadequate understanding of the relation between the Creator and the creature:

‘This relation has only too often been thought of solely in terms of a comparison of the respective natures or essences of God and man, to the neglect of the concrete existential activity uniting them [...]. Sometimes we are told that God is infinite and man is finite, sometimes that God is *das ganz Andres*, the ‘wholly other’, and both these assertions are true. They neglect, however, the basic fact in which the mutual otherness of God and man consists, namely that man is totally dependent for his existence on the incessant creative activity of the self-existent God. And the importance of this, as I have previously emphasized, is that while it involves the greatest conceivable contrast between God and man, it simultaneously places them in the most intimate connection’¹⁹.

Like Robinson, he sees a deistic influence at work in the idea that man is isolated from God²⁰, objecting likewise that such a framework encourages us to view the move from created world to creator as consisting of discursive argument to the concept of a ‘remote and glacial deity’. The result of such an

¹⁷ *Honest to God*, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Exploration into God*, p. 22.

¹⁹ *The Openness of Being*, p. 150.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

approach is that ‘in the very act of affirming God’s existence’ we end up losing hold of ‘the intuition of God and finite being together without which the argument could never begin’²¹. This intuition involves an awareness ‘of the creature as dependent upon its creator’, and it is ‘closely linked with the capacity for contemplative wondering’²². By contrast, if we hold to a deistic conception of creation, we shall think of men as:

‘incapsulated in their finitude in such a way as to make them incapable of receiving anything more than purely external manipulation by God. He can push them around, but he cannot bring about any inner transformation in them; at least he cannot do this without destroying their natures and making them into other beings than they are’²³.

He describes as follows the offending ‘rigid and unsatisfactory’ formulation of the natural/supernatural distinction. It has:

‘(t)ended to see man’s natural constitution as rounded off and complete in itself, and as concerned entirely with his life in this world and sustained by the forces of nature. On top of this there has been superposed a super-natural constitution, in virtue of which man is orientated to the supernatural end of the vision of God [...]. Although nature is held to possess a *potential oboedientialis* for grace and the supernatural, this consists of little more than a lack of antagonism towards it, and the orders are thought of rather as if they were two apartments on adjacent floors, with a layer of soundproof packing between the natural ceiling below and the supernatural floor above’²⁴.

The claim then is that the relation between the natural and the supernatural has been distorted. The terms of this relation have not been spelled out in detail, but the supernatural is said to denote a dimension of reality which involves God and His action, and the natural includes man as he exists in this world ‘sustained by the forces of nature’. These terms are not to be conflated, for there is the ‘greatest conceivable contrast’ between them. However, they also stand in the most intimate connection, and the distortion occurs when this connection is lost. It is lost when the supernatural defines the divine in separation from the human and is located in an inaccessible, incommunicable beyond. As such, it is ‘spooky’ and ‘uncanny’. God ceases to be the ‘most real thing in the world’, and becomes something whose existence is doubtful and, in any case, irrelevant to human life. Human life, on this picture, is played out within the natural world and sustained by its forces. It involves a concern for this world alone, and this world is closed off from the supernatural, as is man’s

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Via Media: An Essay in Theological Synthesis*, London 1956, pp. 152–153.

²⁴ *The Openness of Being*, p. 151.

natural constitution: he is ‘incapsulated in his finitude’. Incapsulated in his finitude, man can, at best, be externally manipulated by God – a manipulation which falls short of the kind of inner transformation which occurs when the connection between the supernatural and the natural is understood aright. The further claim is that, provided we remain within the offending framework, this transformation could be effected only with a destruction of man’s natural being.

6. How does all of this relate to our discussion of naturalism? In both cases we are faced with the question of how we are to comprehend the limits of the natural world. The expansive naturalist argues that the scientific naturalist is working with an unduly restricted conception of nature, and that provided that we remain within these parameters we shall have a difficulty accommodating those phenomena which cannot be comprehended in scientific terms but which are central to how we think about ourselves and the world. We shall end up concluding that such items are irreducibly mysterious, and there will be no way of explaining how we relate to them. A sceptical conclusion becomes tempting, and we are left with an impoverished conception of self and world. Mascall and Robinson see a similar line of argument at work in a theological context. In this case, the phenomenon in question is God, and according to the offending framework, He belongs to a dimension of reality which is ‘other-worldly’ and ‘supernatural’. They allow that there are acceptable interpretations of these terms (compare a similar move to be made on behalf of our expansive naturalists), but object to a picture which severs the connection between God and nature, and thereby, the connection between God and man. According to this picture, nature can be adequately comprehended in non-God involving terms, and man, *qua* natural being bears no relation to God. He can perhaps be externally manipulated by God, and it is not ruled out that he can use his rational resources to construct an argument for His existence. We are led to suppose, however, that such an endeavour is bound to misfire, and that it is no better than an analogous move that might be made by a scientific naturalist when he tries to convince us that he can, after all, accommodate the possibility of value. The implication is that we have been left with an impoverished conception of man and of nature, and that the offending framework rules out the possibility of incorporating the vital missing ingredient. It has become ‘other-worldly’ in the pejorative sense, and we are led to suppose that, working within such a framework, the rational response is atheism.

