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Naturalism as a Philosophical Paradigm

Andrew Melnyk

Abstract: I develop the conjecture that "naturalism" in philosophy names not a thesis but a paradigm in something like Thomas Kuhn's sense, i.e., a set of commitments, shared by a group of investigators, whose acceptance by the members of the group powerfully influences their day-to-day investigative practice. I take a stab at spelling out the shared commitments that make up naturalism, and the logical and evidential relations among them.

I used to think it was pretty much a waste of time to try to sort out philosophical talk of naturalism. I couldn't really discern a single, univocal formulation of naturalism, and I saw no particular reason to expect one to exist. Moreover, none of this seemed to matter. Though sympathetic to the philosophical temperament of self-professed naturalists, I found that I could express all the philosophical theses I really cared about without using "naturalism" or any of its cognates; and, in the arguments of self-professed naturalists, little or nothing of philosophical importance ever seemed to turn on the precise formulation of naturalism. I suspected that talk of naturalism in philosophical discourse was playing a purely rhetorical role.

I have since changed my mind. My mistake, as I'm now inclined to see it, was to assume that (i) professions of naturalism are merely, or mainly, expressions of commitment to a *thesis*, indeed to a *single* thesis, and that (ii) clarification of naturalism would require *conceptual analysis*. But there are attractive alternatives to these assumptions. We can suppose in their place that (i') professions of naturalism are (usually) expressions of allegiance to something like a philosophical *paradigm* in Thomas Kuhn's sense of "paradigm", something therefore *multidimensional*, and that (ii') proposed elucidations of this paradigm are therefore *empirical hypotheses* in the psychology and sociology of philosophy. Let me flesh this out a little.

Author bio

Kuhn hypothesized the existence of paradigms in his sense to explain a pair of related phenomena exhibited by a "particular community of [scientific] specialists", namely, "[1] the relative fullness of their professional communication and [2] the relative unanimity of their professional judgments."[1] He conceived of a paradigm as a set of commitments, shared by a group of scientists, whose acceptance by the members of the group powerfully influences their day-to-day scientific practice.[2] Such commitments concern

(i) concrete scientific achievements members of the group regard as exemplary,
(ii) the kinds of scientific problems they regard as genuine and worth addressing,
(iii) the kinds of solutions to scientific problems they regard as promising,
(iv the kinds of criteria they regard as appropriate to evaluating proposed solutions,
(v) the observational practices and experimental techniques they favor, and
(vi) what the relevant domain of inquiry is like, but at a high level of abstraction.

Now philosophers—even naturalistic ones—don't come close to exhibiting the degree of consensus in substantive belief that scientists exhibit with regard to the vast tracts of material that fill the textbooks in their specialties; so Kuhn's first reason for positing paradigms in science doesn't carry over to philosophy. But his second reason might carry over: despite a lack of consensus in substantive belief, groups of philosophers might still share sets of commitments that powerfully influence their philosophical practice and hence explain the greater ease with which the members of a given group communicate with their fellow members (as opposed to non-members of the group). I conjecture that groups of philosophers do share such sets of commitments, and that naturalism is one such set, i.e., a philosophical paradigm. In this paper, I develop this conjecture by taking a stab at spelling out the shared commitments that make up naturalism. However, I present no evidence that the conjecture is true, i.e., that these shared commitments actually play the causal role in the intellectual lives of naturalist philosophers that would be required for the commitments to constitute a philosophical paradigm; that they play such a role is plausible, I think, but serious evidence that they do would require psychological and sociological inquiry that I have not undertaken. I would be delighted, of course, if my efforts inspired such inquiry; but I'll be content if they shed light on the mind-set of a good number of contemporary philosophers by articulating one view of the nature, limits, and methodology of philosophy. My official stance in this paper toward the commitments themselves is neither to endorse nor to repudiate them.

