

The Value of Pragmatic Naturalism

It has been said that we are more or less all naturalists now, though I am sure that it is not true.¹ Philosophers are, though, comfortable enough with many of the defining characteristics of naturalism that it *seems* like we can now all be so described. The case is similar with those of us who work within the more or less broad parameters of the pragmatism and naturalism in the American tradition. Such pragmatists and such naturalists tend to take it for granted that they also belong in each other's camp. I realize that there are those who would describe themselves as naturalists or pragmatists who come at these perspectives from philosophic sources outside the American tradition, and that the affinity between pragmatism and naturalism may or may not be so automatic to such people. But for those who would identify themselves with the pragmatism of Peirce, James or Dewey, or with the naturalism of Woodbridge, Dewey and the Columbia tradition, the association of pragmatism and naturalism seems to be, well, natural.

Several years ago I had the occasion to write a piece that I called "The Reconciliation of Pragmatism and Naturalism," a title that surprised people for whom the affinity is natural and not in need of reconciliation.² The point I made there is that the two are not the same, which is why people like George Santayana, John Herman Randall, Jr. or Justus Buchler could do naturalist philosophy but maintain a distance from pragmatism, while people like Richard Rorty could do pragmatist philosophy while maintaining a distance from virtually all the technical philosophy of the sort that characterizes American and other forms of naturalism. In the end, however, the two can be and frequently are reconciled, and it is quite possible to speak coherently about pragmatic naturalism. However, because there remains too quick an inclination mistakenly to identify the two, it is also too easy not to appreciate what is valuable about a pragmatic naturalism more carefully thought through. These remarks will address that question, i.e. the question of the value of pragmatic naturalism.

Once pragmatism and naturalism have been reconciled, which I assume has been successfully done, we then need to specify what pragmatic naturalism is and what its virtues are. The first of its traits, which it shares in general outline with other forms of naturalism, is that nature is broadly and richly enough conceived that there is no philosophical need to posit anything outside nature. The usual candidate for the designation "non-natural" is the "supernatural," so we are in effect saying here that philosophical inquiry can and should be

undertaken without having recourse to a supernatural. We need to be clear about what this does *not* mean. First, it does not mean that naturalism necessarily does without a concept of the divine. Personally I do not see, and never have seen, the point of a naturalist theology, but others do see the point, and there is nothing about the naturalist conception of nature that necessarily precludes a meaningful theology. Of course the effort of Santayana to liberate the aesthetic and other traits of traditional spirituality from the supernatural is well known, as is Dewey's attempt to free the language and ethical aspirations of traditional religion from their supernatural home.³ But others have attempted something that looks more like theology, though in a consciously naturalistic philosophical context. John Herman Randall Jr. is one of the more outstanding contributors in this respect, and more recently Robert Corrington has attempted his own version of a naturalist theology, in his case relying on a more or less Buchlerian, ordinal ontology.⁴

This point suggests two additional observations about what treating nature as the comprehensive category does *not* mean, namely a) that nature is equivalent with the material world, and b) that scientific inquiry is the only method that can produce knowledge of nature. With respect to matter, I would if pressed want to argue for a form of materialism, but like Santayana would also say that it seems to me patently false to say at the same time that nature is all there is and that nature is equivalent to the sum total of matter, i.e. that only matter exists. The experience of all of us is replete with the non-material, from the products of imagination to meanings to emotions. The sort of materialism I would want to defend would involve the claim that matter is the ontological *sine qua non* of everything else, but matter is not for that any "more real" than other existences, and certainly not exclusively real. Pragmatic naturalism is not reductively materialistic.⁵

Nor is pragmatic naturalism friendly to the claim that all knowledge derives from the methods of the natural sciences. On the one hand, none of us seriously doubt the epistemological value of the sciences, regardless how we might describe the scientific method. If we did seriously doubt it we would not get into a car, drive across a bridge, or for that matter even get up in the morning. Our lives from moment to moment rely on the principles of engineering, and the principles of engineering are impossible without the results of basic science. But that is not to say that every activity we undertake or everything we think we know is the direct result of the natural sciences and the engineering it enables.

