

The Really Hard Problem

Meaning in a Material World

Owen Flanagan

**A Bradford Book
The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England**

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction xi

1 Meaningful and Enchanted Lives: A Threat from the Human Sciences? 1

2 Finding Meaning in the Natural World: The Comparative Consensus 37

3 Science for Monks: Buddhism and Science 63

4 Normative Mind Science? Psychology, Neuroscience, and the Good Life 107

5 Neuroscience, Happiness, and Positive Illusions 149

6 Spirituality Naturalized? “A Strong Cat without Claws” 183

Notes 221

Bibliography 265

Index 285

1 Meaningful and Enchanted Lives: A Threat from the Human Sciences?

Meaningful Lives and the Scientific Image of Persons

What sense can be made of my wish to live in a genuinely meaningful way, to live a life that really matters, that makes a positive and lasting contribution, if my life is exhausted by my prospects as a finite material being living in a material world? To be sure, I, like all other humans, wish to flourish, to be blessed with happiness, to achieve eudaimonia—to be “a happy spirit.” So what? How could eudaimonia really be in store for a short-lived piece of organized muscle and tissue that happens to be aware of its predicament and wishes to flourish? Suppose I am lucky enough to live a blessed life in the sense that I feel happy, think I live well and experience self-respect. What does this add up to? How does it matter, if when I die I am gone forever? I aim to address these questions here.

There are surprisingly favorable prospects for a type of empirical-normative inquiry suited for our kind of animal that explains what genuine flourishing is, how it is possible for creatures like us, and what methods are available to achieve it. I call this empirical-normative inquiry into the nature, causes, and conditions of human flourishing *eudaimonistic scientia*. ‘Eudaimonia’ is a Greek word that means “flourishing”; ‘scientia’ is a Latin word that means “knowledge.”¹ Despite having the odd property of crossing two dead languages, ‘eudaimonistic scientia’ captures what I want it to capture.

Eudaimonistic scientia—eudaimonics, for short—is based on 2,500 years of observation and study of our kind of being. The aim of eudaimonics is human flourishing (and the flourishing of other sentient beings), and any and all reliable means to the production of flourishing are in its arsenal.² “Project Eudaimonia” is how we fans advertise our efforts. The important

thing is that eudaimonics is empirical, or, better, epistemologically responsible—all claims about the nature, causes, and conditions of flourishing are to be based on reasoning about the evidence, historical and contemporary, as to what flourishing is (including its varieties), and what its causes and constituents are. Although eudaimonics is not itself a science in the modern sense, it involves systematic philosophical theorizing that is continuous with science and which therefore takes the picture of persons that science engenders seriously. Eudaimonics is one way for the naturalist to respond to those who say that science in general and the human sciences in particular disenchant the world in the sense that they take away all the meaning and significance that magical, wishful stories once provided.

Ever since Darwin, we have been asked to re-conceive our nature. We are not embodied souls, nor are we bodies with autonomous Cartesian minds. We are animals. The fact that we are animals does not reveal who and what we are or what our prospects are as human animals. It serves primarily as a constraint on how we ought to think about our *Dasein*, our being in the world. Whatever we are, or turn out to be, cannot depend on possessing any capacities that are not natural for fully embodied beings. This, happily, is compatible with possessing amazing and previously unseen natural abilities.

'Naturalism' names a modest position. It serves primarily to mark my orientation off from non-naturalistic and especially supernaturalistic views. In metaphysics and in philosophy of mind, the objectionable views are impressed by the powerful idea of the *scala natura*, "the Great Chain of Being." Humans sit uniquely poised between minerals, plants, and animals on one side and spirits—angels and God—on the other side, and thus partake of both natures. We are part body, part non-physical mind or soul. Mind operates according to *sui generis* principles that allow circumvention of ordinary physical laws, including dying and being dead. *Res cogitans*—mind conceived as non-physical, as immaterial "thinking stuff"—allows for but doesn't entail eternal life.

This sort of non-naturalist view provides a clear contrastive space in which to get a modest naturalism up and running. Naturalism is impressed by the causal explanatory power of the sciences. Science typically denies the truth—or at least the testability—of theories that invoke non-natural, occult, or supernatural causes or forces.

Conceived this way, philosophical naturalism reins in temptations to revert to dualistic and/or supernaturalistic ways of speaking and thinking about human nature. And it does so for principled reasons. Non-naturalistic ways of conceiving of persons face insurmountable problems, for example, explaining how it is even possible for mind and body to causally interact. Naturalistic conceptions of persons lead to progressive theorizing; non-naturalistic ones do not.³

A broad philosophical naturalism can accommodate our unusual nature as social animals that both discover and make meaning. If this is right, there is nothing inherently disturbing or disenchanting about the naturalistic picture of human being. We ought to beware scientism, but the scientific image of persons need not make us weak in the knees. Even if I am an animal, even if at the end of the day I am dead and gone for good, I still make a difference, good or bad. Why? Because I exist. Each existing thing makes a difference to how things go—a small difference, but a difference. It would be nice to know, given that I care, how to contribute a bit to the accumulation of good effects, or ones I hope will be positive. Eudaimonics is intended to provide an empirical framework for thinking about human flourishing.⁴

Project Eudaimonia

Darwin's theory is the cornerstone for a fully naturalistic theory of persons. The theory of evolution by natural selection provides prospects for philosophical unification of all the sciences that pertain to human being. Because we are animals, biochemistry, genetics, and neuroscience allow us to see heretofore unseen aspects of ourselves more deeply and truthfully. The so-called moral sciences or *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally sciences of the spirit) are re-conceived. Anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology study the thinking and being of social animals, not collections of radically autonomous Cartesian agents, not of beings running on *Geist*—on spiritual fuel in the spooky sense. The unification of the sciences that study persons⁵ is made possible by the insight that all these sciences are all engaged in studying various aspects of the thinking and being of a certain very smart species of social mammal.

In my experience, most people don't like it when I press this idea, the idea that we are animals, although most will admit to finding themselves

perplexed. On the one hand, many see that this picture of persons is required by mature acceptance of the message of a hugely successful scientific synthesis that has been progressing for 150 years. On the other hand, the naturalistic way of conceiving of persons feels reductive and disenchanting, especially if it is stated or implied that our prospects are exhausted by whatever ends there are for fully material beings. The scientific image of persons drains the cup that sustains us of whatever it is that could conceivably give human life real depth, texture, and meaning. If it is true that we are material beings living in a material world, especially if all our prospects are exhausted by our nature as finite animals, then that is depressing. And if you believe it, even if it can be shown to be true, keep it quiet.

One question that needs sustained exploration is this: What does it mean to be a material being living in a material world? What does it mean to be a conscious being if at the end of the day we are just a temporarily organized system of particles, or, as seen at another level, just a hunk of meat? Some say or worry that it means that nothing is as it seems, and life really is meaningless. Others, like me, think that living meaningfully continues more or less as before with a promising potential upside that paradoxically comes from accepting naturalism. If one adopts the perspective of the philosophical naturalist and engages in realistic empirical appraisal of our natures and prospects, we have chances for learning what methods might reliably contribute to human flourishing. This is eudaimonics.

Eudaimonics, as I conceive it and depict it in what follows, provides a framework for thinking in a unified way about philosophical psychology, moral and political philosophy, neuroethics, neuroeconomics, and positive psychology, as well as about transformative mindfulness practices that have their original home in non-theistic spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism. The latter disciplines, inquiries, sciences, and spiritual practices, insofar (and this is not their only aim) as they seek to understand the nature, causes, and constituents of well-being and to advance flourishing, are parts of Project Eudaimonia. Eudaimonics is the activity of systematically gathering what is known about these three components of well-being and attempting to engender as much flourishing as is possible.

The Philosopher's Vocation

In 1960, Wilfrid Sellars began a famous pair of lectures as follows:

The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term. Under 'things in the broadest possible sense' I include such radically different items as not only 'cabbages and kings', but numbers and duties, possibilities and finger snaps, aesthetic experience and death. To achieve success in philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to 'know one's way around' with respect to all these things, not in that unreflective way the centipede of the story knew its way around before it faced the question, 'how do I walk?', but in that reflective way that means that no intellectual holds are barred.⁶

Sellars explains that it "is therefore 'the eye on the whole' which distinguishes the philosophical enterprise" (p. 3). How does the philosopher keep his "eye on the whole"? One way is to do what Sellars proceeds to do in "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (the published version of the two famous lectures): explore the tension between what Sellars calls "the manifest image of man-in-the-world" and "the scientific image of man-in-the-world." What are these two images? They are two ideal types extracted for analysis from the history of conscious thought. They matter because they play a pivotal role in how we self-conceive. How we self-conceive matters greatly to how life seems or feels first-personally. Thus, how these images hang together or fail to hang together matters to how we fare subjectively. Although they bleed into one another, we can distinguish analytically among three images: the *original*, the *manifest*, and the *scientific*.

