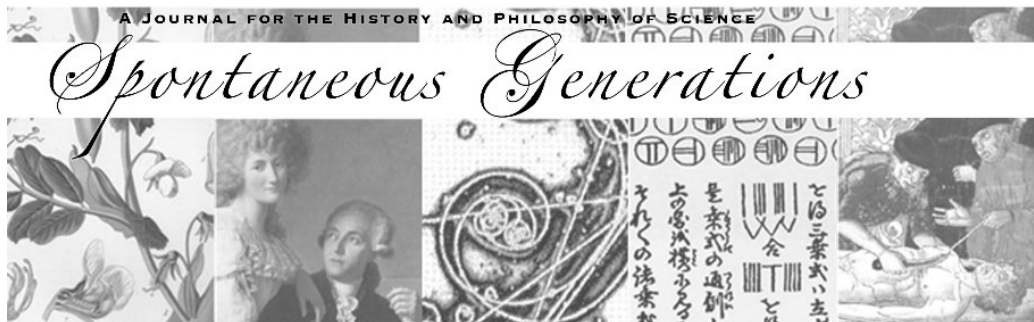




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Source: *Spontaneous Generations: A Journal for the History and Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2009) 9-27.

Published by: The University of Toronto

DOI: [10.4245/sponge.v3i1.6577](https://doi.org/10.4245/sponge.v3i1.6577)

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Published online at jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/SpontaneousGenerations
ISSN 1913 0465

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Phenomenology in the American Vein

Justus Buchler's Ordinal Naturalism and its Importance for the Justification of Epistemic Objects*

Leon Niemoczynski[†]

In this essay, I explore Justus Buchler's ordinal naturalism with the goal of establishing how his phenomenological approach extends the range of human inquiry to include the many and varied traits of natural phenomena that are not "simply" the result of sensate experience or material functions. To achieve this goal I critically assess Buchler's notion of "ontological parity"—the idea that abstract phenomena such as values, relations, ideals, and other mental contents are just as relevant as sense-data when one attempts to provide an adequate description of the world in naturalistic terms. I argue that certain phenomena, subsisting within what Buchler calls the "proceptive domain," are legitimate objects of knowledge as they are part of a larger domain of phenomenological analysis: nature more broadly and justly understood. It is my view that in the attempt to describe the natural world Buchler's ordinal naturalism succeeds where other forms of naturalism fail because his form of naturalism offers a more capacious view of nature that attempts to describe whatever is in any way, not just focus on what is readily apparent to specific forms of observation that may privilege one domain of analysis over another. I draw the conclusion that because Buchler's ordinal naturalism contains within it a working principle of ontological parity, his approach to nature fulfills the criteria of the phenomenological method, and so I title his ordinal naturalism an ordinal phenomenology (Corrington 1992, 1-6, 9-14). Ultimately it is my aim to bring Buchler's thought into closer connection with continental phenomenology, as well as to illustrate a more just and open understanding of nature through an analysis of his unique variety of philosophical naturalism.

*Received July 2008. Revised paper accepted November 2009.

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I. TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN NATURALISM

American naturalism, as it was developed in the twentieth century and continues today, is a distinct school of thought that believes that *nature* is available to philosophical inquiry. Philosophers like John Dewey, George Santayana, John Herman Randall, and F.J.E. Woodbridge claimed that “empirical observation and evidence in the process of inquiry” best provide means toward knowledge and explanatory closure of a fully “natural” world (Ryder 1994, 15). Just what nature, or what sort of inquiry and the knowledge it produces about nature, is a matter of debate. Naturalism, at the very least, holds that “whatever there might be is entirely an aspect of nature” (Ryder 1994, 13-14). The import of this claim comes from understanding naturalism’s view that “nature” admits no supernatural realm; there is nothing “outside” of nature, or one might say that there is nothing “other than” the natural.

