

## Against Idealism

Given the title of this chapter, you may think that I must be the kind of person who enjoys torturing small furry animals. How could anyone but a psychopath be against warm, fuzzy idealism?

I start with consideration of Naturalism. I go on to argue that Naturalism is more theoretically virtuous than Idealism. I conclude that Idealism is an unwelcome and unwarranted kind of scepticism.

### 1. Naturalism

One of the central commitments of naturalism is that minded entities are *late* and *local*: minded entities are latecomers in global causal reality, and minded entities have highly localised spheres of influence in global causal reality. The only minded entities that we know about are relatively recently evolved biological organisms on the surface of our planet. If there are other minded entities in our universe, then they are also either biological organisms that evolved relatively recently on the surfaces of other planets, or they are downstream causal products of the activities of biological organisms that evolved relatively recently on the surfaces of other planets. If there are other universes in which there are minded entities, then they, too, are either relatively late evolving biological organisms or downstream causal products of the activities of relatively late evolving biological organisms. According to naturalism, there are no minded entities other than relatively recently evolved biological organisms in our universe and relatively late evolving biological organisms in whatever other universes there may be, and downstream causal products of the actions of relatively recently evolved biological organisms in our universe and relatively late evolving biological organisms in whatever other universes there may be. Moreover, according to the kind of naturalism I favour, there could not be minded entities other than relatively recently evolved biological organisms in our universe and relatively late evolving biological organisms in whatever other universes there may be, and downstream causal products of the actions of relatively recently evolved biological organisms in our universe and relatively late evolving biological organisms in whatever other universes there may be.

Minded entities can be described using a range of mental vocabulary. Minded entities are *conscious* entities. Minded entities are *agents*. Minded entities *perceive* their more or less immediate surroundings. Minded entities *suffer*. Some—perhaps all—minded entities *believe*, and *desire*, and *intend*. Some—perhaps all—minded entities *remember*, and *learn*, and *predict*. While there are contentious cases—both among contemporary organisms and among ancestral organisms in evolutionary history—there are many cases of uncontroversially minded organisms: organisms that are conscious, organisms that perceive their environments, organisms that suffer, and so forth. Moreover, while there are the contentious cases already mentioned, there are many cases of uncontroversially non-minded entities: organisms that do not have nervous systems—bacteria, amoeba, paramecia, and the like—and non-organisms—sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and so on. It is currently controversial whether there could be artificial minded entities, e.g. androids. If there could be artificial minded entities, then there could be minded non-organisms; else, not.

It is more customary to talk of 'entities that have minds' than it is to talk of 'minded entities'. I prefer the latter kind of talk to the former because the default view—at least for the purposes of the kind of discussion to which this paper contributes—is that talk of 'entities that have minds' is merely idiomatic variation of more strictly accurate talk of 'minded entities'. It is not controversial that there are conscious organisms, organisms that are agents, organisms that perceive their more or less immediate environments, organisms that suffer, organisms that remember and learn and predict,

and so forth: human beings are uncontroversially minded organisms in all of these respects. However, it is extremely controversial to claim that minded organisms have minds, if talk of 'entities having minds' is taken to be something other than idiomatic variation of strictly more accurate talk of 'there being minded entities'.

According to the type of naturalism that I prefer, the mindedness of organisms is explained entirely in terms of natural properties. The natural properties in question certainly include properties of minded organisms, but may also include properties of the environments of minded organisms, and properties of the evolutionary, social, and local histories of minded organisms. On the one hand, that minded organisms are conscious—when, indeed, they are conscious—is plausibly explained in terms of neural processes: for organisms to be conscious just is for them to be undergoing certain kinds of neural processes. On the other hand, that minded organisms are perceiving—when, indeed, they are perceiving—is plausibly explained partly in terms of their immediate environment, partly in terms of their undergoing certain kinds of neural and other biological processes, and partly in terms of their local, social, and evolutionary histories: for organisms to perceive their more or less immediate environments just is for them, in those environments, to be undergoing certain kinds of neural and other biological processes that have been appropriately shaped by local, social and evolutionary history.

## 2. Alternatives to Naturalism

Almost everything in the naturalism that I prefer is controversial. Some think that, while the naturalism that I prefer is true, it is merely contingently true: it could have been, for example, that some minded entities are not both late and local. Some think that the naturalism that I prefer is false, perhaps even necessarily so. Some think that not all minded entities are *late*; some think, for example, that whatever universes there are were created *ex nihilo* by a minded entity. Some think that not all minded entities are *local*; some think, for example, that entire universes are minded. Some think that minded entities have minds, where talk of 'entities having minds' is not mere idiomatic variation on talk of 'there being minded entities'. Some think that, while there are minds, only minded organisms have minds, and this only while the minded organisms in question are alive. Some think that while only minded organisms can have minds, the mind of an organism that dies can become the mind of another, different organism. Some think that minds are ubiquitous: each and every thing that exists is minded. Some think that, although minds are not ubiquitous, minds can exist independently of minded organisms. Some think that, while minds exist, they are not located in our universe (though they do, perhaps, interact with entities that are located in our universe). Some think that minds can exist even if there is nothing else that exists. Some think that there is nothing that exists that is not either a mind or else the 'content' of one or more minds.