Imagine that when the ice melted at the end of the Pleistocene our cognitive schemes were only rich enough to enable us to achieve biological fitness. We knew where and when to forage and hunt. We made tools for these tasks and shared skills. And we possessed cognitive schemes that expressed the relevant know-how, perhaps not in a consciously expressible form. Our language and our expressive skills, we can imagine, were relatively immature and were devoted primarily to fitness-maintaining tasks. "Who are we?" and "What are we like deep down inside?" and "How are we situated in the cosmos?" are questions that may not have been asked or theorized. But whatever rule-governed ways we had then for getting around, for interacting with conspecifics, and so on, constituted the inchoate "original image" of ourselves and our world.

This original image develops and becomes more complex (which is different from “becomes more truthful”) as we become more articulate in conceiving of our nature and our place in the cosmos. This sophistication of the original image in collective memory and narrative is shaped and conveyed in art, epic, fables, poetry, music, and spiritual practices. This is the *manifest image*. It is a work in progress, but one can catch it and examine it for a people at a time. When we talk about “how people see things,” we are normally talking about the manifest image.

At some early stage in the development of the manifest image, what we now call “scientific thinking” is added to the mix. When this happens, either the manifest image absorbs science (as in the case of medicine and human anatomy) or the defenders of the manifest image try to smash what they perceive as threats to how human being is to be imagined (as in the cases of Galileo and Darwin). What science gets to say about human being is legislated by defenders of the manifest image.

Because science, with the imprimatur of the defenders of the manifest image, is absorbed into it, the manifest image cannot be said to be “unscientific.” But a time comes when the scientific image develops autonomy from the manifest image, as well as a high degree of independent authority. Then there is serious competition between the images. Or so it seems.

Because our identity as humans is tied in essential ways to how we self-conceive, who and what we are seems confusing or bewildering, and our sense of our selves and our place in the universe seems unstable or (what is different) fractured. In a situation where there are two incompatible images on offer, dissonance can be resolved by placing all one’s bets on one image over the other. Another tactic is to work to adjust both images so that they need not be perceived or experienced as inconsistent.

“The philosopher,” Sellars writes (p. 4), “is confronted not by one complex many-dimensional picture, the unity of which, such as it is, he must come to appreciate; but by *two* pictures of essentially the same order of complexity, each of which purports to be a complete picture of man-in-the-world.” The situation is that the two images are now equally authoritative but also not obviously mutually comfortable, consistent, or commensurable. Still, Sellars thinks the philosopher’s job is to explain how these different images can both be true. Maybe.

Following the great physicist Arthur Eddington, Sellars compares the situation with two descriptions of a table: the solid table of common sense

and the table made up mostly of empty space as conceived from the point of view of quantum physics. Could both pictures of the table be held in one's mind at once, or must we go back and forth between them as in a Gestalt illusion, alternating between the two images and never able to combine them in our minds at once? Is one picture what Nelson Goodman (1978) calls "the right version" of the way the world is,⁷ or can multiple versions be true and useful for different purposes?

How Many "Worlds" or "Images" Are There?

I aim to examine the relation between the scientific image of persons and images that are available in other locations in our worlds. Specifically, my focus is on how contemporary mind science, informed by Darwin's theory of evolution, a sub-species of science conceived generally, interacts with some of the main locations to which we go to make sense of things and find meaning. Is neo-Darwinian mind science (which includes, but is not exhausted by, evolutionary psychology) a source of disharmony? If so, why? Are there ways to make the relations among what I call *spaces of meaning* more harmonious? Or is it all right if we live among and interact with disharmonious spaces? Does science generally, and do the human sciences specifically, disenchant the world?⁸ To address these questions, I find it necessary to expand the dialectical space in which conflict, consistency, or consilience might be discovered or sought from a dyad to a sextet: {art, science, technology, ethics, politics, spirituality}. Each of these six spaces of meaning names, or gestures in the direction of, a large domain of life. Art includes painting, poetry, literature, music, and popular culture. Science includes all the sciences, as well as whatever synthetic philosophical picture of persons (or reality) is thought to emerge from the sciences. Politics includes the relevant local and/or nation-state form of government as well as the legal and economic structures it rests on and/or engenders. Spirituality includes multifarious religious practices and institutions, theologies, and such non-theistic spiritual conceptions as ethical naturalism, secular humanism, pagan shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Stoicism. The basic idea is that in order to understand how any group or individual self-conceives, what their practices of self-location, self-understanding, and their ideals for human development are, and how they work, one must give concrete values to these six variables. This will

result in something like what Clifford Geertz (1973) called “thick description” (a phrase he took from Gilbert Ryle). Geertz’s idea of thick description is connected to a wise observation made especially among anthropologists about their practice: Before one is able to say anything interesting about some individual’s or group’s thinking and behavior, one needs to understand what the individual or group is doing. This requires a rich and intricate understanding of the individual or group. One must understand behavior in terms of the practices, traditions, and worldview that give the behavior sense and meaning. Thick description (*Verstehen*) involves a kind of understanding, albeit not necessarily a causal understanding, of some phenomena. When I tell you who I am, where I am coming from, how I think about things, and so on, I am providing a thick description. When I say what made me the way I am, I turn to causal explanation. Both are illuminating. The same principles apply to the six spaces of meaning. We live among them, and we will understand ourselves better if we understand deeply what each space affords and how it interacts with other spaces.

There are three main reasons for expanding the dialectical space from two spaces of meaning to at least six:

- (1) The dominant form of dyadic analysis is to examine the conflict between science and religion. Indeed, there is a whole publishing industry devoted to the conflicts between science and religion. But the places in which people find dis-ease among the spaces of meaning involve more than just science and religion. I know artists who are not impressed by traditional religion (they are atheists) but who also find what they take to be the scientific picture incomplete or deflating. Familiarly, we say that the scientific description of the sunset, the tides, or consciousness fails to capture the phenomenon. Williams James believed that psychology as a science sensibly assumes determinism, “and no one can find fault,” but that this deterministic assumption is not compatible with certain equally necessary assumptions about free will and moral responsibility that ethics makes. This conflict, which tortured James, is between science (specifically mind science) and ethics, not between psychology and religion. And, of course, there are abundant conflicts within and between nation-states that turn on conflicts between politics and religion, with science offstage, a non-factor.

(2) When we humans conceptualize who we are and how we are doing, we do so in terms of narrative structures that have their homes in more than just the two expansive spaces named by religion and science.

There is much recent interesting work in anthropology about the ways in which television engenders and reinforces everything from one's self-conception as a citizen to appropriate gender roles. (See Abu-Lughod 2001.) Whether television is intentionally used by nation-states for this purposes is a different and variable matter. The point is that television used in this way is doing more than, possibly something different than, articulating two ideal philosophical pictures of man in the world. It might be doing that to some extent, but as importantly it is depicting something more normative. It is recommending how one ought to be, live, and self-conceive as a man or a woman in a particular political community.

(3) Relatedly, the historical record indicates a persistent human effort to locate excellent ways of being and living. Each age seeks and articulates norms and ideals that if embodied would represent a good life, a life well lived, a beautiful and honest life. Speaking platonically,⁹ we humans show persistent signs of relishing the adventure of trying to track down what is *good*, what is *true*, and what is *beautiful*. My six spaces of meaning connect up with these three forms in telling ways. Art tracks beauty—at least that is one of its functions. Science worships the true. Technology is useful, and what is useful is good in one sense. Ethics and politics track what is good in other senses of the term. And spirituality can be seen as a location in which all three forms are represented, although familiarly, in theistic forms. The spiritual space of meaning is charged by critics with caring little about what is true.

The overall warrant for beginning inquiry with six spaces or zones of meaning is that although most of us live our lives with our feet firmly planted on the ground worried primarily about friends, family, work, making ends meet and so on, how we live in ordinary life and how we experience ordinary life are affected by the multifarious ways we interact with these six spaces.

