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Rea, WORLD WITHOUT DESIGN: THE ONTOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF NATURALISM

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World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism, by Michael C. Rea. Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. ix + 245. Cloth \$35.00.

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In an age dominated by the success of technology and the natural sciences, empirical evidence and abductive explanatory power seem to belong exclusively to philosophical naturalism at the expense of traditional theisms, while theists seem to have nothing more persuasive than wishful thinking or a subjective psychological compulsion dressed up as a revelation or religious 'experience' to support their belief in the scientifically unverifiable reality of a divine supernatural being.

Against this common way of thinking about the methodological and doctrinal inequality dividing theism and atheism, naturalism and supernaturalism, Michael C. Rea argues that naturalism is not a thesis after all, but a research program, that as such naturalism lacks rational foundation, and that naturalism suprisingly is committed to rejecting realism about while offering no adequate basis for accepting the existence of material objects and other minds. Rea maintains that every thinking human subject has a research program, without which nothing could count as evidence even for the most mundane kinds of inquiry. There are individual and shared research programs, but in both cases research programs can at most be discarded but can never be adopted on the basis of evidence. Accordingly, it can never be rational to accept any research program. We can have good reasons for rejecting a research program, but positive commitment to a research program is never more than a matter of disposition.

Rea's book is divided into three main parts. After an Introduction that anticipates and summarizes his central conclusions, Part I discusses Naturalism by outlining selected historical episodes in a chapter on the 'Pillars of Naturalism', from which Rea extracts the salient features of 'Naturalism Characterized'. Part II on Ontology raises difficulties for naturalism as Rea characterizes its research program in chapters on 'The Discovery Problem', inadequately handled by appeals to 'Proper Function' and 'Pragmatic Arguments', culminating in the question 'What Price Antirealism?' Here Rea collects the problems he claims are encountered by naturalism as antithetical to the existence of material objects and other minds. Part III, Alternatives, proceeds on the assumption that the defeat of naturalism in previous sections requires rethinking fundamental assumptions in epistemology. Rea contrasts 'Intuitionism', which he discredits as a special faculty or intellectual source of knowledge for discovering the intrinsic modal properties of material objects and justifying the existence other minds, thus leaving the field exclusively to the only alternative he supports, a version of 'Supernaturalism', in which he defends the methodological advantages of theism over naturalism.

Rea's distinction between thesis and research program, and the claim that research programs can never be accepted on the grounds of evidence is a postmodernist wolf dressed up in analytic sheep's clothing. If an inquirer justifiably or not believes that there are only two possible research programs and comes to reject one on the basis of evidence, which Rea

admits can happen, why would it not be rational to adopt or at least gravitate toward the only remaining alternative? To consider the case directly relevant to Rea's study, if we think that the origin of the universe can only be explained by naturalism or supernaturalism, and we come to reject supernaturalism, say, on the basis of the problem of evil, why would it not then be rational to adopt naturalism as constituting the only viable research program of choice? Why, in the first place, should anyone agree that naturalism is a research program rather than a thesis? Unfortunately, Rea nowhere explains or tries to define what he means by a thesis as contrasted with a research program. He is satisfied to use these terms and draw upon what he takes to be their methodologically charged implications without saying precisely what differences are supposed to hold between them and how they are supposed to be interrelated.

All we learn from Rea's book about the distinction between a thesis and a research program is that Rea regards naturalism as a research program rather than a thesis, and that as a research program naturalism necessarily functions theoretically without rational foundation. We do not even know enough about Rea's distinction between theses and research programs to know whether these are the only possibilities for the classification of naturalism, or whether naturalism might instead be an ideology, theory, framework for a thesis, or something else yet again, and if so what ramifications another categorization might have for Rea's claim that naturalism lacks rational foundation. Nor does Rea provide examples of genuine philosophical theses for the sake of comparison so that the reader can try to determine whether a thesis is or is not open to the same limitations as research programs. We do not even have enough information to know why or in what sense naturalism is correctly classified as a research program, or whether the argument against its being a thesis can also be adapted to show that naturalism cannot be a research program either. Oddly, and in a way that we are never in position to assess in Rea's exposition, naturalism, as the subtitle of his book indicates, despite being a research program, is nevertheless understood as having consequences like those of any thesis in terms of which at least its unacceptability can be judged. Since Rea never says exactly what he means by a thesis, we cannot decide whether the best alternatives to naturalism are genuine theses that we can rationally adopt, or other research programs that of necessity are equally lacking a rational foundation.