1. The Metaphysical Commitment

A Kuhnian paradigm in science usually includes a commitment to a *metaphysical* claim, i.e., to some broad-scope claim about the general character of the segment of reality that the scientists who have adopted the paradigm investigate. Examples of

such claims are that fundamental laws are deterministic, and that geological phenomena arose from the operation of processes that can be seen operating today. The philosophical paradigm of naturalism, I suggest, also includes a commitment to a metaphysical claim. But because philosophy takes the whole of reality as its domain, the claim speaks of everything: it says that everything is *natural.*

But how should this claim be cashed out? One familiar suggestion is that everything is natural just in case everything is governed by laws—whether they be universal, irreducibly statistical, or hedged by *ceteris paribus* clauses—that are *impersonal.* But this suggestion faces the difficulty that an utterly lawless universe—in which not even the probabilities with which kinds of events occur exhibit any consistency—might nonetheless be quite natural. The suggestion is, however, on the right track. It reflects the everyday contrast we make between what is natural and what is artificial, i.e., what is the *result of agency*; and it assigns great importance to the role of laws. Of course, many artifacts exist, so the claim that everything is natural can't be construed charitably as the claim that nothing is the result of agency. But it can be construed as the claim that nothing is the result of *sui generis* agency, no cases of such agency actually existing. I suggest, therefore, that whether everything is natural turns on the status, as *sui generis* or not, of such instances of agency as *acting* (or *choosing*) *for a reason*. More precisely, I suggest that everything is natural iff there are no instances of *sui generis*—in the sense of *nomologically inexplicable*—acting (or choosing) for a reason, where acting (or choosing) for a reason is nomologically inexplicable iff its instances (1) don't have a covering-law explanation of any kind (e.g., a deductive-nomological explanation), *and* (2) aren't identical with, or realized by, items that do have a covering-law explanation of some kind. An act (or choice) that is nomologically inexplicable need not, however, be inexplicable *simpliciter*, since it could, in principle, be explained in some irreducibly teleological way by citing the reason for which it occurred. Richard Swinburne is one prominent philosopher who conceives of acting (or choosing) for a reason as *nomologically* inexplicable, but still explicable, via what he calls a "personal explanation"[3]; and so perhaps do the folk.

If everything is natural in my suggested sense, then either there are no cases of acting (or choosing) for a reason at all or else there are such cases but every act (or choice) either can be explained by being subsumed under a law or is identical with, or realized by, something that can be explained by being subsumed under a law. Of course, actions or choices don't have to be physical or physically realized in order to be natural; they can be made of anything you like (e.g., ectoplasm) and still be natural, just so long as either they have covering-law explanations of their own or they're identical with, or realized by, occurrences that do.

Thus, if everything is natural in my suggested sense, then very many and perhaps all familiar supernatural claims are false. Consider the claims that poltergeists rearrange your furniture, that some people are psychokinetic, that others can do miracles, and that God brought the universe into existence. All these claims purport to describe cases of acting for a reason; and though it's conceivable that these claims should be accompanied by an insistence that the actions in question do have covering-law explanations, in fact they never are, and, I strongly suspect, they never would be. (I want to say: if they were, the thrill would be gone.) So in practice these claims are made to assert the occurrence of nomologically inexplicable instances of acting

for a reason.

The claim that everything is natural in my suggested sense doesn't directly rule out the existence of numbers, sets, and other abstracta, platonistically construed, that presumably aren't located in spacetime, even though naturalists have traditionally taken exception to them; and this might be thought to be a difficulty for my suggestion. The claim that everything is natural in my suggested sense does seem, however, to rule them out *indirectly*. For the claim that such abstracta exist requires an accompanying epistemology, that is, an account of how we come to know about them; and this account, *faute de mieux,* must appeal precisely to nomologically inexplicable instances of belief-formation, e.g., *sui generis* intuitings or graspings. The same complaint can be made about such Lewisian *possibilia* as flying pigs: they're not themselves non-natural, but we still have no idea how our coming to form beliefs about them could be nomologically explicable and hence natural.