Like empiricism, naturalism takes seriously the ideas that *empirical observation*, *sense perception*, and *evidence* are the central components in giving knowledge of the world. It avoids the speculative metaphysical tradition and its Platonic surplus of another, ideal world. Naturalism tends, rather, to favor the *scientific method* as the best method for obtaining knowledge about a world as it eschews metaphysical speculation and intuition in favor of public verifiability. That is, if one wants knowledge then one should appeal to empirical evidence to get it, not speculate about the otherworldly. It should be no surprise, then, that some of naturalism’s major proponents, whether the classical American pragmatist John Dewey, or the more contemporary naturalistic thinker, John Shook, have praised the scientific method as the best method for achieving knowledge about the natural world. As Dewey, Hook, and Nagel put it in their article, “Are Naturalists Materialists?,” “in maintaining that scientific method is the most reliable method for achieving knowledge, the naturalist means what he says” (1945, 111).

Consequently, some naturalists have drawn the inference that certain features of the world, if not included within the scope of an empirically given and scientifically verifiable nature, do not meaningfully contribute to knowledge. Put another way, naturalism’s main claim that there is *nothing beyond nature* means, from an epistemological viewpoint, that realms completely beyond nature could in principle never yield empirically verifiable knowledge, and from a metaphysical viewpoint, that there simply are no worlds beyond the empirical world.¹ Similar to a species of

¹ Interestingly, a hidden problem in the naturalist’s account of knowledge already at this point is presented: if one is to positively outright deny the existence of the supernatural, then how does the concept come to play in natural experience (at all) so as to meaningfully be denied?

logical positivism, naturalism states that to be meaningfully known is to be evidenced in a fully natural world that human beings come to know through empirical testing and observation. I might summarize these ideas by stating in the negative: not natural means nonexistent, and not-meaningfully-known. As F.J.E. Woodbridge wrote, “knowledge is of what we perceive, and I have named that ‘Nature.’ I can find, however, no convincing reason for turning what we perceive into a substitute for something else” (1994, 66).

Naturalism in the form just outlined typically leads to a problem that I title “experiential discrimination.” The problem might be understood by asking the following question: On what basis within the naturalist’s framework are inquirers to discriminate what counts as an epistemic object, a legitimate object of knowledge? Surely a distinction must be made between what is “natural,” and therefore what is capable of supporting empirical observation in an “objectively determinate world,” and what is “supernatural,” that is, what is claimed to be beyond this world and beyond the realm of genuine knowledge—according to the naturalist’s definition of what can count as knowledge, stated above (Ryder 1994, 20). On what basis are we to admit one trait of experience and yet deny another if nature is all that there is?

Naturalism does not invoke the Kantian answer that a priori structures of the human mind delimit what can or cannot count as legitimate objects of knowledge.² Naturalism, at least in the American tradition, follows Hume in denying that there are any concrete, rational, a priori givens that will hold necessarily for the acquisition of knowledge. Matters of fact—that is, ephemeral states of affairs within an ever-changing nature—permit no a priori categories of knowledge to hold permanently during nature’s ever-changing and deeply contingent evolutionary course. This means that there are no grounds to claim that there is anything metaphysically necessary about the world, or necessary about what we may know about the world, for we are a species that is fully a part of, and wholly immersed within, an always-changing, deeply contingent nature. On this view nothing is fixed or final (epistemologically or metaphysically speaking) because human beings are part and parcel of nature. As F.J.E. Woodbridge put it,

an appeal to the stars, the seasons, the swarm of animals,
and the rest is an appeal to the ultimately supreme court of
all knowledge. Setting ourselves apart is like setting anything
else apart. It gives us “Nature and man” just as it gives us

²Again, one might rightly ask whether naturalists are inadvertently using a Kantian noumenal (supernatural beyond) to help affirm what is just a phenomenal appearance of nature.