It has been suggested that naturalism go beyond its interest in the natural sciences and begin to take more seriously the social sciences. I would endorse this call, but go further and say that naturalism, if it is to take seriously the breadth of experience and of nature itself, also needs to look much more closely at the humanities and the arts. Literature, music, poetry, the visual arts, theater, even philosophy, can reveal to us knowledge and understanding of no less significance than that derived from the sciences, natural and social. I am convinced that a careful reading of Dostoyevsky can provide us with as much understanding of human motivations as any careful psychological study. In any case, Dostoyevsky's insights are at least part of the story of human behavior, in fact to such an extent that they offer us something scientific studies do not and cannot reveal. Something similar can be said about any great work of literature, music, art or philosophy. I have not the slightest doubt, for example, that my understanding of myself, or life, or the world, is enhanced by listening to nearly anything Franz Schubert wrote. Schubert does not do that for everyone, but then neither does Einstein, Skinner or Quine, which says nothing about the epistemological value of the results of their work. Science, to use a pragmatist metaphor, is one tool in the pursuit of knowledge. It is a critically important tool, but it is not the only one, nor is it in all respects and situations the most important, valuable or useful one. Not all aspects of nature are amenable to the methods of science. Some require the poet, the composer, the painter, or the philosopher.

Part of the problem traditionally is that we are too quick to assume that anything of cognitive significance must come to us in the form of bits of data or information. But we do not simply assimilate the world, we manipulate it as well. Sometimes our manipulations assert something, sometimes they display or exhibit something, and sometimes they consist of action. None of these three ways of interacting with the world, or three ways of judging, to use that word in a certain technical sense, has a monopoly on cognitive significance. Thus the exhibitivistic manipulation that constitutes a painting, to select one example from many possible, selects aspects of nature and combines them in ways that, ideally, we have not seen before. In doing so it brings into focus traits or characteristics of nature that "speak" something new to us. This is why the visual arts, music, literature and poetry can be and often are cognitive. We do in fact learn something from novel and insightful ways of manipulating form and color, or sounds, or words, no less than we do by the manipulation in the natural sciences of objects and processes. An adequate pragmatic naturalism understands this.⁶

We have to this point somewhat circled around the concept of nature and our access to the complexes that constitute it. One might ask, however, for a more positive and direct definition of nature on the grounds that without it we are begging critical questions. I will say more below about whether pragmatic naturalism is foundationalist in the sense that it rests on firm logical or definitional foundations, but for now let us assume that it is not foundationalist in this sense. Still, one may wonder whether a definition of nature is in order, particularly because the term can be and is used in so many different ways. We can contrast nature, in one sense, with the artificial, or in another we can contrast it with the statistically infrequent, unusual or abnormal, and in our sense we have contrasted it with the supernatural. So the question can reasonably be asked, given its range of possible meaning, just how we are to define it.

There are a couple relevant points that need to be made in response to a request for a definition. First, we may acknowledge that the term “nature” is used in ordinary language and in common philosophical parlance in a variety of different ways, with different meanings, without generating any philosophical problems. There is no need to insist that this or any other word have only one meaning. Second, we have offered a definition of a kind, i.e. that nature is “whatever there is,” presuming that further elaboration of the philosophical issues raised by or within pragmatic naturalism will gradually give the idea more flesh. But is this good enough?

I would like to say that it *is* good enough, and the fact that it is says something important about the way the concept functions for a pragmatic naturalist. To give a more ramified definition at this point, for example that nature is whatever reveals itself to the senses, or whatever we encounter in experience, or whatever can be posited without contradiction, or whatever is the case, or whatever is actual, or whatever is possible, would be too limiting, and in any case would simply raise more questions. To say that nature is “whatever there is” is purposefully to leave open the full range of actualities and possibilities, realities and imaginings. This does not mean that no imaginable concept is excluded. We have already said that our understanding of nature excludes the supernatural, that is that there is no supernatural. This in turn suggests that whatever there may be, it is continuous with something else, i.e. that there is nothing that is entirely other.