Commitment—of a suitably modest sort—to the claim that everything is natural in the suggested sense is no mere matter of taste, or act of faith, or accident of personal biography: we happen to have *evidence* for thinking that there are no nomologically inexplicable instances of acting (or whatever) for a reason. First, modern science has been able to explain a bewildering variety of non-behavioral phenomena—including phenomena once thought to require explanation in terms of purposes—without appealing to nomologically inexplicable instances of acting (or whatever) for a reason. Indeed, such phenomena as the weather, the spread of disease, the ontogenesis of organisms, the origin of species, and the formation of the solar system have all been explained without *any* kind of appeal to acting (or whatever) for a reason. Second, although *behavioral* phenomena, including the products of behavior, in humans and perhaps some animals are often explained scientifically by appeal to acting (or whatever) for a reason, there is evidence that all such mental phenomena are physically realized, and hence nomologically explicable. For example, various experimental techniques (e.g., fMRI scans) have revealed that mental phenomena of all sorts—from deciding to wiggle a finger to performing mental arithmetic—require specific areas of one's brain to be active; whereas no mental phenomena have been discovered that do not require specific areas of one's brain to be active. But this systematic dependence of the mental on the physical seems to admit of only two explanations: either (i) all mental phenomena are realized by physical phenomena or (ii) they aren't realized by physical phenomena, but for some reason nomologically require physical phenomena for their very existence. But hypothesis (i)—the physicalist hypothesis—is preferable to the anti-physicalist hypothesis (ii) for two reasons: it's more economical, positing fewer kinds of phenomena and fewer fundamental laws than hypothesis (ii); and it doesn't leave any explanatory loose ends—contrary to hypothesis (ii), which leaves us wondering *why* each kind of mental phenomenon can't exist without being accompanied by a certain type of wholly distinct physical phenomenon.[4]

A mildly interesting question that arises at this point is how the claim that everything is natural, understood in the way suggested, is related to physicalism, the claim that everything is physical in the sense of being either expressible by physical predicates or else realized by something expressible by physical predicates. The two claims are certainly not the same. True, the claim that everything is physical entails the claim

that everything is natural, given the further premise that everything physical is nomologically explicable. For if everything whatever is either physical or physically realized, then every instance of acting (or whatever) for a reason is either physical or physically realized; and if every instance of acting (or whatever) for a reason is either physical or physically realized, then, if everything physical is nomologically explicable, every instance of acting (or whatever) for a reason either has or is realized by something that has a covering law explanation, and is therefore nomologically explicable. But the claim that everything is natural doesn't entail the claim that everything is physical, since there could be a "patchwork" world in which everything is nomologically explicable, even though no single branch of science is basic in the way in which, if physicalism is true, physics is basic; some events, therefore, would be explained by covering laws, but not by covering laws that were physical. However, the two claims are more interestingly related than these merely logical points might suggest. Because physicalism (plus a plausible further premise) entails that everything is natural, it counts as a *version* of the view that everything is natural. Moreover, it's the most richly developed and best evidenced version of the view that everything is natural; specifically, it's better evidenced than the only naturalistic rival to it with any plausibility, namely, the egalitarian, pluralist view of the relations among the many branches of science and their respective domains.[5] In consequence, physicalism often serves as a working hypothesis among naturalist philosophers who want to appeal to a worldview less abstract than the bald claim that everything is natural. The word "naturalism", therefore, is not just code for the word "physicalism".

I have suggested that commitment to the claim that everything is natural rests on empirical evidence that we happen to possess; so I allow that we might not have had such evidence. I am also inclined, though tentatively, to allow the logical possibility of having positive evidence that nomologically inexplicable instances of acting (or whatever) for a reason exist, and hence that not everything is natural. At the same time, however, I suspect that there is a systematic problem with providing evidence for Swinburne-type personal explanations in the special case when they posit, and cite the actions of, agents who are omnipotent and omniscient. Here is an attempt to articulate in fully general terms how the problem (if it is genuine) arises.