“Nature and the sun.” . . . Is it not time, I am forced to ask, to stop such nonsense and cease to think, as Hume apparently did, that what is called ‘human nature’ is not only the source of knowledge but also the only thing that we know about it? Is it not time to stop identifying experience with what we experience and trying to have philosophies of ‘pure experience’? (1994, 61)

And John Herman Randall elaborated that “. . . naturalism finds itself in thoroughgoing opposition to all forms of thought which assert the existence of a supernatural or transcendental Realm of Being and which makes knowledge of that realm a fundamental importance to human living” (1944, 358). For the naturalists, then, nature does not represent any beyond; it is simply what we perceive it to be.

II. NATURALISM’S PENCHANT FOR SCIENCE AND A PHYSICAL WORLD

From this point, some naturalists, such as W.V.O. Quine, have concluded that what provides the greatest deal of certainty when it comes to knowledge is an external physical world and its corresponding sense-data. Nature is physical bodies in motion, and what one knows best about the world may be stated in terms of describing those bodies; that is, in the language of the natural sciences. As naturalism’s empirical theme suggests, knowledge of the natural world consists of knowing facts about a physical external world based on an inductive trial-and-error basis, and the valuation of those facts is said to be a human addition. It is no secret that Quine was obsessed with the replacement of normative epistemology with empirical psychology, favoring the sensate and physical terms of experience. As he put it, “two cardinal tenets of empiricism remained unassailable, however, and so remain to this day. One is that whatever evidence there *is* for science *is* sensory evidence. The other, to which I shall recur, is that all inculcation of meanings of words must rest ultimately on sensory evidence” (Quine 1969, 75). And in an oft-quoted passage from “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” Quine wrote that

physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries—not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posts comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. Let me interject that for my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer’s gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. (Quine 1961, 44)

Certainly the empirical strain of naturalism asserts that nonphysical aspects of nature (in the case of this discussion, abstract mental contents)

are, if not completely reducible to physical terms, best expressed by them. This preference for a physical nature (and its corresponding sense-data), and the scientific observation and consequent explanation of such a physical nature, enforces a longstanding dualism between a physical nature, or “matters of fact” (typically “outside” of the mind), and “relations of ideas” (found merely “in” the mind). One can most adequately trace this fact/value dualism back to David Hume. Many forms of naturalism, ultimately, have followed Hume in a sensationistic doctrine of perception that, when taken far enough, can lead to problematic forms of skepticism, especially when a wedge is driven between what is a “fact of nature” and what is an “idea about nature.”³

The sensationistic doctrine of perception essentially asserts that our experience of nature is limited to the types of things that the senses are suited to perceive.⁴ Hume’s argument was a beginning point for such a view, but he did not go so far as to claim that one could “know” with any degree of certainty a physical world. Hume’s claim was that perception can give us nothing but “sense-data,” and some naturalists, such as George Santayana, followed Hume in taking a skeptical route about an external physical world. Santayana pointed out that the doctrine of sensationism could only lead to a “solipsism of the present moment,” or a “show of the present moment,” where sense-data are the only reliable sources of knowledge—albeit a “knowledge” limited to the current moment where any drawn inferences that point beyond the present moment are done so only according to “animal faith,” not rational certainty (Santayana 1955a). The denial of knowledge follows (and here I mean the sort of knowledge that naturalists are seeking: publicly verifiable knowledge) because anything not evidenced directly by sense-data cannot not be located in an “objectively determinate world,” and there is no subsequent

³It seems that, for American naturalists, human beings are part of nature, and hence everything in their minds is part of nature as well. But if epistemology is naturalized, then why are human values (or other objects of knowledge not found directly in sense perception) considered “mere,” “secondary,” “less significant” or somehow “less natural” when it comes to publicly demonstrable forms of knowledge? Metaphysically speaking, is it possible that I *know* that I am anxious in a room full of people, despite me not telling anyone or not having anyone intersubjectively verify and confirm that such is my experience? It is interesting to note, as Jaegwon Kim has, that American naturalism was and still is a good less sensitive toward, or even unconcerned with, metaphysical issues in this context. See, Jaegwon Kim, “The American Origins of Philosophical Naturalism,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* APA Centennial Volume (2003): 88.