Among views that are opposed to the naturalism that I prefer, idealist views diverge from the naturalism that I prefer to the greatest extent. Idealists suppose that the naturalism that I prefer is necessarily false. Idealists suppose that minded entities just are minds, where talk of 'minds' is not mere idiomatic variation on talk of 'minded entities'. Idealists suppose that our being conscious is something quite other than our undergoing certain kinds of neural processes. Idealists suppose that our perceiving is something quite other than our undergoing certain kinds of neural and other biological processes that have been appropriately shaped by local, social and evolutionary history. Idealists suppose that there is some sense in which minds (or minds and their 'contents') are *fundamental*: all causal entities other than minds (or minds and their 'contents') are constructed from, or constituted by, or reducible to, or supervenient upon, or identifiable with, minds (or minds and their 'contents').

In my characterisation of naturalism and idealism, and in my account of the ways in which they diverge, I have restricted my attention to 'causal entities'. On my characterisation, near enough, whereas naturalists suppose that fundamental causal reality is entirely natural, idealists suppose that fundamental causal reality is entirely mental. This characterisation that I have given is silent on questions about 'abstract' entities, 'ideal' entities, and the like. While many naturalists repudiate 'abstract' entities, 'ideal' entities, and so on—and while many idealists enthusiastically embrace 'abstract' entities, 'ideal' entities, and so forth—I think that it is an open question whether naturalists ought to repudiate 'abstract' entities, 'ideal' entities, and their ilk, and I think that it is also an open question whether idealists ought to enthusiastically embrace 'abstract' entities, 'ideal' entities, etc. In a more comprehensive discussion, I would need to allow for idealists who suppose that minds and abstract entities are jointly fundamental: all entities, other than minds (or minds and their contents) and abstract entities, are constructed from, or constituted by, or reducible to, or supervenient upon, or identifiable with, minds (or minds and their 'contents') and 'abstract' entities. However, for present purposes, I am happy to set aside considerations about 'abstract' entities, 'ideal' entities, and the like.

### **3. Varieties of Idealism**

There are many varieties of idealism, i.e. varieties of the view that all causal entities other than minds (or minds and their 'contents') are constructed from, or constituted by, or reducible to, or supervenient upon, or identifiable with, minds (or minds and their 'contents').

Idealists disagree about the number of minds. Some idealists suppose that there is just one mind, and that all other causal entities are constructed from, or constituted by, or reducible to, or supervenient upon, or identifiable with, the 'contents' of that single mind. Some idealists suppose that there are many minds, and that all other causal entities are constructed from, or constituted by, or reducible to, or supervenient upon, or identifiable with, the 'contents' of those many minds. Some idealists who suppose that there are many minds suppose further that one among these minds is the cause of the existence of all of the other minds, and the (ultimate) source of the (perceptual) 'contents' of all of the other minds.

Idealists disagree about the primary 'contents' of minds. Some idealists think that the primary 'contents' of minds are thoughts: entities with propositional content. Some idealists think that the primary 'contents' of minds are concepts: ingredient constituents of thoughts. Some idealists think that the primary 'contents' of minds are 'ideas': feelings, sensations, percepts, and the like. Some idealists think that there is a diverse range of primary 'contents' of minds, including thoughts, concepts, ideas, and perhaps more besides.

Idealists disagree about relations between the 'contents' of minds and familiar non-minded causal entities: sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and so forth. Some idealists who claim to be 'realists' about familiar non-minded causal entities maintain that familiar non-minded causal entities are constructed from, or constituted by, or reducible to, or supervenient upon, or identifiable with, the 'contents' of minds. Some idealists are hermeneutical or revisionary fictionalists about familiar non-minded causal entities: on their view, it is merely true according to fiction that there are familiar non-minded causal entities. Some idealists are hard-line eliminativists about familiar non-minded causal entities: on their view, it is incoherent to say or suppose, even according to a fiction, that familiar non-minded causal entities exist.

Idealists disagree about whether minds are causally related. Some idealists suppose that there is unmediated causal influence of minds upon other minds: some 'contents' of minds are unmediated causal consequences of 'contents' of other minds. Some idealists suppose that there is a mixture of

mediated and unmediated causal influence of minds upon other minds: some 'contents' of minds are unmediated causal consequences of 'contents' of other minds, and some 'contents' of minds are merely mediated causal consequences of 'contents' of other minds. Some idealists suppose that there is no causal influence of minds upon other minds: the 'contents' of minds are never causal consequences of the 'contents' of other minds.