The claim that our lives are as they are in some measure because of the ways we interact with the six spaces of meaning is weak, first pass. I am not claiming that most people consciously analyze or score their lives in

terms of how they relate to these (and only these) six spaces of meaning. We philosophers, with our heads in the clouds, might spend more conscious time than most folk among these spaces, wondering how they hang together (if they do hang together). One reason is that it is an occupational hazard that comes from thinking, following Sellars, that this is our vocation.¹⁰ Philosophers aside, the claim is that the shape of perfectly ordinary lives is affected typically by commerce with the latter six spaces. My six spaces of meaning, like Sellars's two images, are inherently social. They are publicly available and we humans live among them. That is, we experience the world in and through these spaces. Regardless of whether a space or an image gets things right, we utilize modes it affords and/or recommends for self-conceiving.

A convincing example of how our narratives are affected (perhaps unconsciously) by ways of speaking and thinking that emerge from abstract spaces of meaning can be found in *Lolita*, where Vladimir Nabokov expresses the idea in a particularly vivid way. Humbert Humbert, reflecting on the narrative demands of his relationship with his wife, says:

She showed a fierce insatiable curiosity for my past. She made me tell her about my marriage to Valeria, who was of course a scream; but I also had to invent, or to pad atrociously, a long series of mistresses for Charlotte's morbid delectation. To keep her happy, I had to present her with an illustrated catalogue of them, all nicely differentiated. . . . So I presented my women, and had them smile and sway—the languorous blond, the fiery brunette, the sensual copperhead—as if on parade in a bordello. The more popular and platitudinous I made them, the more Mrs. Humbert was pleased with the show. . . . Never in my life had I confessed so much or received so many confessions. The sincerity and artlessness with which she discussed her “love-life,” from first necking to connubial catch-as-catch-can, were, ethically, in striking contrast with my glib compositions, but technically the two sets were congeneric since both were affected by the same stuff (soap operas, psychoanalysis and cheap novelettes) upon which I drew for my characters and she for her mode of expression. (Nabokov 1955, pp. 79–80)

This sort of use of “soap operas, psychoanalysis and cheap novelettes” is possible and natural because both Humbert and his wife live in a world that drips “Hollywood” and in which these modes of thinking and speaking play a prominent and possibly unseen (for Mrs. Humbert) role.

The passage from *Lolita* lends support to my idea that it will help in understanding how we humans make meaning and sense of things to expand the spaces utilized to ones like art (in this case soap operas and

cheap novelettes) as well as science and technology (in this case the theory and practice of nineteenth-century Viennese psychiatry as adapted by Hollywood).

The members of the sextet, individually and collectively, name familiar domains with which virtually every modern life intersects. They name places we go to make meaning and sense of things, including ourselves.¹¹ Each space contains information about possibilities for self-description as well as norms for self-direction.

The Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}

I call the sextet {art, science, technology, ethics, politics, spirituality} a *Goodman set* in honor of *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), in which Nelson Goodman shows how such abstract social objects as spaces of meaning contribute to the constitution of our worlds. A world, or the multiplicity of worlds, in the relevant sense, is not the world in the sense of Earth, but the way 6 billion individuals live and conceive of their lives on Earth. A Goodman set is useful for locating—initially at an abstract level—the most salient spaces of meaning that make up the Space of Meaning for some social group. Correctly specifying the main spaces of meaning that some group uses to make meaning and sense of things points us ideally in the direction of the right socially constrained ways some group or groups of people conceive their world(s). Only if using some such analytic apparatus is legitimate for demarcating worlds can we say there are fewer than 6 billion worlds and give some conceptual traction to understanding our kind of being in the world.¹²

The members of a Goodman set can be individuated in a principled way by family-resemblance criteria, but not in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Each member names an abstract scheme, a “form of life,” or an aspect of a form of life which humans intersect with, participate in, utilize, and deploy in making sense and meaning of things, including themselves. Each member is a variable with (to adopt a Ciceronian turn of phrase) the “customs and the times” giving values to the variables. This characterization of what a Goodman set consists of (spaces of meaning) and what it taken as a whole is (the Space of Meaning for a group) has clear empirical implications. First, people should generally know how to classify items under the right general category in forced-choice tests. But there will be

indeterminate cases, or, better, cases that fit in more than one category—for example, many of Leonardo Da Vinci’s drawings are sensibly classified as art and science. Second, people will speak in ways that reflect which spaces are getting attention or having an impact (perhaps short-lived). In the 1980s the vocabulary of input-output (“Thanks for the input”) from computer science replaced the 1970s stimulus-response vocabulary from behaviorism, which had replaced the more aesthetically and politically inspired 1950s (beatnik) and 1960s (hippie) ways of speaking. Third, the spaces, as well as what falls under them, will differ for different times and places. Science in 2007 includes neuroscience and genetics; it included neither a century ago. The Goodman set that constituted the Space of Meaning for twelfth-century Europeans would not include science at all. Art now includes a musical form called “rap” or (what is somewhat different) “hip-hop.” It didn’t in 1987. Monotheism is a relatively recent spiritual option, only 2,500 years old. And so on.¹³

The central claim is that it is, to some significant degree, by living in these spaces that we make sense of things, orient our lives, find our way, and live meaningfully. Each member of a Goodman set is a space of meaning. A Goodman set of spaces of meaning correctly characterized for some group is the Space of Meaning for that group. The Goodman set above of {art, science, technology, ethics, politics, spirituality} constitutes what I call the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}. Most contemporary people interact with all six of these spaces.

I say ‘most’ rather than ‘all’ because a substantial number of Earth’s inhabitants—perhaps 20 percent—do not interact in a full or rich way with the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}. These are fellow humans who live in a condition of “absolute poverty” as defined by economists. Insofar as they can be said to live in a Space of Meaning at all, it is probably best conceived as dominated or constituted by a spiritual or religious view that provides some small (albeit possibly false) hope against their otherwise utterly hopeless lives.¹⁴ Such lives are objectively awful, although if we imagine (as we should) how to help such souls to escape absolute poverty we might legitimately wonder whether it would be a good thing for such people to eventually interact with all the spaces of meaning that the average American does. Besides the problem of living meaningfully for those who live in conditions of absolute poverty, there are also serious problems in racist or sexist nations (virtually all nation-states) where, even if there is

no absolute poverty, there are discriminatory practices that keep certain groups worse off than others in wealth, and in addition give these groups less voice in creating, modifying, and participating actively in the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} as it is embodied in their homeland. Members of such groups are “spiritually” worse off than their compatriots in virtue of social practices that circumscribe how they are permitted to interact with the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}. I will return several times to this question of our responsibilities to those who live in conditions of material or spiritual poverty.

Meaning Pluralism and Meaningful Relations

One additional reason for broadening the scope of inquiry from a conflict between two images or spaces of meaning, science and religion, to six (or more) deserves emphasis, since from this point forward I will largely assume it. The reason has to do with a commitment to the idea that there are plural ways of making sense of things and finding meaning. This is because there are in reality a multiplicity of kinds of things (kings and cabbages and numbers) and relations. Different spaces are suited to speak most profitably about different relations. One reason one ought to be a space-of-meaning pluralist has to do with the ontology of relations.

Science specializes in the causal relation. Some who fear that the scientific image is reductive or eliminativist, are worried about the tendency of certain scientific types to think that the only real relation, or the only interesting one, is the causal relation.

Here is the right reply: Even if everything that there is is the way it is because some set of causes made it that way, it does not follow that the only real relation or the only interesting relation is the causal one. Science itself recognizes numerical, spatial, and temporal relations that are not causal. Atom *a* is *next to/closest to* *b*. There are *eight* distinct atoms left in the chamber. Atom *a* moved *after* *b* hit it.

Because some very important relations are causal, and because science is especially good at uncovering causal relations, science is very important to understanding things.¹⁵ But there are many other types of relations than causal ones. There are arithmetic, geometrical, and logical relations (e.g., if *p* then *q*, *p*, therefore *q*). There are statistical relations, aesthetic relations, personal relations, semantic (meaning and reference), syntactic or

grammatical relations, ethical relations (action a is better than action b), and so on.

There is nothing spooky about there being more relations that are real, and that matter, than relations that are causal. Furthermore, we are good at tracking all the latter relations, and doing so helps us to make sense of things and find meaning.