The alternative is to reject this dualistic conception of the relation between nature and God so as to allow that we ourselves, *qua* natural beings, are already open to God and His communication. That is to say that the supernatural – which here embraces both God and His communicative action – is not

a superstructure, extrinsic or added on to a nature which is complete in itself. Rather, it is a quality or dimension which enriches or perfects nature. This grants us the right to allow that man can be inwardly transformed by God. And precisely because this transformation serves to enhance his natural being – given that we are now working with a broader conception of nature – we avoid the implication that such divine action spells the destruction of man, and leads to a severing of any connection he might have with ordinary human life.

7. The overall message is that reference to God and His action is not irreducibly spooky, but that it becomes so when the relation between the natural and the supernatural is distorted. The further claims are that this distortion leads to an impoverished conception of man and nature, and that there are theologians who are guilty on this score. This might lead us to conclude that such theologians are in need of a dose of good philosophy – the kind of philosophy which can expose and correct the relevant distortions and lead us to a more satisfactory conception of our natural being and the world we inhabit. The difficulty, however, is that many of the philosophers who have embarked upon such a task have blocked the possibility of expanding the limits of nature in the direction of God. Is their refusal justified? Or are they succumbing to the kind of reductionism it is their purpose to disarm?

My philosophy colleague would claim that this refusal *is* justified, and that theology does not stand up to philosophical scrutiny. It courts unnecessary mystery and we do not need it. Thus, it is the task of the philosopher to eliminate theology, or, at least, to expose its deficiencies and leave it those who have not had the privilege of a decent philosophical education – those who are compelled to see things in a distorted and dishonest perspective. On this way of thinking then, philosophy does not need theology, and if we take it seriously we commit an error which is on the same level as that which is operative when we are tempted to admit suspect items into our ontology.

As far as ontological extravagance is concerned, we have seen that matters are not so simple, and that judgements concerning what is ontologically suspect are not philosophically neutral. On the contrary, they give expression to commitments which may themselves be open to challenge, when, for example, they are motivated by scientific naturalism. Thus, when the scientific naturalist insists that the scientist has the monopoly on reality, and proceeds to eliminate all of those items – and, indeed, disciplines – which exceed this paradigm, the rational response is to question his starting-point. The expansive naturalist does precisely this, and broadens our ontology and philosophy accordingly. But he stops short of God. He stops short of God because he believes that such a move is philosophically suspect, and, in any case, unnecessary. We

can explain what needs to be explained without bringing God into the equation. Mascall and Robinson agree that this move is suspect if made from within a metaphysical framework which distorts the quality and the structure of man's relation to God. According to this framework, there can be no genuine relating to God, and He cannot bring about the inner transformation which is fundamental to the Christian message. At best then, He becomes a mysterious 'I know not what'. We may seek to reach this 'remote and glacial deity' by philosophical argument, but it is implied that such an endeavour is bound to misfire. As Mascall puts it, 'in the very act of affirming God's existence' we end up losing hold of 'the intuition of God and finite being together without which the argument could never begin'²⁵.

The implication here is that a philosopher of this persuasion is looking for God in the wrong place. We can begin to understand what this might mean by returning to our scientific naturalist. He looks for value in the wrong place in the sense that he tries to comprehend it in scientific terms, the upshot being that he loses his grip upon it. The further message of our expansive naturalists is that we commit a similar error if we move beyond the ordinary world and seek to locate value in some other-worldly realm – a realm which seems irrelevant to the world of humans and animals and happenings in their lives – the world without which our evaluations would lose their focus and point. So our focus must be this world, and this focus must involve not the dispassionate stance of the scientist who is seeking to explain and to predict. Rather, it presupposes a level of engagement and concern – the concern of one is capable of caring about things, and of finding value in them. Should we find this perspective mysterious? Yes, if we commit to scientific naturalism, and yes, if we take it to involve access to a range of spooky items which exceed the limits of nature²⁶. But no, if we believe that both of these responses stem from a framework we have every reason to reject – one which fails to appreciate not just that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in certain philosophies, but that our receptivity to such things is fundamental to our humanity²⁷.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 141.