#### 4. Method of Assessment

There are three stages in the comparison of philosophical positions. First, there is *articulation*: setting out the positions in sufficient detail to allow fair comparison. Second, there is internal or *non-comparative review*: examining each position for internal consistency. Third, supposing that each position survives non-comparative review, there is *comparative review*: determining which of the positions is most theoretically virtuous.

Articulation is the most important stage: there is no prospect of worthwhile comparison of philosophical positions without full and accurate articulation of those positions. On the one hand, without full articulation of positions, there is no prospect of gauging the true theoretical costs of those positions: significant costs may well remain invisible in less-than-full articulations of positions. On the other hand, given inaccurate articulation of positions, there is no point in proceeding to assessment: an examination of 'strawman' positions is of no value to anyone.

Internal review is, I think, the least interesting stage, though it is often the stage which claims the most attention. Obviously enough, if a particular position can be shown to be inconsistent, then that suffices to remove that particular position from the field of play. But, for any broad philosophical view—'naturalism', 'idealism', etc.—there are many fully articulated variants. Typically, establishing that one fully articulated variant of a view is inconsistent does nothing towards establishing that other fully articulated variants of that view are also inconsistent. Furthermore, it often turns out that attempts to establish the inconsistency of a fully articulated position illicitly import claims that belong only to competing positions.

Comparative review, even for consistent, fully articulated positions, is a very difficult matter. On the one hand, we need to identify the theoretical virtues that are properly in play in the comparative assessment of positions. On the other hand—and far more controversially—we need a method for turning a point-by-point comparison of consistent, fully articulated positions in terms of individual theoretical virtues into an overall assessment of those consistent, fully articulated positions. Even if we accept that there is a relatively small range of relevant theoretical virtues—minimal ontological commitment, minimal ideological commitment, minimal nomological commitment, maximal explanatory power, maximal explanatory breadth, maximal fit with established science, etc.—we may be sceptical that there is any general algorithm that turns judgments about those theoretical virtues into a judgment about the relative overall merits of competing positions. However, if we accept that there is a relatively small range of relevant theoretical virtues, then we will recognise that there must be special cases in which we can turn judgments about those theoretical virtues into judgments about the relative overall merits of competing, consistent, fully articulated positions: namely, cases in which there is point-by-point domination on the part of one of the competing positions. If, compared to a second position, a position has weaker ontological commitments, weaker ideological commitments, weaker nomological commitments, greater explanatory power, greater explanatory breadth, better fit with established science, and so on, then the one position is more theoretically virtuous than the second.

In practice, it is impossible to give full articulations of positions; in practice, the most that can be done is to articulate competing positions to the same level of detail. Thus, any results of comparative

review of positions are bound to be somewhat uncertain. It is always possible in principle that further articulation of competing positions may change the results of theoretical comparison of those positions. It is always possible in principle that further articulation will reveal that a position is inconsistent. It is always possible in principle that further articulation will change the overall assessment of the relative virtue of competing positions. None of these outcomes is surprising: there would not be widespread philosophical disagreement if the assessment of competing philosophical positions were a straightforward matter.

## **5. Articulation**

For the purposes of the discussion to follow, I shall suppose that Naturalist is committed to the following claims:

- (1N) Fundamental causal reality is entirely natural.
- (2N) Mindedness is late and local in the causal order.
- (3N) Mindedness is fully explained in terms of neural and other biological processes that occur in natural organisms in natural environments with appropriate natural histories.
- (4N) Human beings are minded organisms.

For the purposes of the discussion to follow, I shall suppose, further, that Idealist is committed to the following claims:

- (1I) Fundamental causal reality is entirely mental.
- (2I) Minds are neither late nor local in the causal order.
- (3I) 'Non-mental objects' are fully explained in terms of the 'contents' of minds.
- (4I) Human beings are minds.

For the purposes of the discussion to follow, I shall suppose that it is an open question on both views exactly what is required for 'full explanation' (in (3N) and (3I)). In particular, I shall suppose that it is an open question whether 'full explanation' invokes identity, or reduction, or constitution, or supervenience, or something else.

For the purposes of the discussion to follow, I shall suppose that both parties agree: (a) that there are sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and so on; and (b) that there are organisms that are conscious, that perceive, that act, that suffer, that believe, that desire, that intend, that remember, that learn, that predict, and so forth.

Given the preceding characterisations, it is plausible to suppose that Idealist is committed to the existence of 'supernatural' causings whose existence is denied by Naturalist. On the one hand, it is immediate that Naturalist denies that there are any 'supernatural' causings. On the other hand, when Idealist casts around for causes of the 'contents' of human minds, it seems more or less inevitable that Idealist will settle on a 'supernatural' mind, i.e. on a mind that is not the mind of a 'natural organism'. Without a 'supernatural' mind that causes the 'contents' of human minds, Idealist is unable to explain the 'contents' of human minds, communication between human beings, the interpersonal stability of 'non-mental' objects, etc.