⁴Although some skeptical naturalists will not go so far as to say that sense-data “proves” the existence of external physical objects. Others in the naturalist tradition follow John Locke, for example, rather than Hume, and argue that objects in an external world contain the power to produce certain sensations under certain conditions.

certainty beyond the sense-data.⁵ Thus, there can be no foundation for real knowledge, let alone a reality beyond sense-data, if one follows the empirical theory of knowledge through to its most extreme conclusions.

Naturalists such as Santayana have concluded from this line of thought that abstract phenomena, not perceived directly in sense-data, could not be “natural” and either do not “really” exist, at least in any meaningful way, or that non-perceptual phenomena cannot contribute to publicly demonstrable knowledge—that is, scientific knowledge. Santayana’s Humean skepticism thus challenges any form of knowledge: not only does Santayana challenge the supernatural, he claims that there is nothing beyond the “show of the present moment,” even in *this* world (Santayana 1955b, 33-40). Yet here I must point out that not all naturalists are skeptics toward the *possibility* of knowledge, as Santayana most certainly is, but naturalists of this variety are certainly skeptical about a priori knowledge, or any form of knowledge that is about objects beyond immediate sense perception. If something is to count as a legitimate “epistemic object” (an object of knowledge), then it must be empirically observable within an objectively determinate world. So far as metaphysics is concerned, I certainly do not intend to say that naturalists are proponents of a brute eliminative materialism or supervenience physicalism, views that state that there are no other base realities than physical realities, when it comes to an empirical theory of reality and knowledge of it. I only mean to suggest that for naturalists, a physical world is the *basis* for meaningful knowledge. For example, in denying the “accusation” that naturalism is materialism pure and simple, Dewey, Hook, and Nagel maintained, “the occurrence of a *mental event* is *contingent upon the occurrence of certain complex physico-chemico-physiological events*. . .” (1945, 107; emphasis mine). This contingency seems to suggest that non-sensate perceptual experiences reduce to, or at the very least depend upon, the material conditions that the senses perceive. Evidence for scientific knowledge is sensory evidence (Quine) and so goes the naturalist preference for the physical world that produces sense-data.

While a thorough discussion of sense-data empiricism and skepticism goes beyond my concern, I would like to emphasize that the form of naturalism under discussion here places the abstract, or what I shall call the “intangible” phenomena of experience, at the “beck and call” of material functions that are ultimately “physical” in nature (an “intangible” would include abstract mental content including values, relations, and

⁵For an experiment to pass the test of public verification, Santayana’s extreme form of skepticism would bar one observer from actually knowing whether another observer had experienced the same “show of the present moment” that had just passed during the moment in which the experiment had taken place.

ideals that make for the experience of consciousness and subjectivity; the experience of freedom and the self; and also religious, aesthetic, logical, and moral value). While naturalists do “emphatically acknowledge that men are capable of thought, feeling, and emotion. . . in consequence *these powers are contingent upon the organization of human bodies. . .*” (Dewey, Hook, and Nagel 1945, 110; emphasis mine). What is more, it seems that contemporary naturalism seems to insist along with Dewey and others that “the question of the truth of materialism of this type can be decided only on the basis of empirical evidence alone” (Dewey, Hook, and Nagel 1945, 107). My question is simply this: Why place these sorts of epistemic objects (objects of nature that are intangible in character) into a less significant role when providing for an account of the natural world? Moreover, if one cannot empirically test and observe such objects within a public realm, is meaningful knowledge about these objects impossible?