The Psycho-Poetics of Experience

“The central claim,” I wrote above, “is that it is, to some significant degree, by living in these spaces [of meaning] that we make sense of things, orient our lives, find our way, and live meaningfully.” The psycho-social picture is this: We humans are creatures who live as beings in time with our feet on the ground, interacting in and with the natural, social, and built worlds. Living is a psycho-poetic performance, a drama that is our own, but that is made possible by our individual intersection, and that of our fellow performers, with the relevant Space of Meaning. For us contemporaries, how we act, feel, move, speak, and think in the world depends in some measure on how we weave a tapestry of sense and meaning by participation in various subspaces within the spaces of meaning that constitute the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}. Did people always conceive of life artfully? I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. We now do. This is why it matters, why it would be good, if we could gain some clarity on this question: How, if they do hang together, do such non-thingy things as the practices, forms of life, and ways of world-making that shape and partly constitute our individual psycho-poetical performances interact, intersect, and hang together? These non-thingy-things are the stuff of schemas, cognitive models, forms of life, world hypotheses, modes of inquiry, disciplines, *Weltanschauungen*, the Background, the Horizon, social imaginaries, master narratives, and meta-narratives. They form at least a significant part of the Background within which we live our lives. But they are all “on the move.” So they are also a Foreground, places we extend our selves into—the Horizontal Zone. These non-thingy things all have visible public lives, at least in the West, and, I think, in all three other geographical directions as well.¹⁶ How seriously and respectfully each is treated, how much each aspiration or set of practices is socially supported, is, however, a matter of considerable vari-

ability. And, again, how and to what degree any particular individual “participates” in these spaces, or creates his or her own psycho-poetic performance by intersecting with them, is variable. The variability is one way we express our individuality. The main point is that how my life goes depends in some measure on how I self-conceive. How I self-conceive depends in some measure on the spaces of meaning.

The *Lebenswelt*

Edmund Husserl called the individual instantiation of life among the spaces constituting a Space of Meaning the *Lebenswelt*. For each person in, say, a particular community, there is a *Lebenswelt* (l_1, l_2, \dots, l_n) that constitutes the lived world, the psycho-poetic performance for each individual. The lived world has a subjective, something-it-is like nature, which is the way it is experienced first-personally, as well as an objective side, which is captured by the individual’s enactive, embodied being in time in the world. Some of the things we do, we know about and understand first-personally. Sometimes third parties understand us better than we ourselves do.

The collective Background, as well as the Horizon or set of horizons they gesture toward, constitute a vast public space—a space that no individual could possibly comprehend in full. Furthermore, in part because it is vast and social, the Background is not always well articulated, and it includes a certain amount of meta-theory. There is art, but there are also theories about what art is and isn’t, views about kinds and degrees of beauty. Aesthetic theories. There is science and there is philosophizing about science. There are abundant technologies and there are widespread, taken-for-granted assumptions about what sorts of technologies are absolute necessities—for example, televisions and telephones. There are the actual effects that living with the Internet has on lives, and there are academic conferences that theorize and articulate these effects.

The Background, as a container of theory(ies) and meta-theory(ies), has its origins and roots in embodied human practices—in the production of art, in scientific theorizing and experiment, in utilizing technologies for work and entertainment, in moral education, in political debates, in the enactment of legislation, in spiritual experience, meditation, and prayer, and in the building of sacred spaces. The spaces of meaning are created

collectively and emerge from collective activity. They then, as emergent products, grow and develop and constitute spaces we each enter to make a life, to live out the psycho-poetic performance that is our life.

The Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} is abstract and intentionally so. Indeed, it is its abstract quality that makes it useful and allows descent to more grounded places such as the lived worlds of individuals. Let me explain.

‘Psycho-poetics’ refers to the creative ways persons attempt to make meaning and sense of things and thereby to live well. A person who lives well, in a way that makes sense and is meaningful, is what the Greeks called ‘eudaimon’—literally, “happily blessed.” Eudaimonia is flourishing. Aristotle said, and I agree, that all humans seek eudaimonia, although importantly they disagree about what makes for eudaimonia. If there can be such a thing as eudaimonics, systematic theorizing about the nature, causes, and constituents of human flourishing, it is because it is possible to say some contentful things about the ways of being and living that are likely to bring happiness, sense, and meaning to persons.

The compound term ‘psycho-poetics’ is designed to draw attention to the fact that the human attempt to make meaning and sense of things is akin to a performance executed ideally with style, grace, feeling, and a certain amount of mindfulness. To say that persons are engaged in psycho-poetics has a descriptive and a normative component. Individuals co-create their performance with others inside the space of socially available modes of being, thinking, and feeling. Furthermore, this is something we ought to do, mindfully at times, in order to maximize chances of living meaningfully and flourishing.

Life among the Spaces

Ordinary lives necessarily engage three worlds: a natural world, a built world, and a social world. There are the very concrete activities of eating, drinking, making love, making babies, making a living, working, engaging in hobbies, being friends, being enemies, and burying loved ones. Living life on the ground involves doing these things. Emphasizing this might make one press this concern: What does the Goodman set that constitutes the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} have to do with actually living an ordinary life as most people live such lives? The answer is this: In living our

lives, and in speaking with others about our lives and theirs, we take our ways of speaking and thinking, as well as our norms, to some significant degree from the relevant spaces of meaning that constitute our Space of Meaning.¹⁷

Of course, in relation to some of the six spaces that constitute the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} we are actively engaged, whereas in relation to others we are audience, sometimes inattentively or disinterestedly so. Among the 80 percent of Earth's population who have enough to survive, few devote equal time and energy to each member of the Goodman set that constitutes the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}. One reason is that no one deems each equally significant to finding his way. Especially in the West, where no one needs to live in absolute poverty and where communication media are intrusive and speak about all these forms of life and all these ways of being, it is hard to be completely oblivious even to domains one cares little about. Thus, it is a rare bird who does not intersect and interact with most of these six social spaces in some way or other. Such interaction, such intersection, is so much expected that the norms governing our ideals of good and meaningful lives require that we interact in some way or another with most of these spaces and that we be able to narratively track to some degree how we are doing so. The self-expressive, self-locating narrative by which we describe who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed is by and large the report on our own psycho-poetic performance. (On the connection between narrative and selfhood, see Dennett 1988, 1991; Flanagan 1991a,b, 1992, 1996a, 2000b, 2002; Fireman, McVay, and Flanagan 2002.) Indeed, each individual is in some significant way the person constituted by this psycho-poetic performance.

Starting at the abstract level, thanks to the inclusiveness of the superordinate categories, allows us to think, speak, and compare what the psycho-poetic performances are like for individuals by descending from the abstract to where each lives among the spaces in the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}.

Consider the following three lives as a way of seeing how moving between the concrete *Lebenswelten*, the psycho-poetic performances of individuals and cohesive social groups, and the abstract Goodman set that constitutes the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} provides the right sort of analytic space for the present inquiry. A male Celtic-Catholic-Buddhist from Durham who has raised two atheists of great charm and integrity,

who does philosophy, is impressed by and knowledgeable about biology and mind science, loves both Bach and the Beatles, and is on the political left participates in the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} in one recognizable way. A female Muslim from Dearborn who works as an engineer, enjoyed *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, paints in watercolor, has a son in the U.S. Army, supports the war in Iraq, and has raised her children to be devout participates in the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} in another recognizable way. We can live happily in the same country, making meaning and sense of things. Could we marry and live happily ever after? Doubtful. A Maasai thirty-something who runs safaris and Kilimanjaro ascents from Dar es Salaam, listens to African hip-hop and West Indian reggae, sculpts Maasai folk images in teak, has deep knowledge of the flora and fauna of Tanzania and Kenya, and works at a distance against the genocide in Sudan can also be easily seen as working in the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century}.

Despite the fact that the six spaces of meaning that constitute the Space of Meaning^{Early 21st century} (I don't claim that the list is exhaustive) are all abstractions, they are useful abstractions. In the language of linguistics, the name for each space—'art', 'ethics', 'science', and so on—is a superordinate term, as are 'vehicle' and 'job'. Cars, trains, airplanes, jets, motorcycles, and rickshaws are all vehicles. A 2004 Vespa Serie Americana motor scooter is my vehicle. Fireman, policeman, carpenter, stockbroker, farmer, doctor, and lawyer are all jobs. None of those is my job, which is teaching and doing research at Duke University.