²⁶ Compare J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, London 1977, p. 38.

²⁷ It is compatible with this picture that we *become* subjects who are capable of making evaluative distinctions and so forth. The point, however, is that this process of maturation is natural in the sense that it is built into our nature as human beings that we are capable of arriving at a standpoint from which the relevant demands will be brought into view. John McDowell spells this out using the notion of *second nature* which he takes to be implicit in Aristotle's account of how ethical character is formed: 'human beings are intelligibly initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing, which instils the appropriate shape into their lives. The resulting habits of thought and action are second nature... Second nature could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism. This gives human reason enough of a foothold in the realm of law to satisfy any proper respect for modern natural science'. *Mind and World*, Harvard 1994, p. 84.

So we can look for things in the wrong place either by ascending too high or by failing to ascend at all, when, for example, we remain at the level of scientific understanding. We seem to commit a version of both of these errors when we seek to find God by means of the kind of argument rejected by Mascall. According to this strategy we begin with the assumption that man is isolated from God, comprehend the natural world accordingly, and seek to derive His existence from the materials at our disposal. Either we shall be moved, albeit problematically, in the direction of a 'remote and glacial deity', in which case we shall have ascended too high; or alternatively, we shall be thrown back upon the materials with which we started, and we shall have failed to ascend at all. According to Mascall's preferred alternative, we must begin with 'the intuition of God and finite being together'. That is to say, we must reject the assumption that man is isolated from God and 'incapsulated in his finitude'. The further claim is that this starting-point is a pre-requisite for any successful argument to God.

It can look as if we have been invited to beg the question, for the recommendation seems to be that if we want to argue for the existence of God, then we must begin by standing in the right kind of relation to Him. It is notable, however, that a similar strategy is proposed by the expansive naturalist when he insists that an understanding of value requires that we occupy the point of view 'constituted by an ethical sensibility' rather than stepping outside of it in the manner envisaged by proponents of the framework under attack²⁸. This approach is not a plea for uncritical fideism. The point is, rather, that the necessary critical scrutiny must proceed, in part, by way of concepts which can be understood only by one who has occupied the relevant point of view – one who is receptive to value. The alternative, we are told, is to suppose that we are dealing with a range of facts which 'belong, mysteriously, in a reality that is wholly independent of our subjectivity, and set over against it'²⁹. It is made perfectly clear that there could be no relating to facts like this, and no prospect of subjecting them to critical scrutiny.

So the strategy admits of philosophical defence, and if our expansive naturalists are to be believed, it is the only way of guaranteeing that we are working at the right level of explanation. Yet these philosophers would object to its application in a theological context. That is to say, they would reject Mascall's 'intuition of God and finite being together'.

²⁸ See J. McDowell, *Projection and Truth in Ethics*, reprinted in: *Mind, Value, and Reality* Oxford 1998, p. 162.

²⁹ *Projection and Truth in Ethics*, p. 159.

8. This intuition testifies to the openness to God which comes with revelation and grace and which is accepted with faith. These concepts are central to theology, and the subject-matter of theology, on this way of thinking, is not an irrelevant and spooky extra which has no relevance to nature and to our natural being. On the contrary, talk of God involves acknowledging a relationship which is central to our human constitution and given to us in *this* world. Our openness to God is therefore held to have an enriching effect, and without it we remain impoverished. The further implication is that theology itself is not a discipline which is entirely separate from philosophy and to be disposed of by its means. On the contrary, it has an enriching effect: it prevents philosophy from becoming impoverished and reductive, doing so by expanding its borders and giving it a moral and spiritual significance which is lost when we succumb to some of the more reductive conceptions thereof. Likewise, however, it is implied that theology needs philosophy. Not the kind of philosophy which leads it astray with the imposition of faulty presuppositions or which uses these presuppositions to undermine its being. Rather, it needs a philosophy which will protect it from bad philosophy, and guarantee that it remains critically aware. Such critical awareness will involve a willingness to subject its own claims to rational scrutiny, and to come to an understanding – however partial and provisional – of the concepts with which it operates and of how they relate to those which gain application in a non-theological context – the concepts of nature and man are an obvious case in point. Relatedly, it will be necessary to engage critically with those who believe that theology can only ever amount to myth and superstition, to be aware of the kind of scientism which can generate this prejudice, and to stay in dialogue with those who have resisted this reductive impulse whilst remaining resolutely atheistic³⁰.