## **6. Internal Review**

Many naturalists have attempted to argue that idealism is incoherent. Here, however, I shall try to argue for the consistency of idealism *relative to* naturalism.

To simplify exposition, let's suppose that there is just one universe (rather than a multiverse). That universe began with a bang about 13.82 billion years ago, and has been expanding ever since. Our sun formed about 4.57 billion years ago, and the earth formed about 4.54 billion years ago. Life emerged on the earth at least 3.5 billion years ago; eukaryotes emerged at least 2 billion years ago. The simplest animals date back at least 600 million years; the earliest mammals appeared at least 200 million years ago. The earliest hominids—who had brains the size of contemporary chimpanzees, and who used simple stone tools—appeared around 2.3 million years ago. By the time of the first appearance of *Homo Erectus*—around 1.5 million years ago—there had been a doubling in cranial capacity, matched with the use of fire and more complex stone tools. *Homo Sapiens*—the forerunner of anatomically modern human beings—appeared around 400,000 years ago; anatomically modern human beings themselves appeared no more than 200,000 years ago, and started to spread from Africa no more than 100,000 years ago. However we slice the pie, some forms of mindedness have had a long presence on the surface of the earth, perhaps dating back beyond 600 million years.

According to Naturalist, our universe *is* causal reality: there is nothing in causal reality that does not figure in a more detailed telling of the history recounted in the previous paragraph.

According to Idealist, the centrepiece of causal reality is a supernatural mind. That supernatural mind contains a developing representation that exactly matches the account of the universe given two paragraphs back. The temporal domain that the supernatural mind inhabits is also populated by other minds: one for each minded organism that figures in the completed account of the universe sketched two paragraphs back. Within the temporal domain that the minds inhabit, there is two-way transmission of information between the supernatural mind and the organismic minds: transmission from the supernatural mind to the organismic minds is 'perceptual input' to the organismic minds; and transmission from the organismic minds to the supernatural minds is 'behavioural output' from the organismic minds. The developing representation of the universe in the supernatural mind is both responsive to, and determinant of, transmission of information between the organismic minds and the supernatural mind.

I do not think that there is any obvious inconsistency in the view that I have just attributed to Idealist. The view is plainly no more vulnerable to experiential defeat than the view that is held by Naturalist. Moreover, the account of a temporal domain in which there is passage of information between minds *looks* consistent: we can model it with diagrams, and describe it using formally consistent sentences. True enough, Naturalist—or, at any rate, my kind of naturalist—thinks that it is *impossible* for there to be minds, and *impossible* for there to be a merely temporal domain, and *impossible* for there to be distinct causal entities that do not occupy distinct spatial locations, and *impossible* for there to be unmediated transmission of information between distinct causal entities, and *impossible* for there to be storage of information in entities that occupy no spatial volume, and so forth. But that Naturalist takes these things to be impossible is not enough to establish incoherence or inconsistency. In just the same way, that Idealist takes it to be impossible, that organisms' being conscious just *is* their undergoing certain kinds of neural processes, is insufficient to establish that Naturalist's position is incoherent or inconsistent.

There are idealists who have tried to argue for the inconsistency of naturalism, or its materialistic precursors. Famously, Berkeley asserts that materialism involves 'manifest contradiction'. He argues that one cannot coherently conceive of things that exist outside one's mind, since, in the very act of conceiving of such things, they are present to one's mind. (*Principles*, §23.) However, it seems pretty clear that, if Berkeley's argument were good, it would be no less a strike against ideas in the mind of God—e.g. the developing representation of the universe that I mentioned a few paragraphs back—than a strike against material objects. After all, it is no more the case that God's developing

representation of the universe is in my mind than it is that material objects are in my mind. If 'objects without the mind' open up a sceptical gap that atheists can exploit, then so, too, do ideas in the mind of God: we have no more direct access to the latter than we do to the former. (Indeed, if Berkeley's argument were good, it would be equally a strike against both God and other minds; for, evidently enough, we have no more direct access to either of them than we do to material objects.)

Just as we can argue for the consistency of idealism relative to naturalism, so, too, we can argue for the consistency of naturalism relative to idealism. Suppose that we start with the Idealist picture, according to which there is nothing but minds and their contents. Somehow, from the contents of the minds, we can recover the account of the universe that we gave a few paragraphs back. We can be sure that idealists will allow that we can do this. After all, that account just is the serious scientific account of the history of our universe; not even idealists claim to dispute it. But, once we have that account of our universe, it is a very short step to a consistent naturalism: we simply strip away the idealist theory of minds and their contents, leaving just the minded organisms that feature in the canonical account of the history of the universe. And then we declare that causal reality is fully and accurately described by that canonical history. True enough, Idealist supposes that it is impossible for that history to be true without the supporting idealist account of minds and their contents. But that Idealist takes this to be impossible is simply not enough to establish incoherence or inconsistency.