Again, I am beginning here with the most problematic aspects of how naturalists make key distinctions between what is natural (the physical world, sense-data, and the subsidiary mental experiences that the world produces) and what is taken to be not natural. I do not wish to take naturalism to task on these issues because one may object that the world produces ideas, and that the scientific method may indeed be applied to ideas. So ideas are fully natural as they belong to human minds—products of nature—and science is fully capable of dealing with human minds. (Although even this may be problematic given the hard problem of consciousness: why should the physical processing of the brain give rise to a rich inner life at all?) But with the exclusion of valuations, ideals, morality, and religious experience from the realm of publicly verifiable and scientific knowledge, I only ask whether a more adequate description of nature might be warranted if one has the aim to describe nature in its most broad and just terms.⁶

The naturalist’s answer to this criticism, of course, is that physical bodies and their corresponding empirical data directly pertain to the “publicly demonstrable” claims of the scientific method, deemed to be the best method for obtaining knowledge—so certainly the scientific claim

⁶Such an exclusion may be more insidious than I am presenting it here. Stephen Turner writes that the exclusionary practices of (scientific) expert claims routinely “affect, combat, refute, and negate” some faction or group of persons who subscribe to a particular set of valuations. For example, “when scientists proclaim the truth of Darwinism, they refute, negate, and whatnot the Christian view of the creation, and thus Creations. When research is done on racial differences, it affects, negates, and so on, those who are negatively characterized.” Expert claims and the exclusion of some portions of experience and knowledge can have dire consequences. See Stephen Turner, “Political Epistemology, Experts and the Aggregation of Knowledge” *Spontaneous Generations* (2007).

upon nature is warranted as nature is fundamentally physical. Knowledge of the world is *empirical* knowledge, it is knowledge that “the naturalists maintain is publicly verifiable” (Dewey, Hook, and Nagel 1945, 111). Any object that is to count as an object of knowledge *must* be in principle verifiable by what science deems “acceptable” in terms of an observation and consequent intersubjective confirmation—that is, observation of an empirical world through the judgment of sense perception and following agreement about its legitimacy.⁷ Public confirmability is the test for all scientific knowledge (Kim 2003, 96) and “as naturalism envisages the nature of this method...the method is applicable only to things which are physical or ‘public’ and not to states and events which are mental or ‘private’” (Dewey, Hook, and Nagel 1945, 110).

I believe that naturalism’s claim that the scientific method is the *best* way to know nature is problematic in two ways, if the scientific method entails the subscribing to sense-data empiricism as outlined above. First, while the intangible epistemic objects of human experience are part of *nature*, naturalism does not see these phenomena as legitimate regions of inquiry to be known through the application of the scientific method because they have no publicly verifiable character.⁸ Second, while the intangibles of nature “exist,” they only exist with a subsidiary status compared to the objective determinations of a physical world.⁹ When it comes to regarding the ontological status of abstract mental content, naturalism incessantly invokes a preference for explaining the conditions of the physical or material world, and *not* the related abstract experience of it. Interestingly, naturalists warn against a “fallacy of selective emphasis” (a fallacy stating that one should not, after abstracting from experience, treat the resultant abstraction as primary or more real than the experience

⁷Communication of personal experiences or subjective mental experiences would presumably not be enough to warrant knowledge, at least as the type of naturalism under discussion here characterizes it. Hence William James’ most notable difference from naturalism and closer tie to *phenomenology*, which takes seriously descriptive reports of first-person experience. See *Pragmatism Considers Phenomenology*, eds. Corrington, Hausman, and Seibohm (1987).

⁸Paul Weiss was a philosopher who, along with Buchler, challenged the idea that public verifiability should be linked with the capability of some phenomenon to be “known” within personal or private experience unconnected to others. Paul Weiss, *Privacy* (Weiss 1983, 1-16). Weiss maintains that there are different kinds of evidence that will enable one to remark about familiarity with the natural world.

⁹By “objective determination” I mean that a subjective experience, for example, should only exist if the physical parts of the brain produce that experience. “Material transactions” producing intangible experience would be another way to describe this: the technical term in the philosophy of mind is “epiphenomenalism.” Consciousness or subjectivity rides on the material components that produce it.

from which it was abstracted).¹⁰ Despite the admonition, naturalism does emphasize sense perception of an external world: it is a thinly disguised species of positivism where the physical world is taken to be primary and more “real” than the abstraction associated with it.