An explanation of some state of affairs S that says *merely* that S exists because some omnipotent and omniscient agent produced it should satisfy nobody; one might as well say that S exists because some entirely impersonal event caused it. So a Swinburne-type personal explanation of S must cite the omnipotent and omniscient's agent's *reason* for producing S. But what kind of reason might an omnipotent and omniscient agent have? There is one kind of reason that such an agent could not have: the reason that consists *only* in valuing S because, given the contingent laws of nature, it would be a means to some end E that the agent values for its own sake and that the agent cannot produce directly. For an omnipotent and omniscient agent can always produce E directly, i.e., without pulling contingent causal levers, through the exercise of omnipotence. This is not to say that such an agent could never have a reason to bring about E by means of first producing S, for he could—the reason might be that the agent intrinsically values the complex state of affairs of E's having been brought about by S; but such a reason would not be one that consists *only* in valuing S as a contingent means to E. So any reason that an

omnipotent and omniscient agent might have for producing S would have to include the agent's valuing of S for its own sake. Accordingly, any proposed personal explanation of S that cited the action of an omnipotent and omniscient agent would have to attribute to the agent a basic desire to produce S. It seems, however, that if an omnipotent and omniscient agent has a desire to produce, from nothing and with no assistance, a certain state of affairs, then this desire must have a content rich enough to specify the desired state of affairs completely (for example, if the desired state of affairs is the one that obtains iff *a* is F and *b* is G, then the desire must be a desire that *a* be F and *b* be G). But if the desire has a content rich enough to specify the desired state of affairs completely, the desire must itself exhibit the same degree of complexity as does the state of affairs. Therefore, even when the only hypothesis to explain a certain state of affairs is a personal explanation that posits an omnipotent and omniscient agent, it will never be more parsimonious to explain the state of affairs in this way than to leave it unexplained, in which case it's not obvious that we will have any reason to accept the hypothesis.

2. An Objection

The philosophical paradigm of naturalism, I've suggested, includes a commitment to the claim that everything is natural. But I can imagine an objection—either to my suggested interpretation of naturalism or to naturalism thus interpreted. The objection is that, as a philosopher, one can't just *assume* the claims of modern science that serve as evidence that everything is natural; such empirical claims, or rather the methods that produce them, must first be philosophically *certified* in some way.

However, philosophers who adopt the naturalist paradigm needn't agree that empirical claims, or the methods that produce them, must be philosophically certified before philosophers can accept them. For how might such certification proceed? Suppose that it proceeds a posteriori. In that case, it would be circular, and hence no certification at all. Alternatively, then, suppose that it proceeds a priori. In that case, either it requires a priori certification of the *reliability* of observation and induction or it doesn't require such a priori certification. If it does, then it looks to be impossible, since the reliability of contingent processes can't be certified a priori, and hence to be something that we can't be obliged to achieve. If it doesn't, then reliance on observation and induction must somehow be capable of being *reasonable* regardless of whether they are *reliable*, i.e., reliably yield truth. But such a view of reasonableness severs the connection between reasonableness and truth, and hence makes it hard to explain why anyone should *care* about being reasonable.

The upshot is that in philosophy, as well as in science and everyday life, one is at liberty to assume the results of empirical inquiry; in this—i.e., Quine's—sense, there is "no first philosophy."[6] Now this liberty might at first appear to license dogmatism, by placing the results of empirical inquiry beyond the possibility of skeptical criticism. But it doesn't really. The results of empirical inquiry are legitimate assumptions but *fallible* ones: they are proper starting-points for inquiry but they can still be abandoned as inquiry proceeds, and they may have to be. They aren't *infallible* assumptions in the sense of being proper starting-points that can never be abandoned, come what may. Consequently, any *particular* result of empirical inquiry can still be aban-