## **7. Comparative Review**

Given that Naturalist and Idealist both have consistent views, the only question that remains to be addressed is whether one of Naturalist and Idealist has a more theoretically virtuous view than the other. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I shall attempt to argue that Naturalist has a more theoretically virtuous view than Idealist. Since I have already conceded that Naturalist and Idealist are tied when it comes to the question of fit with established science, I shall not consider this aspect of theoretical virtue in the subsequent discussion.

First, let's consider the ontology of the two positions. On the one hand, Naturalist is committed to the denizens of the universe—minded organisms, sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and so on—and to nothing else. On the other hand, Idealist is committed to all of the denizens of the universe—minded organisms, sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and so on—as well as to a supernatural mind, to minds for all minded organisms, and (perhaps) to 'contents' in all of the minds. Of course, it is true that Naturalist and Idealist have radically different conceptions of the denizens of the universe: Naturalist supposes that none of the things that exist are minds or things that exist in minds, whereas Idealist supposes that all of the things that exist are minds, or things that exist in minds, or things that exist 'across' minds. However, Naturalist and Idealist agree on the existence of minded organisms, sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and so on. So, on point of ontological commitment, Naturalist is a clear winner: Idealist is committed to all of the ontology to which Naturalist is committed, and more besides.

Second, let's consider the ideology of the two positions. On the one hand, Naturalist is committed to the ideology needed to characterise the universe and its denizens, and to nothing else. On the other hand, Idealist is committed to the ideology needed to characterise the universe and its denizens, and to the ideology needed to characterise supernatural minds, minds for minded organisms, and 'contents' of minds. According to Naturalist, there is just one kind of causation: natural causation within the universe. However, according to Idealist, there are two kinds of causation: natural causation with the universe, and the type of causation that underwrites transfer of information between minds in the purely temporal domain in which minds are 'located'. Of course, it is true that Naturalist and Idealist have radically different conceptions of the application of ideology: Naturalist

supposes that none of the ideology has application to minds, or to things that exist in or across minds, whereas Idealist supposes that all of the ideology has application only to minds, or to things that exist in or across minds. Nonetheless, Naturalist and Idealist both make use of all of the ideology that has application to minded organisms, sofas, sculptures, cars, cities, rivers, planets, stars, and the like. So, on point of ideological commitment, Naturalist is a clear winner: Idealist is committed to all of the ideology to which Naturalist is committed, and more besides.

Third, let's consider the principles or laws that are invoked in the two positions. On the one hand, Naturalist is committed to just those principles and laws that are required for the universe. On the other hand, Idealist is committed to those principles and laws that are required for the universe as well as to the laws and principles that are required for the domain of minds and 'contents' of minds. As before, it seems that Naturalist is a clear winner: Idealist is committed to every principle and law to which Naturalist is committed, and more besides. Hence, on the combination of theoretical commitments—ontological commitments, ideological commitments and nomological commitments—Naturalist is a clear winner: on each of the dimensions of theoretical commitment, Idealist is committed to everything to which Naturalist is committed, and more besides.

I suspect that many readers will be thinking that the arguments that I have just made cannot be any good. In particular, many readers will recall that I noted earlier that Idealist does not agree with Naturalist that for organisms to be conscious just is for them to be undergoing certain kinds of neural processes. How can it be that Naturalist defeats Idealist on each of ontological commitment, ideological commitment and commitment to principles and laws, when Naturalist is committed to this claim and Idealist is not? Given that Naturalist accepts this claim and Idealist rejects it, doesn't Naturalist thereby incur some kind of theoretical commitment that Idealist does not have?

No. When Naturalist denies that there is a supernatural mind, Naturalist does not incur a theoretical commitment that Idealist does not have. Of course, if the postulation of a supernatural mind increases the explanatory power of Idealist's position, or if the postulation of a supernatural mind increases the explanatory breadth of Idealist's position, or if the postulation of a supernatural mind increases the fit of Idealist's position with established science, then it may be that the additional theoretical commitment of Idealist leads to an overall increase in theoretical virtue. But it will still be the case that Naturalist does better than Idealist on the count of theoretical commitment.

When Idealist insists that organisms' being conscious is something over and above their undergoing certain kinds of neural processes, Idealist is taking on an additional bunch of theoretical commitments that Naturalist does not take on. If the postulation of minds and 'contents' of minds increases the explanatory power of Idealist's position, or if the postulation of minds and 'contents' of minds increases the explanatory breadth of Idealist's position, or if the postulation of minds and 'contents' of minds increases the fit of Idealist's position with established science, then it may be that Idealist's additional theoretical commitments lead to an overall increase in theoretical virtue. But it will still be the case that Naturalist does better than Idealist on the count of theoretical commitment.