When we turn to the question of exactly what might be meant by naturalism, Rea again does say enough. He argues that there is no reasonable construal of naturalism as a thesis, so that we must classify it instead as a research program. There is no obvious system to the alternatives Rea considers, however, so we do not know whether he has eliminated all of the possibilities or overlooked what might otherwise turn out to be the most promising answers. The mere fact that the literature contains conflicting accounts of naturalism is interesting but inconclusive for this purpose, because it might only reflect confusions or differences in perspective about the concept. A useful way of thinking about naturalism that Rea does not try to refute formulates naturalism as the thesis that all and only those putative entities actually exist that are hypothesized, entailed, or presup-

posed by a correct natural science. This definition avoids the need to describe naturalism as a research program, which in some sense it also undoubtedly is, and answers Rea's main objections to naturalism as a research program that is incompatible with a commitment to the reality of material objects or other minds.

Where the unexpected implications of naturalism in conflict with materialism and the existence of other minds, Rea offers an interesting but unpersuasive line of objections. He argues that naturalism is incompatible with commitment to the reality of material entities because of what he calls the Discovery Problem. This is the alleged epistemic obstacle uniquely encountered by naturalism in trying to determine the intrinsic modal properties of material objects. Against the existence of other minds Rea resurrects the frequently discussed problem of sustaining an analogical inference to the existence of another consciousness from the inductively weak single case basis of the thinker's first person experience of internal mental states. Later, in the book's final chapter, Rea argues that these defects of naturalism are surmounted by supernaturalism and the belief (or is it a thesis?) that the world is the product of divine intelligent design. These are exciting claims by which Rea's work projects a revolutionary metaphilosophical outlook on the dialectical interrelationships governing far-reaching theoretical constructions in philosophy, science and religion. If his conclusions are correct, Rea's criticisms eliminate an obstruction to and encourage instead the cultivation of theism and supernaturalism in light of the epistemic limitations and metaphysical disadvantages he attributes to philosophical naturalism.

The problem throughout Rea's discussion is its myopic focus on easily if not succinctly defeated strawmen. When he has refuted these, he still leaves the strongest contrary and sometimes most obvious opposing views untouched. Thus, not only does Rea not try to explain what he means by the key concept of science, but from what he does say it appears that he has a narrow excessively skewed and to that extent implausible view of what scientists actually do and what science actually involves. He concludes that naturalism is incompatible with belief in the existence of material objects because materialism presupposes that there are intrinsic modal properties of material entities that cannot be 'detected' by empirical means. Natural science, however, is ontically committed to the existence of many kinds of putative entities that do not make their presence known on any Geiger counter. Science is best construed not merely as a systematization of observations, but as a structure of hypotheses that support one another in a mutually justificatory coherence network that is empirically justified in complicated ways. If we emphasize the hypothetical as well as the observational aspect of natural science, then it is hard to see how can there possibly be any objection to philosophical naturalism as including such hypothetically posited putative entities as material objects, including their intrinsic modal properties, if any, and other minds. These items, whose existence Rea does not prove in the first place beyond remarking that they are widely accepted, do not need to be discovered, but only hypothesized by a justified application of natural science in order to satisfy the proposed definition of philosophical naturalism as a bona fide metaphysical thesis.

In this spirit, it may be worthwhile to look more closely at Rea's argument for the Discovery Problem. Even if it is true that intrinsic modal properties cannot be empirically detected, this fact does not detract from naturalism's grounds for commitment to their existence as a reasonable hypothesis or as entailed or presupposed by the reasonable hypotheses of natural science. In lieu of a convincing argument by Rea that there are such modal properties, it might be the better part of naturalism anyway not to include them in its ontology but to withhold judgment concerning their existence. Rea, moreover, overlooks an important distinction between intrinsic logical and intrinsic causal modal properties. It might better be said that contingently existing material objects do not and cannot even be imagined to have intrinsic logical modal properties, except in the trivial sense of having *a fortiori* the logical possibility of instantiating whatever other logically contingent properties they happen to instantiate, along with the logical necessity of instantiating tautological properties and not instantiating logically inconsistent properties.