doned, on the basis of criticisms employing the methods of empirical inquiry themselves, together with other, currently uncontested results of empirical inquiry. The history of science is chock-full of *local* skepticism of this empirically-based sort, which is simply the piecemeal rebuilding of the raft one is floating on. Moreover, taking the results of empirical inquiry as legitimate though fallible assumptions is even consistent with *global* skepticism about the results of empirical inquiry.[7] For it remains possible to argue, as some philosophers do argue, that if the usual methods of empirical inquiry are reliable, then we should accept certain results of their application, which results imply that those very methods are not reliable—from which we must conclude that those methods are not reliable, and hence that we shouldn't accept any results of empirical inquiry. The so-called "pessimistic meta-induction" conforms to this pattern: the usual methods of scientific inquiry warrant acceptance of today's best scientific theories, but if these theories are true, then the history of scientific theorizing is a history of error, and so our usual methods of inquiry are unreliable, and we shouldn't accept today's best scientific theories. Also conforming to this pattern is the following close relative of Alvin Plantinga's argument against (what he calls) naturalism: the usual methods of scientific inquiry warrant acceptance of an evolutionary etiology of human cognitive faculties, but if this etiology is true, then our cognitive faculties are unreliable, and so we shouldn't accept today's best scientific theories.[8] And so too does the following less familiar argument: if our usual methods of inquiry are objectively reasonable, then the scientific view of the world is correct, but if it is, then there are no such things as objectively reasonable methods of inquiry, and so we shouldn't accept the scientific view of the world. That globally skeptical arguments like these can be refuted is not a foregone conclusion, even if one takes the results of empirical inquiry as fallible assumptions.

3. Three Methodological Commitments

A Kuhnian paradigm in science also includes certain methodological commitments. So also, I propose, for the philosophical paradigm of naturalism. The methodological commitments of naturalism arise from its metaphysical commitment that everything is natural in the suggested sense, as I will explain.

The first methodological commitment is to a certain constraint on the acceptance of any theory, whether in science or philosophy. Obviously, if the claim that everything is natural in the suggested sense is true, then any theory inconsistent with that claim must be false. But it doesn't follow, and it isn't true, that any theory inconsistent with the claim that everything is natural should automatically and irrevocably be rejected as false; such a constraint would be dogmatic, ignoring the non-zero probability that not everything is natural. Properly understood, the methodological constraint that arises from the metaphysical commitment is more subtle: it's that inconsistency with the claim that everything is natural counts against a theory, presumably in the sense of lowering its probability, *to the extent that the claim is well-supported*. Thus, the first methodological commitment of naturalism is to treat inconsistency with the claim that everything is natural as one consideration against a theory, though not a conclusive one, since it may be outweighed by other considerations that favor the theory. Of course, conservatism in theory-appraisal requires

that a theory's inconsistency with *any* well-supported element of our background commitments counts against the theory; so this first methodological commitment is simply an application to the case at hand of a sound general principle. I think we see this commitment at work when philosophers seek to "naturalize" phenomena, such as intentionality or knowledge. Naturalizing a phenomenon, I suggest, is showing the phenomenon to be something whose existence is consistent with the claim that everything is natural. And the point of naturalizing a phenomenon is to avoid the evidential burden of countenancing a phenomenon whose existence is inconsistent with the well-supported claim that everything is natural.

The second methodological commitment of naturalism, I suggest, concerns the methods of inquiry used in science, which methods these are being itself a matter for a posteriori investigation. The commitment is to the claim that these methods of inquiry can in principle yield understanding of every phenomenon that isn't totally isolated causally from us but that can still be understood by us somehow. This claim follows from the premise that there are no nomologically inexplicable instances of acting (or whatever) for a reason, plus a second premise stating that the methods of inquiry used in science can in principle yield understanding of every phenomenon that (a) includes no nomologically inexplicable instances of acting (or whatever) for a reason, that (b) isn't totally isolated causally from us, but that (c) can still be understood by us somehow. The appeal of this second premise is that we apparently have no conception of what reality would have to be like for it to be false, i.e., no conception of any possible reason other than those mentioned in (a), (b), and (c) why the methods of inquiry used in science might be unable even in principle to yield understanding of some phenomenon. It might be objected that reality, or portions of it, could be *private* or *subjective* in a way that rendered scientific methods inadequate; but arguably no one has ever managed to spell out what a private reality would amount to.[9]

Commitment to the claim that the methods of inquiry used in science can in principle yield understanding of every phenomenon that isn't totally isolated causally from us but that can still be understood by us somehow is properly classified as methodological. For, if it's true, then, whenever we encounter some puzzling phenomenon that we want to understand, we should try to do so via the methods of science; we may yet fail, of course, since the puzzling phenomenon may lie beyond the limits of what we can understand in any way; but if it lies within those limits, then the methods of science will in principle yield understanding. However, from the claim that the methods of inquiry used in science can in principle yield understanding of every phenomenon that isn't totally isolated causally from us and that can be understood by us somehow, it doesn't follow that the methods of science are the *only* successful methods of inquiry; the methods of science might be omni-competent (within certain limits) and yet enjoy no monopoly on success.