Some readers may protest that there are compelling arguments for the claim that organisms' being conscious is something over and above their undergoing certain kinds of neural processes. Consider zombies. If it is possible for there to be zombies—creatures whose neural processing is just like ours but who do not have the conscious experiences that we have—then it is not the case that for organisms to be conscious just is for them to be undergoing certain kinds of neural processes. Consider Mary. If Mary acquires new non-physical knowledge when she leaves her black and white room and sees a ripe tomato, then it is not the case that for organisms to perceive their more or less immediate environments just is for them, in those environments, to be undergoing certain kinds of



neural and other biological processes that have been appropriately shaped by local, social and evolutionary history.

These arguments cut no ice in the present context. Naturalist and Idealist disagree about whether it is possible for there to be zombies. Naturalist and Idealist also disagree about whether it is possible for there to be someone like Mary; according to Naturalist, no organism can have complete physical knowledge of the universe that it inhabits. Given that Naturalist and Idealist disagree about the possibility of zombies and the possibility of 'physically omniscient' organisms, arguments that appeal to these alleged possibilities are powerless to decide between their views. If the respective modal commitments were primitive, there would be no uncontroversial way of determining whether the costs are greater on one side than the other. (Should we suppose that primitive possibilities are less expensive than primitive necessities? All else being equal, should we seek to minimise primitive possibilities?) But, in any case, the respective modal commitments are not primitive; rather, they are tied to other theoretical commitments of the respective views.

Even if it is granted that, when we consider theoretical—ontological, ideological, and nomological—commitments, Naturalist's view trumps Idealist's view, it does not follow that, when all theoretical virtues are taken into account, Naturalist's view trumps Idealist's view. For all that has been argued to this point, it may be that Idealist's view bests Naturalist's view in the trade-off between theoretical commitments and fit with data; and it may be that Idealist's view has greater explanatory power than Naturalist's view; and it may be that Idealist's view has greater explanatory breadth than Naturalist's view.

But, given the construction of Idealist's view, it is hard to see how Idealist's view could trump Naturalist's view on any of these further considerations.

On Naturalist's view, there is just the natural universe and its denizens. If there is an initial state of the universe, then either the existence of that initial state is contingent and there is no explanation of its contingent existence, or the existence of that initial state is necessary and there is no explanation of its necessary existence. If there is an initial state of the universe, then either the nature of that initial state is contingent and there is no explanation of the contingent nature that it has, or the nature of that initial state is necessary and there is no explanation of the necessary nature that it has. If there are laws related to the causal evolution of the universe, then either the obtaining of those laws is contingent and there is no explanation of their contingently obtaining, or the obtaining of those laws is necessary and there is no explanation of their necessarily obtaining. If there are powers that drive the persisting existence of the universe, then either the operation of those powers is contingent and there is no explanation of the contingent operation of those powers, or the operation of those powers is necessary, and there is no explanation of the necessary operation of those powers. If there are chance events, then, a fortiori, there is no explanation of why those chance events play out as they do. And, on Naturalist's view, there are no other explanatory surds: the universe evolves chancily from its initial state under the laws (or as driven by the relevant powers).

On Idealist's view, there is the supernatural mind, the contents of the supernatural mind, the other minds, and the contents of the other minds. Even on the most economical version of this view—in which the existence and nature of the other minds and the existence and nature of the contents of the other minds are explained in terms of the supernatural mind and the contents of the supernatural mind—we still need to consider all of the following points. If there is an initial state of the supernatural mind, then either the existence of that initial state is contingent and there is no explanation of its contingent existence, or the existence of that initial state is necessary and there is no explanation of its necessary existence. If there is an initial state of the supernatural mind, then

either the nature of that initial state is contingent and there is no explanation of the contingent nature that it has, or the nature of that initial state is necessary and there is no explanation of the necessary nature that it has. If there are initial contents of the supernatural mind, then either the existence of those initial contents is contingent and there is no explanation of their contingent existence, or the existence of those initial contents is necessary and there is no explanation of their necessary existence. If there are initial contents of the supernatural mind, then either the nature of those initial contents is contingent and there is no explanation of the contingent nature that they have, or the nature of those initial contents is necessary and there is no explanation of the necessary nature that they have. If there are laws related to the causal evolution of the supernatural mind, then either the obtaining of those laws is contingent and there is no explanation of their contingently obtaining, or the obtaining of those laws is necessary and there is no explanation of their necessarily obtaining. If there are powers that drive the persisting existence of the supernatural mind, then either the operation of those powers is contingent and there is no explanation of the contingent operation of those powers, or the operation of those powers is necessary, and there is no explanation of the necessary operation of those powers. If chance plays a role in the evolution of state of the supernatural mind, then, a fortiori, there is no explanation of why those chance events play out as they do. If chance plays a role in changes to the contents of the supernatural mind, then, a fortiori, there is no explanation of why the chances play out as they do. On Idealist's view there are no fewer explanatory surds than there are on Naturalist's view: on Idealist's view, the supernatural mind and its contents evolve chancily from an initial state under the laws (or as driven by the relevant powers).