All this suggests that for the pragmatic naturalist nature does not serve as a category in any normal sense. It is not simply one among a number of concepts that taken together constitute a philosophical system. Rather it suggests a general perspective or frame of mind. The pragmatic

naturalist philosopher is predisposed to give whatever there is, or whatever there may be, the benefit of the doubt, at least as a point of departure. He or she is prepared to try to understand whatever is encountered or invented as being among the complexes of nature, even, as we have seen, the divine. This is why Buchler in his examination of the idea of nature ended up describing nature as simply “providingness.”⁷ Nature is not simply this or that, but rather it is “whatever there is.” No other definition is possible, and no other would in any case capture the role the concept plays for pragmatic naturalism.

So the category of nature is sufficient to our purposes, nature itself is wider than the physical world, and the natural sciences are not the only source of knowledge. Furthermore, pragmatic naturalism takes a relational view of nature. Dewey, who is the paradigmatic case of a pragmatic naturalist, fairly explicitly, if not systematically, employed a relational understanding of nature throughout his work. A “situation,” in his technical sense of the term, whether a problematic situation or not, is not merely a collection of discrete, unrelated entities. It is, rather, a complex in which the constituents mutually determine one another’s traits. It was Justus Buchler who developed in considerable categorial detail a relational naturalist ontology, though he did so without any wish to have it construed as pragmatic. The basic ontological idea is that all “things,” i.e. anything whatsoever, are constituted by constituents and their relations, and that no constituent, no matter how deeply or broadly one looks, or how thoroughly one analyzes, is atomic. Or to put the point positively, every thing, or entity, or complex, is constituted by its constituents and their relations, including the constituents themselves. Furthermore, constituents are not identical to parts in any normal sense. The history of a complex may be among its relevant constituents, for example, as might its social or physical context. All complexes are relationally constituted, whatever the detailed relations may be for any given entity.⁸

The reason relationality of this kind is crucial to pragmatic naturalism is that it is what allows the reconciliation of the differing philosophical approaches of pragmatism and naturalism. Neither Dewey nor Buchler put it quite this way, though Randall did: one of the critical differences between the two is that pragmatism privileges experience while naturalism privileges nature. This disconnect would be fatal to any effort to reconcile them unless it were possible to show that experience and the rest of nature are related to one another in such a way that the world can be understood as the interconnection of experience and the rest of nature without reducing either to the other. A relational ontology allows us to do precisely this by making it

possible to say that complexes of nature, whether themselves experienced or not, are constitutive of experience, and that experience is constitutive of the complexes of nature to which it is related. Thus the two are integrated without experience being defined away and without nature being inappropriately subjectivized.

The final definitional point is that for pragmatic naturalism philosophical ideas are justified by their success. This of course is not a novel point with respect to pragmatism, but it is less commonly applied in naturalist circles. Nonetheless, even the more technical philosophical aspects of pragmatic naturalism, by which I mean its naturalist side, cannot be justified by reason alone. Let us take the claim that “nature is to be understood relationally” as an example. There is no amount of argument or analysis that will force or even enable us to say that this claim is true and that its alternatives, for example that “nature is to be understood atomistically,” are false. The best that argument can do is to demonstrate that it is logically possible, or reasonable, or maybe even desirable, to hold that nature is to be understood relationally. Even if I were the most clever philosopher since Aristotle, and even if I were able to demonstrate rationally to the satisfaction of everyone in the room the appropriateness of the proposition that nature is to be understood relationally, sooner or later some even less clever philosopher would have a counter-argument, or an objection, or a rational alternative. You may want to point out that this is in fact what has happened and continues to happen to every philosophical proposition made, and I would agree with you. I would go so far as to say that philosophers have misconstrued our enterprise by understanding it by analogy with mathematics, wherein propositions can be proven. But even if you do not want to go as far as that, it is nonetheless appropriate for us to regard pragmatic naturalism as subject to pragmatic valuation. It is appropriate, for example, for us to accept and put to work the proposition that nature is to be understood relationally if we can render the proposition consistent and meaningful, and if by putting it to work we are able to do things we are not able to do otherwise, and create relatively few new problems along the way. The same principle of valuation should be taken to apply to other aspects of pragmatic naturalism as well, and of course to the many issues and problems which philosophy can appropriately address.