9. The expansive naturalist is one such figure, and I want to end this paper by returning to his position and making explicit the implications it contains for an understanding of philosophy, theology, and the relation between them. Such a philosopher would reject the claims of theology, and he would deny that philosophy becomes impoverished in its absence. Nevertheless, he works with versions of all of the claims I have made on the theologian's behalf. His fundamental aim is to lead us away from an impoverished conception of philosophy – the kind of philosophy which is forced upon us if we commit to scientific naturalism – and he holds that this reductive impulse leads to an impoverishment of self and world. As he sees it then, we are required by philosophy to expand its limits, and this will lead also to an expansion of the

³⁰ This is the overall message of John Paul II's, *Encyclical Letter "Fides et Ratio"*, Boston 1998.

limits of nature. He allows that such a move will be challenged by one who remains within the framework under attack, and that it can appear to be an invitation for courting superstition and bad philosophy. His response to this complaint is twofold. First, he points out that it stems from a commitment to the very framework he is seeking to disarm – a framework which leads us to suppose that philosophy is respectable only if it is reducible to science, and that self and world must be understood accordingly. Second, he demonstrates that his own preferred standpoint is rationally defensible. It is rationally defensible not simply because it offers a corrective to the impoverished and ultimately unsustainable world-view of the scientific naturalist, but because it can itself be subject to critical scrutiny, albeit a scrutiny which involves and applies to a range of concepts which far exceed these reductive limits.

Our theologian agrees that there are impoverished conceptions of philosophy, and that such conceptions lead to an impoverishment of self and world. He claims, however, that philosophy is enriched by theology, and that our being is enriched to the extent that we are inwardly transformed by God. The expansive naturalist rejects the idea that philosophy is enriched by theology, doing so on the ground that philosophy has the resources to enrich itself. It does so by exposing the errors of scientific naturalism and broadening its scope accordingly. Likewise, he would deny that God's action is required to remedy any deficiencies in our being. All that is required is that we move beyond the parameters dictated by science so as to allow that we are capable of participating in evaluative life and thought. As McDowell puts it, 'our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons'³¹. This openness is no 'occult power, something extra to our being the kind of animals we are, which is our situation in nature'³². On the contrary, it is something of which we are capable by virtue of being the natural beings we are, and the dimension of reality to which we become receptive is 'essentially within reach of human beings'³³.

One suspects that, for McDowell, the theologian's conception of the supernatural precisely does involve some 'occult power' which is isolated from man's natural being, and out of reach of human beings. We have seen that the offending conception abounds – amongst both theologians and philosophers – but we have seen also that it is not mandatory, and that it is fundamental to good theology that the supernatural is a dimension of nature which serves to enrich the lives of those natural beings who are capable of receiving divine

³¹ *Mind and World*, p. 82.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*.

communication. It is tempting in the light of all of this to turn the tables at this point and throw at the expansive naturalist a version of the argument *he* uses to undermine the position of the scientific naturalist. It would go like this: you are accepting a framework which leads to the conclusion that philosophy is respectable only if it remains untainted by theology – a framework which implies that theology can only ever amount to myth and superstition, and that its subject-matter has no bearing upon the lives of natural beings. The upshot is that you are forced to comprehend self and world in terms which make no reference to God. However, this framework is not mandatory, and its imposition leads to an impoverished conception of philosophy, self, and world. These deficiencies can be overcome if we allow that theology can enrich philosophy, and that God's action can enrich nature. To be sure, this can look like an invitation to superstition and bad philosophy, and there are versions of this move which warrant such a complaint. However, the theologian under present consideration is critically astute, and believes that there are good reasons for taking seriously his position. Yes, he is introducing a range of concepts which will strike you as problematic, just as you introduce a range of concepts which are problematic to the scientific naturalist. However, he believes that they admit of rational defence, albeit a defence which will be difficult to appreciate to one who remains closed to this way of thinking and being.