Starting with the superordinate categories, even though it entails that we are starting the conversation in abstract space, has several advantages. First, public discourse about conflict between spaces commonly occurs using exactly these abstract terms. Consider, for example, the alleged conflict between science and religion. There really isn't any such conflict, since neither science nor religion names a single, determinate, or homogeneous practice. There is, as I write, a conflict between Darwinism and creationism and intelligent design, especially in the United States. But chemistry, anatomy, and medicine are parts of science, and they are not bothering most religious folk. Second, not all spiritual traditions are having trouble, or need to have trouble, with evolution. If certain Christians stopped claiming that the Genesis story (which of the two?) is literally true, part of the problem would disappear. The Dalai Lama is pretty comfortable with evolution. Many spiritual folk, the Earth over, have not yet heard of or absorbed the

theory. Time will tell how they respond. So one advantage of starting at the high level is that when conflict occurs, the abstract taxonomy composed of the six spaces of meaning allows us easy descent to the exact location of the problem. Some philosophers, as well as some literary and art theorists, speak of the conflict between art and (conventional) morality. But in almost every case I can think of we need to descend from the superordinate spaces named 'art' and 'ethics' and get into nitty-gritty discussions of, say, Plato's objections to poetry as it pertains to the moral (mis-)education of the youth, or of rap and hip-hop music as pernicious reinforcers of sexist or homophobic beliefs and practices, or of whether Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ" is disrespectful or sacrilegious. If after discussion the problem seems bigger, such as the sense that science in general is disenchanting or that art generally disrupts ethics or politics or undermines religion, then we can ascend and talk about that.

A final point relating to the interplay between the abstract and the concrete: One might think I would be wisest to narrow the topic to the highly visible conflict between science and religion because that is the region in which the most contentious debates about human flourishing and life's meaning seem to occur. However, this visible and noisy conflict may not be as deep or widespread as it seems. Truth be told, I fear that if I give it more attention than it deserves, I encourage the conflict in just the way one encourages an occasionally naughty boy by giving him too much attention when he is naughty. Second, I am certain that we will do best if we frame whatever conflicts exist between this dyad within the wider space of the multifarious things we do to make meaning and sense.¹⁸ Forget for a moment about science and its relations to religion. If one conceives of science as the only epistemically "first-class" way of speaking (I believe Quine used this expression for physics and he had no hope that any human science could ever achieve "first-class" status), it is not at all clear how ethics and politics are to be conceived. Ethics and politics have to do with virtues, values, norms, and practices that are productive of the common good. They ask the perennial questions: How shall I live? How shall we live? Ethics and politics had better be cognitively respectable if eudaimonics is possible.

Many scientists will claim that science is unopinionated on virtue and vice, human flourishing, and the like. But if we grant to science the broad scope that global metaphysical naturalism and scientism seem to entail,

then it is not clear how anyone could be legitimately opinionated on such matters. Global metaphysical naturalism is an imperialistic ontological view of maximal scope: What there is, and all there is, is matter and energy transformations among natural stuff. Scientism says that everything worth expressing can be expressed in a scientific idiom. If either of these views is credible, or if both of them are, it is hard to see what ethics and politics are, do, or are about.

Similarly for the arts. Music, literature, poetry, painting, drama (serious and comic), and dance are all ways in which and through which humans try to make meaning and sense. (This is so whether one is situated as artist or as audience.) What is art? What is it for? Picasso's *Guernica* or Munch's *The Scream* is said to speak truthfully about something. How can art speak truthfully about war and existential despair if everything real is no more than matter and energy transfers among natural stuff? What could war and existential despair even be? If the arts are speaking about matter and energy transfers, that they are doing so is well disguised, and we are seriously confused about what they are doing. Politics (and I guess ethics too) could be analyzed as forms of engineering, something science makes sense of, indeed that it gives rise to. Machiavelli, before science was really big, had this idea. And Quine advanced the idea late in the last century. But if we allow that politics often expresses, and occasionally embodies, views about goodness and beauty, and is not exclusively concerned with matters of social coordination, conflict management, and the like, then the problem of the place of these things in the world that science purports to describe and explain resurfaces.¹⁹

***Geisteswissenschaften*: Our Peculiar Situation**

The six ways of making meaning and sense that constitute our Goodman set and thus the Space of meaning^{Early 21st century} all have long histories. But perhaps only in the West has science been on the list for several centuries. *Naturwissenschaften* blossomed in the seventeenth century. The nineteenth century marked the official appearance of *Geisteswissenschaften*, anthropology, sociology, and psychology as well as new ways of conceiving of history and political science as scientific or potentially so. *Geisteswissenschaften* joined *Naturwissenschaften* in the pursuit of describing and explain-

ing (and in some cases predicting and controlling) whatever can be described and explained naturally. This fact created a special situation. In our time, the human sciences—especially but not exclusively the mind sciences—are opinionated about the nature and status of the other ways of making meaning and sense. Indeed, the very idea of the human sciences implies that all human practices can, in principle, be understood scientifically. Here is the Possibility Proof:

1. Humans are natural creatures who live in the natural world.
2. According to the neo-Darwinian consensus, humans are animals: *Homo sapiens sapiens*, mammals who know and know that they know.
3. Human practices are natural phenomena.
4. Art, science, ethics, religion, and politics are human practices.
5. The natural sciences and the human sciences can, in principle, describe and explain human nature and human practices.
6. Therefore, the sciences can explain, in principle, the nature and the function of art, science, ethics, religion, and politics.

Explaining Ways of Worldmaking

What might explaining our practices—our ways of worldmaking—involve? Presumably we would try to understand the nature and functions of these practices, as well as their causal antecedents and consequences. This would lead us to understand the nature of *Homo sapiens* more deeply. It would almost inevitably require changes in traditional narratives of self-understanding. If the changes involve filling in blank spaces, that is good. Knowledge is increased. If, however, well-entrenched views about the nature of our world and ourselves are asked to yield to better ways of understanding, the task is more complicated and stress-inducing. It may involve revising stories that we think of as necessary for living meaningfully.

One surprisingly common idea is that science, in explaining some phenomenon, makes it something it isn't or wasn't. It tries to disclose that every thing is a "mere thing." It takes the world as we know it and turns it into a mere collection of scientific objects. 'Reductionism' is the disparaging name for this phenomenon. Something like this view—that reduction

always entails that things are not as they seem, and that such phenomena as consciousness are revealed as illusory—is common. But it rests on a mistake. To say that some phenomenon can be understood scientifically, even that it can be reduced, is not to say that the phenomenon is itself “scientific,” nor does it entail that the phenomenon we began with disappears or evaporates—whatever exactly that might mean—when we get at its deep structure. Consider a simple case: Water is H_2O . Water is not explained away; its nature is understood more deeply. Water is a natural element. It is the explanandum. H_2O is the explanans. Is either water or H_2O itself “scientific”? The question makes no sense. Water is a natural phenomenon, and science helps us to understand its microstructure, which explains why it in fact possesses such higher-level properties as fluidity. That’s all there is to it.

The Threat of Scientism

Scientism is the source of some of the dis-ease with contemporary science. Scientism is the brash and overreaching doctrine that everything worth saying or expressing can be said or expressed in a scientific idiom. It is arguable that some of the European logical positivists of the 1920s and the 1930s came close to embracing scientism.

The claim that science can, in principle, explain everything we think, say, and do—that it can, in principle, provide a causal account of human being (a causal account of *Dasein*)—should be distinguished from the claim that everything can be expressed scientifically. Consider art and music. It is patently crazy to say that the works of Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Picasso, Mozart, Chopin, Schönberg, Ellington, Coltrane, Dylan, or Nirvana could be expressed scientifically. Assuming something like the best-case scenario for science, we might want to say that artistic and musical productions can be analyzed in terms of their physical manifestations—painting in terms of chemistry and geometry, and music in terms of sound waves and mathematical relationships.

Furthermore, some very complex combination of the culture, individual life, and the brain of some artist might allow for something like an explanation sketch of why that artist produced the works he or she did. Kay Redfield Jamison (1993) has done very interesting work on the high inci-

dence of bipolar disorder among great nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets and musicians.²⁰ Such work might lead us to understand more deeply what ordinary and creative imagination consist in. But such work does not replace or reveal what Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath, or Seamus Heaney says, means, or does in the language of poetry.