These problems are precisely what phenomenologists have taken issue with, in the sense that all mental contents are subordinated to the physical transactions of the world, *rather than being represented as mutual inhabitants of the world as such*. Not all epistemic contents have clear and concrete empirical sense correlates, so it would be wrong to assume that explaining physical causes of abstract phenomena gets to the heart of explaining related abstract phenomena fully and completely. Thus one finds that the intangible phenomena of experience are “simply” the result of material functions in a physical world, and one finds that the physical world is the most important category of description when it comes to knowledge. Again, I do not mean to claim that naturalists outright deny that there are experiences of abstract realities. But many naturalists do *downgrade* these sorts of experiences (aesthetic, value driven, ideal, moral, and religious experience) to the realm of *non-knowledge*, for these sorts of experiences are incapable of standing up to “critical scrutiny” of the scientific method and they also cannot be verified by a community to stand as knowledge. It should be noted that Dewey and company did try to formulate a naturalism in which values and ends, both moral and aesthetic, are taken as real and legitimate. However, because science—their preferred method—can only define nature through a scheme of ideas that takes seriously just empirical data, the intangibles of experience are more often than not left out as *legitimate* objects of knowledge—nevermind that the ontological status of the knower who is experiencing these intangibles is put into question. John E. Smith summarizes this point in the following way, “One might say that Dewey laid such stress on the objective and public nature of experience that there are grounds for questioning whether he did justice to its personal and individualized aspects. . . he did not indeed omit this dimension of experience, but no reader of Dewey can entirely suppress the impulse to ask from time to time the question, ‘Whose experience?’” (Smith 1987, 86).¹¹

¹⁰For Dewey’s discussion of selective emphasis, see *Experience and Nature* (Dewey 2007, 29-31).

¹¹Of course I do not mean to suggest that Dewey believed that there was something like a “substantial self.” However, when coming so close to a reductionistic sense-data form of empiricism, Dewey’s naturalism comes close to falling headlong into a philosophy that has *no* subjectively experiencing knower; there would be only transactions of physical materials, and “the self” would be “nothing more” than those physical or material transactions, perhaps even identical to them. Yet, what, after all, is a transaction? A motion, discharge of stimuli, or something else? Postmodern skeptics would contest his

In my judgment, then, the form of naturalism discussed so far requires reinterpretation because it becomes so intent on denying the supernatural that it actually ends up unnecessarily excluding the abstract components of experience that clearly can and do contribute to knowledge (knowledge of the self or knowledge of the ideal laws that govern the universe, for example). Such exclusion comes under the supposition that aspects of nature that are not directly perceived by the senses simply cannot be real, at least in any relevant way, and consequently they cannot count as legitimate objects of knowledge. A better account of how to discriminate the most relevant features of nature is required because even if naturalism does attempt to readmit intangibles into its purview one must ask *why* these features' relevance for knowledge is subordinated to public verifiability as well as to the material or physical conditions that supposedly produce and control intangible subjective experiences (assuming that the way in which a scientific community determines the validity of a subjective experience is a completely benign process—a process in which subjective experiences are placed under the scrutiny of a scientific community whose “experts” determine whether some form of experience is “real” or not, and may or may not contribute to an edifice of knowledge). If the naturalist were to answer that only material conditions of the physical world may answer to science, and science is what best provides public, verifiable claims to truth—i.e., “knowledge”—then the very laws of discrimination that the scientific method uses to observe and predict the world come into question. Jaegwon Kim addresses this very point:

But what is scientific method? Most contemporary naturalists are likely to wince, if not laugh, at the idea of there being some monolithic “method” that characterizes all science everywhere. In these Postmodern times, when we have all read and, to one degree or another, internalized Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Rorty, many of us may not even be sure whether or not there is such a thing as “science” as a natural kind, a type of human activity regulated by a set of general principles of rationality and evidence. There is no question that skepticism about science and scientific method leads directly to skepticism about the coherence of the naturalistic program. For naturalism to make sense as a philosophical doctrine, the idea of science as a reasonably well-defined activity with a shared commitment to a set of methodological principles, however broad and diverse they may be, is essential. (Kim 2003, 88)

claim here. Intangibles such as the interplay of social force or power seem to be left out when it comes to the construction of a self.