So to sum up the definitional side of pragmatic naturalism: it is a relational philosophy; it is a philosophy for which nature is a category sufficient for all things; it holds that nature consists of more than material objects; it proceeds as if natural science is one of a larger number

of sources of knowledge; and it is a philosophical perspective which expects to be evaluated by its usefulness and value in philosophical and other contexts. We may now consider the question what value it does in fact have. Each of the specific virtues of pragmatic naturalism highlighted is related to one or another of the defining characteristics just described.

First, pragmatic naturalism avoids the many artificial dualisms that have driven philosophy into too many dead ends. Whenever he had the opportunity Dewey bemoaned the many bifurcations that have characterized philosophy in the Western world over the centuries, and he quite rightly thought that we would do well to get past them. Despite his efforts, and those of many other people, philosophy seems to have accommodated itself to, even continues to thrive on, those same dualisms: mind and body; belief and knowledge; self and world; individual and society, etc. One might reasonably wonder why these dichotomies have the strength and longevity that they do, and I think the answer is simple. They continue to attract our attention and often to drive our thinking because in each case both sides of the dichotomy have a compelling claim on our attention. No matter our reasonable philosophical and scientific efforts, and even contortions, to explain human being in material terms, there remain aspects of our experience that continue to drive us to appeal to mind of some kind. And though the Berkeleyan idealist and the Buddhist may insist on the insignificance and even illusory character of body, the rest of us cannot live without it. One could go on to make similar observations about the terms of the other dualisms mentioned above. In each case the terms taken alone are plausible enough, but when juxtaposed to one another as mutually exclusive alternatives they make trouble. But why is that, i.e. why does the juxtaposition of mind and body become a technical “problem” around the discussion of which philosophers have made entire careers? The answer, I think, and this applies to all the dualisms mentioned and no doubt to others as well, is that we have continuously misunderstood what they are. Mind and body are a problem for each other only if we insist that each is in some technical or non-technical sense a “substance,” and that the two are substances of radically different kinds, or that there is no way to understand how they interact. Such misunderstandings force us to define one or the other away, or reach for metaphors, such as the contemporary inclination to understand mind as either a computer or as a piece of software, that are dubious at best and perhaps detrimental.

There is no need within a pragmatic naturalist framework to distinguish mind and body, or belief and knowledge or self and the world or the individual and society, in such a way that

each becomes a problem for the other. For one thing, a relational ontology allows us to make the distinctions that mind and body suggest without assuming that in essence each is entirely different from the other. On the contrary, if approached relationally we are driven to say that mind, or anyway mental complexes, are in any number of ways constitutive of bodies, and bodies constitutive of mind and mental events. There is nothing stranger in saying this than there is in saying that eating ice cream makes me happy. Furthermore, if we are prepared to say that the value of ideas is in the work they do, then we never need to ask the questions that constitute the “mind/body problem” in the first place. Or if we find that we do, then the terms, the concepts, and whatever relations we posit for them will stand or fall on the adequacy of what they accomplish for us. Philosophy, in what we can call the Humpty-Dumpty Fallacy, has unnecessarily and artificially shattered a fairly coherent world into many pieces, and cannot seem to get it back together without creating monsters. One value of pragmatic naturalism is that it does not compel us to push Humpty-Dumpty off the wall in the first place.

A second value of pragmatic naturalism is that it allows us to accept the realism of our experience, contra many post-modernisms. Among the tragedies of philosophy in recent decades is that many philosophers (whom I will here call, perhaps inappropriately, post-modernists) who emphasize experience or language or the human subject tend to fear objectivity because they suspect that it ignores the human perspective. The result of the all too frequent fear of or hostility to objectivity has been a denial of its very possibility. The tragedy of this is that philosophers, scientists and others who continue to insist that there are traits of nature that do not depend on us tend to ignore the post-modernists, and vice versa. In some sense this is not necessarily a problem because the two sets of scholars are often working on different issues and questions. But in many ways each could benefit from the insights of the other, and they too often fail to do so.