The third methodological commitment of the philosophical paradigm of naturalism is, I suggest, to the claim that there's no such thing as a priori philosophical knowledge and hence that philosophers shouldn't seek it.[10] This commitment, however, is less dramatic that it at first appears. For to be a priori in the intended sense, philosophical knowledge would have to be gained through the use of reason alone—whatever exactly that might amount to. So philosophical knowledge that was acquired independently of experience, but only because it was produced by *innate*

mechanisms, naturally selected to operate in a manner isomorphic to, but causally independent of, the pertinent aspect of external reality, would not be a priori in the intended sense, and could therefore be quite acceptable to the naturalistic paradigm. The same goes for philosophical knowledge that was acquired through the exercise of *introspection*; though acquired independently of perceptual experience, such knowledge would not be gained through the use of reason alone.

The rationale for denying the existence of a priori philosophical knowledge is this. Suppose that philosophical knowledge gained through the use of reason alone indeed existed. Then, first, there would have to be some reality that this knowledge is about, since every truth is a truth about something; and, second, this reality would have to be something we can gain knowledge of through the use of reason alone. But these two conditions can't be met simultaneously. To feel the force of this rationale, consider some candidates for the possible reality that a priori philosophical knowledge might be about. Suppose, for example, that philosophical knowledge were simply one kind of knowledge—perhaps very abstract knowledge—of the contingent world that the sciences are about. The good news is that we would in that case be able in principle to gain such knowledge. The bad news, however, is that, if everything is natural, there are no nomologically inexplicable instances of believing for a reason, and so any instances of acquiring a true philosophical belief would have to be nomologically explicable; but no philosopher has ever explained how a true belief could be acquired in a nomologically explicable way, be about contingent reality, and yet count as genuinely a priori in the sense given above.

Suppose, alternatively, that philosophical knowledge were about some non-contingent, non-causal, platonistic reality (e.g., of concepts, non-psychologically construed). But how could knowledge about such a reality arise? It's easy to answer that truths about this realm would be "grasped" or "intuited", and that in order to be warranted in relying on such grasping or intuiting we wouldn't need to be able to explain how it works—any more than a child needs to know how vision works in order to be warranted in relying on vision. But how could the instances of believing that result from such graspings and intuitings be nomologically explicable, as they would have to be if everything is natural? Since aspects of platonistic reality don't fall under laws, or so one would have thought, how would the required nomological explanations go?

Suppose, finally, that philosophical knowledge is of *conceptual truths*, where it's facts about our *minds* that make such truths true; perhaps, at least for people who possess the relevant concepts, knowledge of such truths could arise solely through reflection, and hence be a priori. However, this third supposition is really just a special case of, and hence no improvement upon, the first supposition (that philosophical knowledge is about the contingent world); for our minds, whether physically realized or not, are still just parts of the contingent world. Moreover, as I argue in detail elsewhere, all attempts to develop concrete proposals that accord with this third supposition fail to provide a theoretical foundation for philosophical knowledge that is a priori in the sense in question.[11]

Now the claim that there's no such thing as a priori philosophical knowledge, and hence that philosophers shouldn't seek it, does imply, on the assumption that philosophy is nevertheless properly aimed at achieving some kind of knowledge, that

all philosophy is properly aimed at achieving a posteriori knowledge. But what does this mean in practice? Does it mean that philosophers should set up laboratories, conduct experiments, and record their observations? Or that they can simply read the answers to philosophical questions off the findings reported in *Science* and *Nature*? It does not.