There is nothing remotely odd about these kinds of scientific investigation of art or music, or of the creative process itself. But although such inquiry takes artistic or musical production as something to be explained, it does not take the production itself as expressing something that can be stated scientifically. The claim that not everything can be expressed scientifically is not a claim that art, music, poetry, literature, and religious experiences cannot in principle be accounted for scientifically, or that these productions involve magical or mysterious powers. Whatever they express, it is something perfectly human, but the appropriate idiom of expression is not a scientific one. The scientific idiom requires words and, often, mathematical formulas. Painting, sculpture, and music require neither. Indeed, they cannot in principle express what they express in words or mathematical formulas. Therefore, whatever they express is not expressible scientifically. To be sure, poetry, literature, and music with lyrics use words. But their idiom is not a scientific one. And the reason is doubly principled: Many of the relations explored are not explored causally (the relation in which science excels). A good love song can make you feel love, but it never does so by getting into the “pheromonics” and the neurobiology of love. The arts work our imaginations with all the playful tricks of language, allegory, metaphor, and metonymy that science, for its purposes, doesn’t much care for.

Historians of literature and art often tell us useful things about art—for instance, about how poets and artists were influenced by scientific ideas—and psychologists can explain important things about the physiology of perception. Despite the illumination provided, neither provides anything approaching a complete or satisfying explanation of what any interesting artistic work means or does. The simple and obvious point is that not everything worth expressing can or should be expressed scientifically. Scientism is descriptively false and normatively false. This, I like to think, will quell some of the anxiety. I like this outcome because temperamentally

I don't like for people to be anxious. If there were a basis for legitimate fear and trembling, sickness unto death, and the like, I would have to say so. But there isn't, so I don't.²¹

The Scientific Image of Persons and Big Mistakes

The bugbear of scientism aside, what about the picture of persons that Sellars calls "the scientific image of man-in-the world"? Does the scientific image reveal any deep or big mistakes in our ordinary folk-philosophical picture of persons? Is the scientific image disturbing, demeaning, and disenchanting?²² These last two questions are logically distinct, but in fact they connect up. If science, or the image it projects, said that there are no persons, or that we *seem* conscious but aren't, or that we can never act freely, then these are "truths" that *if true* would be disturbing.²³

What does contemporary mind science say about the nature and function of consciousness and about mental causation, about human agency? Does deeper scientific understanding of consciousness and mental causation help or hinder our efforts to make sense of things, to find meaning, and to flourish?

Sellars, recall, says that "the philosopher is confronted not by one picture . . . but by *two* pictures of essentially the same order of complexity, each of which purports to be a complete picture of man-in-the-world, and which, after separate scrutiny, he must fuse into one vision" (p. 4). In view of the possible conflict between the manifest and scientific images on the issues of consciousness and causation, one might wonder what the force of 'must' is here. If the scientific image insists with good reason that some essential tenet of the manifest image is false, then the two images cannot be fused.

Perhaps it is best to read Sellars's statement that the philosopher must "fuse [the two images] into one vision" as meaning that the philosopher ought to try to fuse the two images. But if the philosopher can't do that, something must yield.

Remember also that for Sellars there are actually three ideal types dubbed images. The "original image" was magical in the sense that essentially all moving objects, even abstract objects such as thunderstorms and seasons, were personified. "From this point of view," Sellers writes, "the refinement of the 'original' image into the manifest image, is the gradual 'depersonal-

ization' of objects other than persons. That something like this has occurred with the advance of civilization is a familiar fact. Even persons, it is said (mistakenly, I believe), are being 'depersonalized' by the advance of the scientific point of view." (p. 10) This passage suggests that Sellars might think that the two images can be fused, and thus that the effort to do so can succeed because the scientific image does not "eliminate" the category of person. If it did, the two images would be inconsistent, since the manifest image treats the concept of person as fundamental and ineliminable. But even if neither the manifest image nor the scientific image denies that there are persons, there is this difference: The manifest image assumes "that what we ordinarily call persons are composites of a person proper and a body" and that "the essential dualism in the manifest image is not that between mind and body as substances, but between two radically different ways in which the human individual is related to the world" (p. 11).

It is interesting and instructive that Sellars, circa 1960, sees the manifest image this way, insofar as Gilbert Ryle, writing a decade earlier, read the manifest image as Cartesian to the core. Ryle called substance dualism "the official view" (and, less kindly, "the myth of the ghost in the machine"). Sellars acknowledges that philosophers read the manifest image through Cartesian lenses, but he judges the dominant common-sense position to be Lockean. Locke, recall, pleaded agnosticism (in some moods) on whether our two "radically different ways" of conceiving of humans—as continuous bodies and as continuous "persons"—depend on one substrate or two. I am not going to fuss over the question of what kind of dualism the manifest image incorporates, although I do think it is typically some form of immaterialism, either immaterial substances or immaterial properties.

Happily, the scientific image does not claim that there are not persons, but it does reject dualism. That is, it endorses (at any rate, this is the consensus position) some form of materialism or physicalism about persons. Is this the end of the world as we know it? I think not.

Subjective Realism, Neurophysicalism, and Phenomenal Consciousness

One thing many people fear about a naturalistic view of mind is that it will, in virtue of identifying mind with brain, make experiences a thing of the

past. I have experienced at first hand being introduced as a “neurophilosopher” at receptions where people then proceed to treat me as an anthropological specimen who must have no inner life and who must believe that they are zombies! The worry, as best I can tell, goes something like this: A dualist picture of mind insists that we humans possess phenomenal consciousness. There is something it is like first-personally to be a subject of experience. We are not mere information processors. We have experiences. The scientific picture of mind identifies the mind with certain objective physical processes. But the subjective and the objective can’t be meshed or melded. Not only isn’t first-person phenomenal consciousness not “objective”; it cannot even, in principle, be captured in the sort of third-person objective description that normal science relishes.

The belief that consciousness can’t be explained scientifically is also held by a surprisingly large number of naturalistically inclined thinkers. Thus, one hears much talk of the unbridgeable “explanatory gap” between subjective experience and the objective features of brains, and much about the “hard problem of consciousness.” In 1991, I dubbed naturalists who think consciousness is a natural phenomenon that can’t be explained scientifically “mysterians.”²⁴ One kind way to describe them is as believing that there are epistemic limits, such as Heisenberg limits or Gödel limits or the limit that can’t get us closer than 10^{-43} second to the Big Bang, that are relevant to our ability to solve the problem of consciousness. However, no mysterian has provided any Gödel-style proof that this is so. Instead, mysterians count on intuitions of the form “to say that my perception of blue is realized by activation of the blue-detecting neural network in my visual cortex is very unsatisfying.” My response, then and now, is that intuitions like this should not be trusted, especially ones predictably hardened by long adherence to dualist views of mind, and furthermore that there is all the difference in the world between an explanation that is intuitively satisfying and one that is scientifically satisfactory.

No one, dualist, naturalist, or pan-psychic, has yet explained consciousness. What we have are pictures of how we might explain it, and differing assessments about how far along various research programs are in the attempt to explain how and why experiences occur. What we can say for certain now is that a naturalist picture fits much better with the rest of science than any known dualist or immaterialist view. Of course, the

naturalist must accept the burden of showing how, using only natural resources, he proposes to explain phenomenal consciousness. Here is how.

Token neurophysicalism is the view that each and every mental event, each and every experience, is some physical event or other—presumably some central-nervous-system event.²⁵ *Type neurophysicalism* is the view that each kind or type of experience, e.g., “seeing a red cube” or “believing that [snow is white],” each kind or type of event—be it perceptual, emotional, or a belief—is realized in “pretty much the same way” by each member of the species that has the relevant experience. Type neurophysicalism appears to be true for rhesus macaques in narrow experiments where the task is to alternately detect (i.e., experience) vertical or horizontal lines—that is, distinctive populations of neurons fire in the same area depending on which sort of lines they see. For present purposes it does not matter whether “the same” mental state (“seeing red” or “believing that [snow is white]”) are realized in different ways by human brains or are realized in very similar ways and/or locations in human brains. What matters is that each and every experience supervenes in some strong sense on a brain state. We can accept the truth of token neurophysicalism, and thus reject all immaterialist views that deny it, while resisting the conclusion that the essence of a mental event is revealed completely or captured completely by a description of its neural level realizer. The reason is as follows, and it applies uniquely to conscious mental events: Conscious mental events are essentially Janus-faced and uniquely so. They have first-person subjective feel *and* they are realized in objective states of affairs. As John Dewey said (1922, p. 62), “given that consciousness exists at all, there is no mystery in its being connected with what it is connected with.”

Speaking counterfactually, water would be H₂O and gold would be the substance with atomic number 79 even if there were no subjects of experience, no sentient beings, in the world.²⁶ *Objective realism* is true of water and of gold.