This, however, is a problem we can avoid. There are two factors that contribute to the difficulty: 1) the more or less constructivist view that knowledge and inquiry are always perspectival, and 2) the mistaken though common assumption that if x is not absolute then x is not objective. The pragmatist side of pragmatic naturalism would endorse the claim that knowledge and inquiry are always perspectival because they are always undertaken for a reason, i.e. to do something, and therefore knowledge is never absolute. Similarly, the naturalist side of pragmatic naturalism is likely to acknowledge that whatever place human beings and our experience has in nature, there remain aspects or traits of nature that are what they are entirely

independent of human interaction with them. This is to say that in at least some respects human perspective is irrelevant to the traits of nature, which means there are traits of nature that are objective.

This complication can be dealt with if we carefully sort out how perspective, objectivity and absoluteness are connected with one another. The good news is that the relational ontology of pragmatic naturalism allows us to do precisely that, and in such a way that we can understand that the absence of absolute knowledge does not preclude objectivity, either epistemological or ontological.⁹ For example, when I see the door at the side of the room I see it from a point of view, from a perspective, but the door is no less objectively there and not somewhere else. Traditionally this commonsensical observation has led to the bifurcation between the world as it is in itself, i.e. the door with its objective traits, and the world as it is experienced, i.e. the door from my particular angle of vision.

Though Kant contributed tremendously to the development of European intellectual life, this particular Kantian move has been pernicious, and it continues to seep into our way of thinking about this problem: if our epistemology is perspectival but our ontology is objectivist, there must be a gap between them. But this is a *non sequitur*. Perspective is inconsistent with absoluteness, such that if our perception of the door is perspectival it cannot be absolute. This is, in the end, the reason knowledge is always contextual. This is a problem for objectivity only if to be objective is to be absolute. If, however, we are willing to separate the two, then there is nothing puzzling about the fact that the traits of the door, i.e. its location, size etc., really are the traits of the door and that we encounter the door from some angle and in some context. We can see that there is no problem here once we realize that given a relational ontology, the objective traits of the door are themselves relationally constituted regardless of the door's relation to us as perceivers. Every aspect of the natural complex that is the door – its location, size, shape, weight, material properties, functions, color and so forth – is itself in a complex set of relations with the other constituents of the door and with the broader relational contexts in which the door finds itself. There is, in other words, absolutely nothing absolute about the door in the first place. It, like every other complex of nature, is thoroughly relational, and the relation to us as perceivers is one more relation that contributes to the traits of the door. The entire relational web of door and its perception is decidedly not absolute, but it is all nonetheless objective in that the relations are what they are and not something else, including our perspectival perception and knowledge of

the door. This being the case, we can see that the relational ontology of pragmatic naturalism enables us to retain the realism of ordinary experience even while appreciating the many insights of recent constructivist philosophy.

A third value of pragmatic naturalism is that it allows us to avoid the reductionism common to much of contemporary philosophy. As we pointed to above, philosophers have too routinely allowed nature to be carved up into competing categories, i.e. mind and body, self and society, individual and complex, etc., even while knowing that the dichotomies thus created are themselves problems that must be addressed. One of the ways philosophers have traditionally tried to deal with the inadequacy of their many dualism and dichotomies is to reduce one side to the other: mind being dissolved into body, the biological into the physical and chemical, the social into the individual. The problem with such reductionism, besides the technical difficulties of trying, for example, to describe all mental events in purely physical or neurochemical terms, is that the conception of nature and of our experience that results is no more plausible than the dichotomies the reductions are intended to mend. A memory may be delightful, but a neurochemical process cannot be delightful. So even if neurochemical processes of certain kinds are necessary conditions of a memory, the two are not identical. A philosophical analysis that attempts to make one of them disappear into the other is no more acceptable than the philosophical analysis that initially turned them into absolutely distinct categories.