If we are to provide a wholly adequate description of nature then nature's intangible features must be taken into account in addition to those features that are given directly in sense perception that correlate to an external world. A more adequate form of naturalism must make sense of the many and varied traits of natural phenomena, so *all* features of experience must be accounted for and treated with equal scrutiny in a more generic scheme of nature that places no selective emphasis on any portion of experience.¹² Admittedly, the abstract portion of experience may offer no concrete or clear sensate correlate. These intangibles are, in some sense, *beyond* sense perception, at least according to the naturalist's criteria defined so far in this paper. But, these traits of experience are not beyond the reality of a perceivable nature. A more adequate form of naturalism, then, must also account for *how* these experienced abstract realities do exist and do inform the very basis of what it means to comprehend or self-understand and to act based on that comprehension and self-understanding, in short, to subjectively experience what would *count* as knowledge about the world.

Perhaps as a surprise to the reader I believe that a more wholly adequate form of naturalism is present within the very history of naturalism itself—in this case, a sort of naturalism called *ordinal naturalism*, developed by the somewhat obscure philosopher Justus Buchler (1914-1991). On my view, Buchler's ordinal naturalism is able to offer a broader naturalist conceptual framework that valiantly resists the gravity of scientism, physicalism, and materialism as it aims to encompass aspects of nature "reflected by the sciences and arts, by moral and religious attitudes, and by what takes place psychologically, socially, technologically" (Buchler 1951).

III. BUCHLER'S ORDINAL NATURALISM

Outside immediate circles of study within the contemporary American philosophical tradition Buchler is not well known. His doctoral dissertation, *Charles Peirce's Empiricism*, published in 1939, earned him the designation of a Peirce commentator. After publishing a few books, all written in highly idiosyncratic and technical terms, Buchler isolated himself from a larger philosophical community that had grown used to the (at times) unsophisticated and common-sense writing style of the classical American pragmatists. Buchler's mild criticisms of cherished philosophers such as John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead did not help, either. What is important here, however, is one of Buchler's central concepts, that of

¹²I note that other than broadening the criteria for what to include within a description of nature, that it might be helpful to again look carefully at the category of "expert opinion" and those in the public realm who are determining what valuations found in human conduct are significant to a category of "scientific knowledge."

“ontological parity.” I will introduce this concept within the context of this paper and then apply it to the debate outlined above. I shall emphasize Buchler’s phenomenological moments showing his philosophy to be an *ordinal phenomenology*.

Buchler’s philosophical perspective hinges on the concept of “ontological parity,” the idea that abstract phenomena such as ideas, relations, values, and judgments—part of what he called “the proceptive domain”—are just as relevant as sense-data when one attempts to provide an adequate description of the natural world. The “proceptive domain,” simply put, suggests “the inseparable union of process with receptivity, of movement in nature with impact by nature, of things shaped with events accepted. The emphasis is on historicity and natural involvement” (Buchler 1955, 143). This means that the proceptive domain functions “not *merely* in the mind” but is of an intangible character in the sense that it is part of the individual’s experience (Buchler 1955, 124; see also Merleau-Ponty 1969). Experience for Buchler means that there are no sharp divisions between a reality as it is in itself and one’s related experience of it (Buchler 1966). Thus the assumption that knowledge is somehow inferior to an external world has no place in his account of nature. As Buchler put it, “feelings, thoughts, or judgments. . . *must* be precepts. . .” and “we assimilate not just *sensible* qualities, but changing modes of thought and the ethical temper of society” (Buchler 1951, 18). He concludes that the proceptive domain cannot be either merely mental or merely physical.