But even if a conscious-mental-state token (say, your experience here and now of seeing these words on this page) is realized, and realized necessarily, in some complex neural process *n* in you, it is not the case, speaking counterfactually, that *n* could occur in a world without subjects. Specifically, *n* could not and would not occur in a world in which you were not reading these words. It is fine with the token physicalist if for each of us the neural

realizer of the experience of reading the exact same sentence on this page, is somewhat different so long as there is some neural realizer or other that is the experience of seeing or reading that sentence for you.

The objective states of affairs in brains that *are* conscious mental events (not all, even widespread, neural activity is conscious) are unique in producing first-personal feel—*phenomenality*.²⁷ If certain objective states of affairs obtain, then so do first-person feels, and if there are first-person feels, then the relevant objective states of affairs obtain.

The asymmetry between water and gold, on the one side, and conscious mental events, on the other, can be said to come to this: the nature of water and gold is essentially objective—it is completely objective, ergo objective realism. The nature of conscious mental events is such that despite being perfectly natural, objective states of affairs, they have as part of their essential nature the subjective feel they have.

Call the basic idea *subjective realism*. Subjective realism says that the relevant objective state of affairs in a sentient creature properly hooked up to itself produces certain subjective feels in, for, and to that creature. The subjective feel is produced and realized in an organism in virtue of the relevant objective state of affairs' obtaining in that organism. The subjective feel is, as it were, no more than the relevant objective state of affairs obtaining in a creature that feels things. However, since the relevant objective state of affairs is only "captured" as the thing it is (in this case, a conscious mental event) as it is "captured" or "felt" by the organism itself. Thus, a completely third-personal neural description or causal explanation of an experience doesn't "capture" it as the experience it is. The reason is that third-personal descriptions don't "capture" feels. Certain third-personal states of affairs are the realizations of feels, but the feels are only had or captured by (or in) the creatures in whom those states of affairs obtain.

Suppose β activity is how seeing blue is realized for *Homo sapiens*. That is, suppose that, unlike in cases of semantically decoding spoken or written speech, the cell assemblies that underlie color perception are the same across members of our species.²⁸ We can then say that when Bert sees blue he is in the β state. The β state is how seeing blue is realized in all people. But Bert's seeing blue despite being realized by β activity in him is not realized solely in virtue of being β activity; it is realized in virtue of being β activity *in him*. And it is in virtue of being realized *in him* in the right way that he sees blue. Bert's seeing blue is nothing more than Bert's being in a

certain objective psychobiological state. But it is a state that produces, or better, that has as an essential feature, a certain feel for Bert. How and why it does so is, I take it, explainable fully in naturalistic terms. Imagine that there is a complete neural description of what is going on in Bert—a complete description of β activity as it is uniquely realized in his nervous system. This description as offered from the third-person perspective completely captures the fact that Bert is seeing blue. Indeed, if the entire causal picture from the external blue object to his experiencing it were filled out we might claim to have explained fully why Bert is experiencing blue. But neither description “captures” what it is like for Bert to see blue. The experience is only captured by Bert first-personally. It is not important that Bert be able to say anything deep or interesting about what his experience is like. It is enough that he experiences blue or is seeing things blue. This is sufficient, I hope, to see how one might be committed to the truth of *neurophysicalism* (token or type) about the conscious mind without being committed to the claim that the essence of an experience is captured fully as the experience it is by describing completely its neural realizer.²⁹

For many it produces a mental cramp to think the thought that mental events are neural events but that their essence cannot be captured completely in neural terms. Such is the power of *objective realism*, a doctrine that is true for most of the things and types of things in the universe but that is not true for experiences. The cramping can be eased, I propose, by accepting that the subjective realist is claiming nothing mysterious. It is simply a unique but nonmysterious fact about conscious mental states that they essentially possess a phenomenal side. Don't mention that, and possibly how, they appear first-personally and you haven't described one, possibly two, of their essential features. Your metaphysics is incomplete. See things in the Janus way recommended and the intuition that gives rise to the thought that there is an unbridgeable explanatory gap between conscious mental states and their realizers is deflated, and it may disappear. Or so it seems to me.³⁰

The main point of this part of the therapeutic exercise can be summed up this way: The individual gripped by the idea that we possess non-physical minds (or that mind involves non-physical properties) makes this sensible demand on any naturalistic view that could even be entertained as a replacement view: “Don't mess with phenomenal consciousness. It is a given that all my compatriots and I are subjects of experience. So you will

need to say more than that a naturalistic neurophysicalist conception of mind is simpler than a dualist view to remotely capture my interest. There are all sorts of views that are simpler than their opponents—for example, that water is the only element is simpler than every view which countenances more than one element—but that fail because they are miserably simplistic. The simplicity of a view is only an interesting feature of that view when it explains everything that both views agree needs explaining. And in the case of mind, one thing, perhaps the main thing that needs explaining is how experience is possible, how there could be phenomenal consciousness in a material world.” But we have now seen how this can be done. The subjective realist is a (neuro) physicalist who claims to be able to meet the plausible demand of the Cartesian, or any other variety of dualist, to provide a theory sketch or a plausibility proof, or at least to leave ample space for phenomenal consciousness. For the subjective realist, as for the immaterialist, it is a fundamental fact that phenomenal consciousness exists and is in need of explanation. My own view is that it is a law of nature that humans, and all other creatures that have experiences, have their own experiences in virtue of the way they are hooked up to themselves and to the world. *Homo sapiens* is the name for a class of creature that each has his or her own nervous system and no one else’s. Thus, each person has his or her own experiences and no one else’s. Something like subjective realism and something like neurophysicalism are the best candidates for the regulative assumption under which neuroscientists operate.

Mental Causation and Free Will

Like James (1890) and Kim (2005), I think there are two equally important mind-body problems: (1) the mind-brain problem, specifically what Dave Chalmers (1995, 1996) calls “the hard problem of consciousness,” and (2) the “mental causation” problem. I have just sketched (yet again; see Flanagan 1991a, 1992, 1996a, 2000b, 2002) how I think the problem of consciousness can be solved naturalistically. My view leaves consciousness, at least how experience *seems*, exactly as before. The only thing it requires adjustment to for the ordinary person is his or her view on the constitution of consciousness, how conscious mental events are realized.

What now about mental causation? Here too I propose to naturalize the concept of free will—that is my job, after all (Flanagan 1991a,b, 1992,

1996a, 2002). And although I know doing so does not change *my* conception of what I am up to when I act freely, experience has taught that my way of speaking is unsettling and really does not seem to leave the phenomena and the associated practices intact. I'll let the reader decide.

Thomas Nagel concisely expresses one major worry that involves the question of whether a scientific view of human action could conceivably be fused with our ordinary view:

If one cannot be responsible for consequences of one's acts due to factors beyond one's control, or for antecedents of one's acts that are properties of temperament not subject to one's will, or for the circumstances that pose one's moral choices, then how can one be responsible even for the stripped down acts of the will itself, if *they* are the product of antecedent circumstances outside the will's control?... The area of genuine agency... seems to shrink under this scrutiny to an extensionless point. Everything seems to result from the combined influence of factors, antecedent and posterior to action, that are not within the agent's control. (1979b, p. 35)

This is chilling, or so it seems. The worry has to do with thinking of every event as caused, thinking of choosing or willing as an event and thus as having causes, and, at the same time, thinking of ourselves as free agents who choose our voluntary actions in a force free field, who are "the prime movers ourselves unmoved" of what we do voluntarily.

Ever since Darwin, the idea that persons are subject to causal laws has become a regulative assumption of *Geisteswissenschaften*. And thus all the sciences—genetics, neuroscience, and psychology on one side, and sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science on the other side—can be understood as in the business of causally explaining what we are doing and why. It is not as if everyone who labors in the human sciences need be interested in causal explanation. There is a vast amount of insight to be gained from very careful thick description and taxonomizing. The point is that it is generally accepted that everything that happens in the human sphere, as in all other parts of the world, happens because antecedent things happened, and so on. Even if reasons are or can be causes (and I am sure they can be) they must have causes, and so on. Thus, it seems that the "area of genuine agency...shrink[s] under this scrutiny to an extensionless point" (Nagel 1979b, p. 35).