It was suggested earlier that one of the virtues of pragmatic naturalism is that it does not compel us to push Humpty-Dumpty off the wall, i.e. we are not compelled to slice nature into irreconcilable pieces. The same characteristics of pragmatic naturalism that make this possible also allow us to accept the multiplicity of nature without any need to dissolve some of it into the rest. Each complex of nature possesses the traits that define it as the complex it is and not another. Precisely how it is related to other complexes is critical to understanding its traits. If a specific memory can only arise in certain neurochemical conditions, then that memory's relations to those specific neurochemical processes are among its traits and defining characteristics. Such a relational understanding of memory and neurochemistry makes it possible for us to recognize and acknowledge the diversity in nature while at the same time accounting for the close, and in many cases necessary, relations among them. In this respect pragmatic naturalism is following in the footsteps of some of its intellectual ancestors. Spinoza for example, though without the relational dimension, also painted a picture of nature with, as he put

it, infinite attributes. There is a rich tradition in the history of philosophy, of which Spinoza is only one example, of careful attempts to avoid reductionism. Pragmatic naturalism is the contemporary expression of that tradition.

This point allows us to suggest a fourth value of pragmatic naturalism, which is that it permits us to acknowledge the multiple facets not only of nature in general but also of our experience and creativity, specifically art, music, poetry, literature, theater etc. Several of the points that have so far been made speak to the advantages of naturalism over other philosophical approaches. This point speaks to the value of pragmatic naturalism over other varieties of naturalism that focus, sometimes exclusively, on the natural sciences. By insisting on the monopoly of science in the production of knowledge too many naturalists are forced to deny, overlook, or suppress the experience any reasonably sophisticated person has when attending a concert, viewing an exhibition, reading a novel or watching a play.

The point was made earlier that there is something cognitively significant about the arts, something well understood by those who work in the arts. The Adagio of Schubert's C Major Quintet helps us understand the human condition more deeply; Monet reveals various dimensions of the Parliament Building on the Thames and its relation to different kinds of light; Picasso's *Guernica* speaks volumes about war and its effects on civilian populations; and throughout his vast production Shakespeare brings into focus human strengths and frailties. These are not simply nice sounds, pretty pictures and clever words, though they sometimes are all those. They are judgments rendered, with the greatest skill and insight in the manipulation of sound, rhythm, form, color and language, on aspects of nature and our experience. They bring into focus dimensions of nature, traits of our world, which are otherwise either unavailable to us or available less dramatically. None of these insights is produced by science, though in many ways once made by great composers, painters and writers, science can augment them. But if we insist on science as the sole source of knowledge and understanding we will miss these insights and thereby do violence to our experience. By encouraging a philosophical approach that fully and enthusiastically incorporates the creative arts and humanities as cognitively significant activities, pragmatic naturalism gives us naturalism together with the full riches of our experience.

A fifth value of pragmatic naturalism is that it avoids the logical pretensions of much of historical and contemporary philosophy. Despite our reliance on deduction, the fact is that

philosophers have *proven* very little to one another, and virtually nothing that lasts very long. If the goal of philosophy is to arrive at deductively demonstrated proofs, then our discipline is a dreadful failure. But that is not the goal of philosophy, or anyway it need not be. The importance of deduction and inference is not to enable us to prove anything, but to provide tools that are useful in arriving at consistent positions that have some acceptable degree of plausibility. Such positions will then stand or fall to the extent that they do the work we want them to do. And they will last only until they cease to do that work, or until the work is no longer needed, or until another position is developed that does it better. Something like what Thomas Kuhn said about developments in the natural sciences is applicable to philosophy. Philosophy changes over time, and from place to place, not because we progressively build on the results of prior proofs, but because new approaches are introduced with enough plausibility that they capture our imaginations, or because old problems about which we once argued are no longer of moment, or because new problems emerge for which older methods are ill adapted.