It will be *difficult* to appreciate, and perhaps impossible for the kind of philosopher who remains locked within the parameters of scientific naturalism. However, the expansive naturalist has escaped these parameters, and, to the extent that he shares at least some of the aspirations of the theologian, it is not ruled out that he might come to acquire the perspective from which the theologian's reasoning will make some kind of sense. To be sure, there are obstacles³⁴, and our naturalist may continue to insist that an ascent in the direction of God (and of theology) is indefensible. Alternatively, and in the spirit of his expansive approach, he may be persuaded to enter into dialogue with theology. If my conclusions are justified then he can forsake such a task only at the risk of impoverishing his discipline and robbing theology of a fundamental philosophical resource.

³⁴ I consider some of these obstacles in my forthcoming *God, Value, and Naturalism, Ratio*, 2011.

REFLEKSJE NAD ZWIĄZKIEM POMIĘDZY FILOZOFIĄ A TEOLOGIĄ (STRESZCZENIE)

Autorka podejmuje próbę określenia związku pomiędzy filozofią a teologią z perspektywy współczesnych trendów występujących w filozofii wartości. Głównym punktem zainteresowania będzie pewien rodzaj naturalizmu, który zostanie tu przedstawiony jako przeciwstawiający się scjentyzmowi, niemniej jednak nie odrzucający ateistycznego formatu myślenia. W porównaniu z naturalizmem scjentyistycznym, poszerzone zostaną znaczenia kluczowych pojęć, takich jak „natura” i „filozofia”. Ta koncepcyjna ekspansja ma umożliwić konstruktywne otwarcie się filozofii na refleksję teologiczną. Autorka twierdzi, że tę możliwość otwarcia na teologię ze strony naturalizmu scjentyistycznego należy potraktować poważnie, zwłaszcza że nie zostaną tu złamane zasady przyjęte przez jego zwolenników. Zgodnie z tym podejściem możliwe jest poparcie argumentu, że Bóg angażuje się w naturę i że teologia ma znaczenie dla filozofii. Do tego wniosku można dojść posługując się typem argumentowania przyjętym przez przedstawicieli rozumowania ateistycznego. Jedynym warunkiem jest gotowość odrzucenia naturalizmu scjentyistycznego. Trudno przewidzieć, czy da się rozwinąć i wytłumaczyć szerzej tego typu teistyczną defensywę. Autorka sugeruje, że nie należy zaprzestawać inicjowania kolejnych prób w tym kierunku. Dyskusja kończy się deklaracją filozoficzno-teologicznego optymizmu.

ÜBERLEGUNGEN ZUM VERHÄLTNIS ZWISCHEN PHILOSOPHIE UND THEOLOGIE (ZUSAMMENFASSUNG)

Die Autorin unternimmt den Versuch, das Verhältnis zwischen Philosophie und Theologie aus der Perspektive der gegenwärtigen philosophischen Strömungen zu bestimmen. Die Aufmerksamkeit wird besonders auf eine bestimmte Art von Naturalismus gelegt, der hier als konträr zum Szientismus dargestellt wird, obwohl er auf den atheistischen Hintergrund nicht verzichten will. Im Vergleich zum naturalistischen Szientismus wird hier die Bedeutung der Schlüsselbegriffe *Natur* und *Philosophie* erweitert. Dieses konzeptuelle Expandieren verfolgt das Ziel, die Öffnung der Philosophie auf die theologische Reflexion zu ermöglichen. Die Autorin ist der Meinung, dass man die Öffnungsmöglichkeit der naturalistischen Richtungen auf die Theologie ernst nehmen soll, besonders deswegen, weil dadurch die Prinzipien ihrer Anhänger keineswegs durchbrochen werden. Gemäß diesem Ansatz ist die Zustimmung zur Ansicht möglich, dass Gott in die Natur eingreift und dass Theologie eine Bedeutung für die Philosophie hat. Eine solche Schlussfolgerung ist sogar bei der durch Anhänger der atheistischen Denkweise vertretenen Argumentation möglich. Die einzige Vorbedingung ist die Ablehnung des szientistischen Naturalismus. Es ist schwer vorauszusagen, ob ein solcher Ansatz Zukunft hat. Die Autorin suggeriert jedoch, dass man die Versuche in diese Richtung nicht aufgeben darf. Die Überlegungen schließen mit einem optimistischen Vorausblick auf die Zukunft des philosophisch-theologischen Dialogs.