To decide whether the scientific image spells death for free will, we need to know what conception of free will is being discussed. There are two main conceptions of free will. One is the libertarian view, which is relatively

new and Western. The other is older and can be found in ancient Greek and Eastern texts (I see it in Confucius, Buddha, Aristotle). The first conception cannot be fused with the scientific image; the latter conception can. So let it return.

The view that won't work is stated by Descartes this way: "[T]he will is so free in its nature, that it can never be constrained. . . . And the whole action of the soul consists in this, that solely because it desires something, it causes a little gland to which it is closely united to move in a way requisite to produce the effect which relates to this desire." Roderick Chisholm says this about free agency, which he calls "agent causation": "[I]f we are responsible. . . then we have a prerogative which some would attribute only to God: each of us when we act, is a prime mover unmoved. In doing what we do, we cause certain things to happen, and nothing—or no one—causes us to cause those events to happen." (1964)

No one has ever explained how any animal, or any natural being, could possess a part—an extremely important part, "the will"—that is not subject to causal principles but nonetheless produces astounding effects. Fortunately, there is an ancient conception of free will that has shown remarkable resiliency and that sits nicely with the scientific image.

Aristotle and Dewey

Even if there is no such thing as an incorporeal mind that governs the body, and even if there is no such thing as libertarian free will, we are owed an account of the phenomenology that supports these ideas.³¹ Aristotle and Dewey are helpful here (as is the Buddha but I'll leave him out of the discussion for now). We can make peace between the scientific and manifest images in the following way: Accept that (as best we can tell) everything that happens has a set of causes that make it as it is; then proceed to distinguish the voluntary and the involuntary, the free and the unfree, in terms of the *kinds* of causation or causes that distinguish them.

Aristotle championed the voluntary-involuntary distinction long before there was a conflict between the Cartesian image of mind and agency and the scientific image. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle drew the involuntary-voluntary distinction this way: "What is involuntary is what is forced or is caused by ignorance. What is voluntary seems to be what has

its origins in the agent himself when he knows the particulars that the action consists in." What Aristotle had in mind was something like this: An action is involuntary if it results from some sort of compulsion against which effort and thinking are impotent, or if the agent in no way knows or grasps what he is doing.³²

Voluntary action involves the agent's knowing what action he is performing, and acting from reasons and desires that are his own. How is this possible? It is possible if I am conscious and if my consciousness has some causal efficacy. And it does. Mother Nature put me in conscious touch with some of my most salient desires, hopes, and expectations. When I see what I want and/or need and judge it to be choiceworthy, I adjust some circuitry (thanks to how I am designed, what I have learned, etc.) to do what gets me what I want. These actions are voluntary. We call actions 'voluntary' when we think about means and ends and act in accordance with our thinking (or could have).

Dewey was well aware of the conflict brewing between the libertarian (metaphysical, not political) image of persons, inspired by Descartes, and the assumptions made by the new scientific psychology. In an early paper, "The Ego as a Cause" (1894), Dewey claimed that the main question facing the science of the mind was whether we can "carry back our analysis to scientific conditions, or must we stop at a given point because we have come upon a force of an entirely different order—an independent ego as an entity in itself?" His answer was that the myth of a completely self-initiating ego, an unmoved but self-moving will, was simply a fiction motivated by our ignorance of the causes of human behavior. He saw no need for the notion of a metaphysically unconstrained will or of an independent ego as a prime mover itself unmoved in order to have a robust conception of free agency. For there to be agency, we need the person (or the ego) as a cause, possibly even the proximate cause of what we do. But the person (or the ego) may serve as the proximate cause of action and still himself be part of the causal nexus. Indeed, a person, in virtue of being a natural creature (an animal), must be part of the causal nexus.

Within five years of writing about the unacceptability of an ego as an "unmoved mover," Dewey had worked out an alternative, naturalistic account of conscious deliberation and will. In his splendid book *John Dewey and Moral Imagination*, Steven Fesmire writes:

In his 1900–1901 lectures on ethics at the University of Chicago, Dewey distinguishes four of the ways in which people deliberate, then explores the generic pattern:

- (1) “Some people deliberate by dialogue.”
- (2) “Others visualize certain results.”
- (3) “Others rather take the motor imagery and imagine themselves doing a thing.”
- (4) “Others imagine a thing done and then imagine someone else commenting upon it.”

What unifies this diversity is that deliberation “represents the process of rehearsing activity in idea when the overt act is postponed. It is, so to speak, trying an act on before it is tried out in the objective, obvious, space and time world.” Following Peirce’s belief-doubt-inquiry continuum, opposed tendencies create a tension, evoking an affective phase in which emotions come to the fore. This tension spurs deliberation. To escape the tension requires “an objective survey of the situation.” The deliberative phase is marked by inhibition of activity and involves “turning back, as distinct from the projective or going-forward attitude.” Prior experience is analyzed in order to find a way to direct current activities. (2003, p. 74)

Notice that Dewey’s and Fesmire’s artful descriptions of the aims and types of deliberation yield testable hypotheses about linkages between phenomenology and behavior (grist for the neurophenomenologist’s mill; see Thompson 2007), about psychological development, and about character education.

Once Dewey saw the promise of a robust theory of agency without libertarian free will, he never looked back. By the time he wrote *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey was confirmed in his opinion that, although there were big-time, large-stake questions about freedom, there were none about “free will” in the spooky metaphysical sense: “What men have esteemed and fought for in the name of liberty is varied and complex—but certainly it has never been metaphysical freedom of the will.” (1922, p. 209)

Dewey is right. Cries for “freedom” are typically pleas for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—i.e. for political freedom, not metaphysical freedom.

Many people think they need a notion of free agency that involves a self-initiating ego in order to undergird the idea that they are free. Maybe something else can do the job, something where the distinction between voluntary and involuntary does not turn on a distinction between acts ini-

tiated by a completely self-initiating will and those that are fully explicable in causal terms.

Dewey says the moral problem concerns the future. I treat you as an intelligent being, capable of self-control, if I call you on inappropriate or non-virtuous actions. If you are receptive and paying attention, my response gives you reason to behave better in the future. I call this *responsibility* to indicate that it incorporates the credible assumption that our characters, our hearts and minds, are plastic to some degree. Social communities are dynamic systems in which complex feedback mechanisms help us adjust our beliefs, desires, feelings, emotions, and behavior.

Aristotle is silent about the source of the capacities to think and act with reason although he does say “what is voluntary seems to be what has its origins in the agent himself.” But this silence should not be taken for neutrality on the existence of natural causal origins for these capacities. For Aristotle, and for many post-Cartesian thinkers, including David Hume, John Stuart Mill, and John Dewey, the assumption is that the capacities that are deployed in the initiation of voluntary action are distinctive but perfectly natural human capacities with perfectly ordinary natural histories. That the “will” seems to be self-initiating is perhaps an understandable illusion. We are not in touch, first-personally, with most of the causal factors that contribute to who we are and to what we do. It is hardly surprising that we are prone to overrate the causes we are in touch with first-personally. When I deliberate and choose among the options before me, I am in touch with the relevant processes, the processes of deliberation and choice. I am not in touch with—indeed I am normally clueless about—what causes me to deliberate and weigh my options as I do. So I make a misstep and think deliberation is self-caused. It seems that way, after all.

Spinoza diagnosed the source of the libertarian illusion this way: “Men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they have not the faintest idea, because they are ignorant of them.” (*Ethics*, appendix to part I)

Designing persons to be in first-person touch with high-level proximate causes is a brilliant piece of evolutionary design. Were we in touch with *all* the causes of thought and action, the mind would be much too noisy, and it is doubtful that a noisy mind would enhance fitness. So a design that

puts us in touch with proximate causes and screens off distal causes is fitness enhancing. But it has one unfortunate consequence. It causes us to overrate proximate causes and to think that how things seem from the first-person point of view (e.g., non-physical) is how they *are*, or, perhaps worse, that proximate conscious thoughts and intentions have no causal antecedents themselves and are produced by ourselves, where each self is a “prime mover itself unmoved.”

This is as much as I will say for now about how to think of humans as very smart social animals who are agents. Agency is real, but libertarian free will is an illusion. Can we bear up and live with what scientific image says about consciousness and causation? Yes. The scientific image, if conceived carefully, need not be reductive, eliminativist, or disenchanting. If this is right, we can proceed to examine more closely what, at this point in the first decade of the 21st century, eudaimonics can say or teach about the prospects for flourishing for conscious creatures who are capable of knowing and choosing how to live in a co-dependent, co-creative journey with others.