Even if it is granted that Idealist's view achieves no better than parity with Naturalist's view when it comes to explanatory surds, it might be claimed that there is particular data that is better explained by Idealist's view than by Naturalist's view. Each of the following claims is data, i.e. a claim that is uncontroversially agreed between Naturalist and Idealist: there are *conscious* organisms; there are organisms that *reason*; there are organisms that engage in *science*; there are organisms that engage in *politics*; there are *virtuous* organisms; there are organisms that practice *religion*; there are organisms that pursue *mathematics*; there are organisms that act from *conscience*; there are *musical* organisms; there are *poetic* organisms; there are *storytelling* organisms; there are *philosophical* organisms; and so on.

Is there good reason to suppose that Idealist offers explanations of this kind of data that is better than the explanations that are offered by Naturalist? It is hard to see how there could be. On the one hand, it is uncontroversial that certain kinds of appropriately embedded neural activation are necessary for organisms to be conscious, to reason, to pursue science, to act politically, to act virtuously, to practice religion, to pursue mathematics, to act from conscience, to produce music, to write poetry, to tell stories, to make philosophy, and so on. No organism that lacks appropriately embedded neural activation—or that has suffered sufficiently serious damage to what would otherwise be appropriately embedded neural activation—has ever done any of these things. On the other hand, there are many limitations on the ability of organisms to reason, to pursue science, to act politically, to act virtuously, to practice religion, to pursue mathematics, to act from conscience, to produce music, to write poetry, to tell stories, to make philosophy, and so on: organisms do all of these things very imperfectly. Any serious view is required to explain *both* the abilities *and* the limitations of minded organisms.

How should we suppose that Naturalist and Idealist fare when it comes to explanation of the abilities and limitations of minded organisms?

On the one hand, Idealist's explanation must appeal to the creative intentions of the supernatural mind: minded organisms have the abilities and limitations that they have because the supernatural

mind intended for them to have these abilities and limitations. This is a weak kind of explanation: essentially, it invokes new theoretical commitments each time a new piece of data is considered. Organism O has ability A just in case its mind has ability A'. Organism O's mind has ability A' just because the supernatural mind intended for organism O's mind to have ability A'. The supernatural mind intended for organism O's mind to have ability A' just in case the model of reality in the supernatural mind had features that modelled O's mind as having ability A'. And the features of the model of reality in the supernatural mind that modelled O's mind as having ability A' are theoretical primitives in Idealist's explanation of organism O's possession of ability A.

On the other hand, Naturalist's explanation appeals to the immediate, local, social and evolutionary histories of organism O: organism O's possession of ability A is explained in terms of O's genetic endowment and upbringing; but, in turn, O's genetic endowment and upbringing are explained in terms of the social and biological evolution of O's ancestors. Unlike the explanation given by Idealist, the explanation given by Naturalist does not invoke new theoretical commitments each time a new piece of data is considered. Of course, at present, there is much that Naturalist does not know about social and biological evolution; in many cases, the details of the explanation of the abilities and limitations of minded organisms are not to hand. However, there is no reason to suppose that there is any in-principle objection to the suggestion that Naturalist could explain the abilities and limitations of minded organism without invoking more theoretical commitments that Idealist invokes in explaining those abilities and limitations. I conclude that there is no reason to suppose that Idealist offers better explanations than Naturalist of the abilities and limitations of minded organisms.

When we consider all of ontological commitment, ideological commitment, nomological commitment, trade-off between overall commitment and fit with data, goodness of explanation, breadth of explanation, and fit with established science, we see that naturalism wins clearly in some categories, and at least breaks even in all other categories. In other words, when we consider the full range of theoretical virtues, we see that Naturalism trumps Idealism. Or so it seems to me.

## **8. Stocktake**

Even if the argument that I have just sketched is not otherwise defective, there is a serious question about how much it can accomplish. I began with fairly condensed articulations of naturalism and idealism, summarised in four short principles. I then gave quite compact arguments for the consistency of the two views relative to one another. Finally, I gave a slightly more complex argument for the claim that, on point-by-point comparison of theoretical virtue, the version of naturalism under consideration trumps the version of idealism under consideration. If the argument holds up, the most that I can have established is that one kind of naturalism is more theoretically virtuous than one kind of idealism.