This does not mean that argument is inappropriate in philosophy. It would be rather self-defeating to argue against argument. The point rather is that there are several different sorts of argumentation, and that it is unnecessary, indeed unwise, to insist that deductive argument is the only proper form of reasoning in which philosophers should engage. For one thing, there is as we all know inductive argument as well, and for another there is, alongside deductive and inductive reasoning, pragmatic reasoning. One can argue, as I am doing throughout this paper, for the plausibility, or reasonableness, or even desirability, of a particular idea or intellectual commitment. Plausibility, reasonableness and desirability are of course not the end of the story. Proposition *p* may be plausible or reasonable yet turn out on the strength of other evidence to be false; and proposition *q* may be desirable in some ways but not others, or to a greater or lesser extent in different contexts. So plausibility, reasonableness and desirability are not simple and clear cut principles of valuation of an idea or proposition. They are, nonetheless, plausible, reasonable and desirable.

Is this reasoning circular? Well, yes, but so much the worse for deductive validity in this case. Pragmatic naturalism does not pretend to approach the world from an unshakable foundation. Pragmatic reasoning begins wherever it is, assumes whatever the situation compels it to assume, and goes from there. Philosophy does not have the luxury to begin at the beginning. If intellectual bootstrapping of this sort is circular, then so be it. Dealing with the philosophical

dimensions of our experience, of nature, is not mathematics, and philosophers do our own enterprise a disservice by pretending that it is. The upshot of this attempt to expand philosophical methodology beyond deductive argument is to make the point that one of the values or virtues of pragmatic naturalism is that it is a way of understanding philosophical inquiry such that it retains its rigor and significance without continuing to pretend to be something it is not, will never be, and need not even desire to be.

The last of the values of pragmatic naturalism to which I would like to point has to do with social, in fact political, life: pragmatic naturalism enables us to avoid ideology. Let us consider as an example international relations and foreign affairs. In this area nothing is more dangerous than ideology, by which I mean a tenacious commitment to one's concepts, perspectives and ideas regardless of evidence and experience. Ideologies, both religious and political, have been responsible for more suffering and evil than we could here note. Recent experience with the ideology of fundamentalist Islam as well as that of neoconservative imperial aspirations offer only the most current examples of the destructiveness of ideology no matter the end to which it is put.

Pragmatic naturalism, by virtue of its experimentalism and fallibilism, is a corrective to ideology, and its intellectual tradition is sufficiently sophisticated and broad in application as to provide a rich mine from which we can draw. In 1916, in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey gave an initial definition of "democracy" that included the necessity of cultivating common interests with members of one's own community and with those across borders. This characteristic of a democratic society gives us a way to reconceive international relations and foreign policy. If a democratic nation should be expected to pursue and cultivate interests with those abroad, then its foreign policy cannot be based solely, as foreign policy traditionally has been, on "national interest," at least not as long as national interest is determined without a serious consideration of the interests of other nations.

The implications of this shift would be enormous, especially by contrast with traditional realist and liberal approaches to international relations, not to mention the recently influential neoconservative variety. For one thing it implies the sacrifice of some degree of national sovereignty. For another, traditional approaches to foreign policy and international relations assume some set of commitments – for example democracy, free trade, revolution, human rights, power, or religion – in the interests of which a national government would then conduct its

policy. One of the shortcomings of all of the traditional approaches is that they are conducive to the development of an ideological commitment to whichever values they endorse. It becomes politically difficult or impossible to compromise, and one's overall values become not virtuous ends but weapons with which to bludgeon other nations. It may be appropriate in other spheres of life for our values to dominate our decisions and actions, but not in foreign policy. The reason is that in foreign policy one is by definition dealing with other nations. If the other nations also hold tenaciously to their fundamental values, foreign policy becomes not diplomacy but simply war by other means.