Several remarks are worth making. First, not all a posteriori knowledge has been discovered through systematic scientific inquiry; some of it results from common-sensical methods of inquiry. And it's conceivable that common sense should provide all the empirical material to work with that philosophers need. Certainly every philosopher has a rich stock of common-sense empirical knowledge on which to draw. Second, even the results of systematic scientific inquiry can be learnt by reading, so that philosophical reflection on those results, and thereby perhaps the achievement of philosophical knowledge, can still take place in the comfort of the armchair, so that no philosophers themselves need don the white coat. Third, it's not even true of all uncontroversially scientific questions that answers to them can simply be read off observational data or settled by some crucial experiment. Indeed, some science is done, as Einstein is said to have done it, on the backs of old envelopes. Philosophical knowledge might be a posteriori in something like the way in which the most highly theoretical parts of scientific knowledge are a posteriori. Fourth, some philosophers of science seem to assume that, if a priori philosophical knowledge of, say, causation can't be achieved by conceptual analysis, then causation itself—the relation (if any) that ordinary thought and talk of causation in fact picks out—must be a worthless or unsuitable object of philosophical inquiry. But this is just a *non sequitur*. The folk *may* turn out to have been thinking and talking about nothing, or nothing interesting, when they have taken themselves to be thinking and talking about causation, but this isn't entailed by the impossibility of a priori conceptual analysis. It may be both possible and worthwhile to investigate the relation that the folk call "causation" a posteriori. Finally, it may be that traditional philosophical methods have been misrepresented as being a priori, when in fact they are a posteriori. Consider, for example, the method of possible cases, by which we imagine a hypothetical state of affairs and then ask ourselves whether or not a given term or concept would apply to it; this method is quite acceptable, as far as it goes, but it is arguably an a posteriori method.[12] To the extent that traditional philosophical methods have been misrepresented as a priori, however, recognition that there's no such thing as a priori philosophical knowledge may require very little change at all in philosophical practice—perhaps just an acknowledgement that the methods are fallible, and that their deliverances are but one kind of evidence to consider in deciding which philosophical theories are true.

4. Conclusion

I've been developing the conjecture that naturalism in philosophy is a philosophical paradigm—a set of commitments shared by certain philosophers that powerfully influences their philosophical practice. Specifically, I've proposed that naturalism in philosophy is a philosophical paradigm constituted by a metaphysical commitment—to the claim that everything is, in a certain sense, natural—and by three

methodological commitments that flow from it, though naturalism may well include other commitments too. And I've done this in the hope, first, of better understanding an influential sub-population of contemporary philosophers and, second, of exposing a fascinating conception of philosophy to the bright light of day. But I should caution that I do *not* think that philosophers should refrain from philosophy until they have determined which philosophical methodology is correct. We have to do philosophy with the methodologies we've got—else not do it at all. And that's fine so long as we are willing to change.

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Notes

1. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970, 2nd edition), p. 182.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11, 40–42, 103, and 181–187.

3. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 36ff.

4. Andrew Melnyk, *A Physicalist Manifesto: Thoroughly Modern Materialism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 298–304.

5. *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

6. W.V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 127.

7. Philip Kitcher, "The Naturalists Return," *The Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 90ff..

8. Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), Ch. 12.

9. William Lycan offers an argument against the possibility of a private reality: see his *Consciousness and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 50–51.

10. The reasons for thinking that there's no philosophical a priori knowledge may also be reasons, of course, for thinking that there's no logical or mathematical a priori knowledge.

11. Andrew Melnyk, "Conceptual and Linguistic Analysis: A Two Step Program," *Noûs*, 42 (2008): 267–291. Louise Antony sketches a way in which, she thinks, we could learn logic a priori: we carry out "introspective surveys of the inferences we accept", where these inferences are in fact reliable. But I fear such surveys are at best a way in which the *nomological*, rather than the *logical*, reliability of inference-patterns could be learned a priori; how could we learn in this way that if p and $p \rightarrow q$, then it must *logically* be true that q? See her "A Naturalized Approach to the A Priori," *Philosophical Issues*, *Epistemology* 14 (2004): 12–13.

12 Melnyk, "Conceptual and Linguistic Analysis".