If you are an idealist who accepts the kind of idealism that has figured in my discussion, then—if my argument holds up—you have been given a reason to think that there is a kind of naturalism that is theoretically superior to the kind of idealism that you accept. Does it follow that you should abandon idealism and become a naturalist? Hardly! For all that has been explicitly argued here, there may be some other kind of idealism that is more theoretically virtuous than the kind of naturalism that has figured in my discussion. For all that has been explicitly argued here, there may be some other kind of idealism that is more theoretically virtuous than any kind of naturalism. For all that has been explicitly argued here, there may be some kind of non-idealistic non-naturalism that is more theoretically virtuous than the kind of naturalism that has figured in my discussion. For all that has been explicitly argued here, there may be some kind of non-idealistic non-naturalism that is more theoretically virtuous than any kind of naturalism. Even if the argument that I have given is in no way

defective, it falls well short of establishing that there is a version of naturalism that is more theoretically virtuous than all versions of idealism, and it falls even further short of establishing that all idealists ought to become naturalists.

Of course, it is also controversial whether the argument that I have sketched is not otherwise defective. There are several points on which it may be open to challenge. First, the argument depends substantively on assumptions about the markers of theoretical virtue: if there are theoretical virtues other than (all else being equal) minimising ontological commitment, (all else being equal) minimising ideological commitment, (all else being equal) minimising nomological commitment, (all else being equal) fitting data, (all else being equal) explaining data, (all else being equal) minimising explanatory surds, and (all else being equal) fitting with established knowledge, then the argument is incomplete and requires reconsideration. Second, the argument depends substantively on the claim that the version of naturalism under consideration is point-by-point at least as theoretically virtuous as the version of idealism under consideration: if there is even one point on which it is not clear that naturalism is at least as theoretically virtuous than idealism, then the argument breaks down. Third, the argument depends substantively on the assumption that decision between worldviews is—and should be—entirely a matter of weighing theoretical virtues: if one can rationally maintain a worldview that one holds to be less theoretically virtuous than a competing worldview, then the argument that I have given breaks down entirely. These three assumptions all look solid to me; but I should acknowledge, at least, that these three assumptions may not seem quite so solid to everyone else.

Perhaps some may wish to object that, since my argument is an argument from point-by-point dominance, it is vulnerable to well-known objections to decision-theoretic arguments from point-by-point dominance. But it should be noted that my argument is not a decision-theoretic argument; the style of argument from point-by-point dominance that I have employed seems to me to be entirely unproblematic.

Perhaps some may wish to object that arguments from theoretical virtue depend upon a very controversial kind of epistemological internalism. Suppose that Idealist thinks that the supernatural mind causes all other minds to be such that, when they are functioning properly, they accept the central tenets that characterise Idealist's position. If Idealist's position is correct, then all properly functioning minds accept that Idealist's position is correct *even if* Idealist's position is less theoretically virtuous than Naturalist's position. Of course, at this point, Idealist is depending upon a very controversial kind of epistemological externalism. If Naturalist is correct in thinking that Naturalism is the most theoretically virtuous position, then, in fact, if Naturalist's position is correct, all maximally virtuous theorists accept that Naturalist's position is correct *because* Naturalist's position is the most theoretically virtuous position. Moreover, if Naturalist's position is the most theoretically virtuous position, then that is overwhelming reason to think that Naturalist's position is correct: for, if Naturalist's position is the most theoretically virtuous position, then there is simply no reason to believe in anything that does not find a place in Naturalist's worldview.

No doubt many will wish to object to the 'identity theory of mind' that I have attributed to Naturalist. I anticipate that some will claim that one must 'feign anaesthesia' in order to adopt this position. It seems to me that this claim is a travesty. Naturalist says that, for organisms to be conscious just is for them to be undergoing certain kinds of neural processes; and Naturalist says that for organisms to perceive their more or less immediate environments just is for them, in those environments, to be undergoing certain kinds of neural and other biological processes that have been appropriately shaped by local, social and evolutionary history. Since Naturalist accepts that organisms are *conscious* and that organisms *perceive* their immediate environments, it is obvious that Naturalist does not 'feign anaesthesia'. True enough, Naturalist rejects entities that Idealist postulates in order

to account for consciousness, perception, and the like: but it is one thing to reject entities postulated in order to account for consciousness, perception, and the like, and quite another thing to reject consciousness and perception themselves.

It is a very curious thing that proponents of Idealism have considered it to be a satisfactory counter to 'scepticism', 'nihilism', and the like. On the contrary, it seems to me that Idealism is a very close cousin to 'brain-in-a-vat' scepticism and other anti-naturalistic fantasies. Moreover, it seems to me that Idealism is inferior to Naturalism for much the same kinds of reasons that 'brain-in-a-vat' scepticism and other anti-naturalistic fantasies are inferior to Naturalism: a proper weighing of theoretical virtues discloses that Naturalism is the most virtuous worldview. There is nothing 'warm and fuzzy' about Idealism.

### **9. Concluding Observation**

No small furry animals were harmed in the writing of this paper.