Despite the nonexistence of intrinsic logical modal properties, and contrary to Rea's argument that naturalism cannot accommodate any intrinsic modal properties, material objects might nevertheless be said to have and even in some sense to be defined in terms of their intrinsic causal modal properties. Intrinsic causal modal properties might be understood as those a material entity has by virtue of falling under a particular empirically established causal law, by which some strength of causal rather than logical necessity is implied. Whereas empiricists and naturalists are free to disagree among themselves about whether there can be intrinsic logical modal properties of material objects, Rea says nothing whatsoever to exclude the empirical discovery of intrinsic causal modal properties, reasonably attributed at least hypothetically to contingently existent material objects whenever an appropriate causal law is discovered or confirmed as applying to certain kinds of material entities. A bullet, accordingly, might naturally be such that it must be projected through space with a force equal to its mass times its rate of acceleration, given the law of kinematics by which $f = ma$, not as a matter of intrinsic logical necessity but of intrinsic causal modality. A naturalist on this account can easily include any of the usual candidates for causally modal dispositional properties that are empirically justified, such as the property of being brittle, soluble, or the like. All we seem to need is the good old-fashioned covering law model in the natural sciences, while the Discovery Problem as an epistemic obstacle to reliably determining the logical or causal modal properties of material entities does not seem to be resolved in any way by the proposition that the world is designed by a divine supernatural being.

As for Rea's conclusion that the naturalist is inherently prohibited from justified commitment to the existence of other minds because of the problem of supporting an inductive inference from a single first-person case, the objection here is also circumvented by the hypothesizing role of science and by the observation that many kinds of inductive generalizations are epistemically warranted by single instances. A child is right to avoid burning its fingers on the basis of an induction from a single case after only one encounter with a flame, and logicians are right, as George Boole and others

have maintained, to accept the rule of *modus ponens* as deductively valid in every application after reflecting on only a single clearcut example. Why not then in the defeasible refutation of ontic solipsism?

The endorsement of theism and of the existence of an intelligent designer lacks depth in Rea's concluding chapter, because he does not consider theism as a thesis or research program in light of the same kinds of objections to which he subjects naturalism. A balanced account that could enable an impartial reader to judge the pros and cons of naturalism versus supernaturalism would need to assess the strengths and weaknesses of supernaturalism only after raising comparably motivated criticisms on both sides. Rea presents us with detailed objections to naturalism from which he suggests that only supernaturalism can rescue metaphysics. The problems with supernaturalism, however, beginning with but by no means limited to the epistemic inaccessibility of the divine, are potentially even more damaging to its prospects than any of the difficulties Rea raises against naturalism. Rea speaks indeed of supernaturalism overcoming naturalism merely by virtue of adopting the justified belief through a particular kind of religious experience that there is a divine supernatural designer of the universe who has ensured that there is an epistemically reliable connection between what it is theoretically useful for us to believe and what is in fact true. If anything, the justificatory burdens, possibilities for error, misconceptions and paradoxes appear enormously greater in Rea's characterization of supernaturalism as a solution to relatively pedestrian metaphysical problems about the existence of material objects and their modal properties and the existence of other minds than philosophy encounters in even the most naive forms of naturalism.

Rea clearly has a theistic axe to grind in metaphysics. He wants to discredit naturalism because it stands in the way of belief in God. He soft-pedals this conclusion in several places, stating that he hopes only to convince some naturalists to 'jump ship', holding short of the claim that he has decisively disproved naturalism or rigorously demonstrated the necessary truth of any form of supernaturalism. But it is peculiar in the first place for Rea to oppose theism and naturalism, when we recall that in the eighteenth century the argument from design for the existence of God was known by proponents and critics alike as natural theology or natural religion. Rea reminds us in one place that naturalists need not be atheists, despite their close affinity, but he argues that naturalism as he understands the concept is incompatible with the view that the world is designed or the handiwork of a divine intelligent supernatural designer. Rea is well aware of the eighteenth century connection between theism and naturalism, but he tailors his cursory survey of the history of naturalism to begin only from the mid-nineteenth century onward, thereby avoiding a host of interesting questions about naturalism and belief in the existence of God. If we think of naturalism in a less constrained way, then we need not exclude William Paley and David Hume as naturalists interested in the question of God's existence, who are willing to consider the implications of the natural science of their day for the hypothesis that the order that prevails in the natural world as revealed by empirical inquiry might or even must be the direct result of intelligent design. The lack of any prior basis in

Rea's account for deciding what is and what is not a proper example of naturalism haunts his discussion, and leaves a mystery surrounding his choice of John Dewey and W.V. Quine as his paradigm naturalists, to the exclusion of Franz Brentano, Ernst Mach, Bertrand Russell, Gilbert Ryle, David Armstrong, among numerous many others, even within the narrowly circumscribed historical period to which Rea limits his overview.

The problems besetting the argument in Rea's critique of naturalism make it hard to recommend the book on its philosophical merits. The questions it raises are nevertheless important and enduring. Whatever confusions pervade the work, Rea presents a remarkable dialectical confrontation between approaches to the philosophy of science and religion, between naturalism and supernaturalism, that is certain to provoke continuing debate and to enliven the perennial dispute concerning these fundamentally opposed ways of understanding the natural world with or without design.