A pragmatic naturalist foreign policy, by contrast, must by definition derive the interests of its government and nation in collaboration with the nations with which it interacts. In that case it is much less likely that an overarching ideological commitment can short circuit the pursuit of the democratic ends of the cultivation of shared interests. Conditions may or may not be right at any given time for the expansion of the values of democracy, or human rights, or whatever other set of social values one holds most dear, but even if they are not, a foreign policy based on the pursuit of shared interests will encourage rather than impede communication, and that is surely a virtue in either secure or dangerous times.¹⁰

It is worth pointing out that the relationality of pragmatic naturalism also supports this approach, by contrast especially with the assumptions of traditional realism. The discipline of international relations dates the origins of its subject matter to the creation of the modern nation state, specifically with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Like so much else that was born in the 17th century and matured in the 18th, conceptions of the modern nation state assumed the atomism that was common to Baroque era physics, mathematics, psychology, economics, epistemology, metaphysics and music. Nation states were understood as discrete entities, each of which possessed its characteristics and defining traits independently of the others, and which interacted with one another more or less like balls on a billiard table. In such an environment, one that informed Hobbes' "war of all against all" as well as the more tempered versions of such liberals as Locke, the role of diplomacy and foreign policy was to manage the interactions of the balls as they rolled around the table. At worst one wanted to minimize the damage created by the occasional collision of balls, and at best one might manage the course around the other balls in such a way as to benefit oneself. At bottom, this is still how contemporary realism sees the world of international relations, and these are the results it hopes for in foreign policy.

If, however, the international world is not Baroque in this sense, that is if we understand nation states not as “atoms in a void” but as having their characteristics and defining traits constituted in their relations with one another, then the foreign policy picture changes accordingly. It no longer seems natural for nations to interact based on self-defined national interests. If the very traits and nature of nations are formed in their relations with one another, then it only makes sense to conceive of interests as developing within that same relational network. In other words, in an international environment relationally understood, the pursuit of common interests becomes the more obvious course for any nation’s foreign policy to take. Pragmatic naturalism, then, has the added value of encouraging, and providing the resources for, a revised approach to international relations and foreign policy that could well contribute to the solution of many of the more difficult problems facing all nations.

One could go on in this vein for some time and delineate other values and virtues of a pragmatic naturalism defined as we have done here. There are other points one could make with respect to both technical and applied philosophical inquiry and analysis. It is for all these reasons that pragmatic naturalism seems to me to be useful, indeed wise, philosophical direction for now and for the future.

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NOTES

1. See for example Barry Stroud, “The Charm of Naturalism,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 70, November 1996.
2. John Ryder, “Reconciling Pragmatism and Naturalism,” in John R. Shook, ed., *Pragmatic Naturalism and Realism*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003, pp 55-77.
3. George Santayana, “Ultimate Religion,” in John Ryder, ed., *American Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994, pp 466-476; John Dewey, *A Common Faith, The Later Works*, Volume 9, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986. The latter is also excerpted in John Ryder, *American Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century*, op. cit.

4. John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Meaning of Religion for Man*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1968; See also Willard E. Arnett, "Are the Arts and Religion Cognitive?," in John P. Anton, ed., *Naturalism and Historical Understanding: Essays on the Philosophy of John Herman Randall, Jr.*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1967; Robert S. Corrington, *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1992, and *Ecstatic Naturalism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994.
5. See John Ryder, "Ordinality and Materialism," in Armen Marsoobian, Kathleen Wallace and Robert S. Corrington, eds., *Nature's Perspectives: Prospects for Ordinal Metaphysics*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp 201-220.
6. For a more developed articulation of this conception of judgment see Justus Buchler, *Nature and Judgment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.
7. See Justus Buchler, "Probing the Idea of Nature," Appendix IV of *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1966. Second, Expanded Edition, Kathleen Wallace and Armen Marsoobian, with Robert S. Corrington, eds., Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990.
8. See Justus Buchler, *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1966. Second, Expanded Edition, Kathleen Wallace and Armen Marsoobian, with Robert S. Corrington, eds., Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990.
9. For a more detailed elaboration of this point see John Ryder, "Reconciling Pragmatism and Naturalism," *op. cit.*
10. See John Ryder, "American Philosophy and Foreign Policy," in Sandor Kremer and John Ryder, eds., *Self and Society: Central European Pragmatist Forum Volume Four*, Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, forthcoming.