“Ontological parity” means that within the proceptive domain that which is being related is on equal footing with the relation itself, therefore abstract phenomena find their place in a natural scheme. That is, *whatever may be* (nature understood in its broadest terms)—including for Buchler values, ideals, moral judgments, and religious experience but also universals, particulars, actualities, possibilities, and God—all items of nature “inhabit the same ontological plane” and justly carry the same integrity as physical phenomena. This means that while the objects of nature vary in their pervasiveness or influence, none has a more basic ontological status or function than any other. Nature is thus “flat” because no aspect of nature, whether physical or metaphysical, is privileged in a hierarchy of importance.¹³ Phenomenologically speaking, ontological parity means that nature now can be taken to mean, as Buchler puts it, “whatever is in any way” (see Buchler 1966). This understanding of nature, when taken in the context of the proceptive domain, is crucial because one can maintain a category wide enough to describe nature, whatever it turns out to be. Within nature whatever one discriminates is a legitimate object

¹³Although ordinality “flattens” nature, one can open any degree of “depth” to nature by inviting a line of query into its continued availability of orders.

of knowledge, if by “knowledge” one means first, an acquaintance with nature, and second, a description of nature that may or may not be publicly verifiable in the terms discussed thus far.

Rather than speak of “experience,” Buchler speaks of “proception,” “an all-embracing movement characteristic of individual life,” which includes the entirety of nature: physical, social, genetic, morphological, physiological, intellectual, and affective,” where “all feeding impulses, habits, and dispositions, ensure the outcome of the process is human” (Buchler 1955, 109). Buchler does not speak of the immediate perception of “sense experience,” but rather the *awareness* of “proception” in order to better speak of the diverse dimensions to nature. Adopting this new term, “proception,” Buchler believed, would shed previous associations and encumbrances attached to the word “experience” and cast a new phenomenological dimension to knowledge (see also Merleau-Ponty 1969, 106-107). To clarify, he wrote that,

most of the current terms [proception, proceive, procept] roughly synonymous with ‘experiencing’ are not only terms signifying ‘mental operations’ but are derivatives of the supposed subject-object relation—perceiving, feeling, knowing, and the like. The term ‘involvement’...expresses first, the common presence and common relevance of all the relata or determinants of proception, and second, the modification imposed by proception on all its relata. To be involved is to be affected or uniquely modified by a relation. (Buchler 1955, 143)

The domain of proception is fully relational between knower and known, if such a division can be made at all, and it does not correspond with “the data of experience” in the traditional sense discussed earlier in this essay. Nor does empirical observation or perceiving “sense-data” retain its original meaning. With this new phenomenological conception “knowing” nature takes place through becoming aware of the natural world and by describing that world. Buchler wrote that these descriptions are continually “enlarged” and “re-patterned” (Buchler 1955, 109). Arguing that knowing nature means being acquainted with it through awareness and not brute “sense perception,” Buchler wrote that, “most ‘empiricist’ philosophers think that the world becomes experientially available through ‘data.’ And there would be nothing wrong with this if the ‘data’ were construed not as noises and patches, or even as tables and chairs, but the circumstances of rearing and growth, as pervasive imperceptible moral influences, as the structures of human togetherness, as the contingent stimuli to curiosity and emotion, as the boundaries imposed by the facts of society, heredity,

and mortality. . . . [In all of this] it is truly *awareness* that is most prominent" (Buchler 1955, 126; Merleau-Ponty 1969, 106-107).

Proception for Buchler suggests a "closeness" to nature that is fully natural, genuine, and that communicates knowledge by direct phenomenological acquaintance that can be communicated in a variety of ways to other inquirers, although this communication is not a requirement for knowledge *per se* (see Buchler 1955 on "exhibitive judgment"). This acquaintance is found in the individual mental experiences that human inquirers undergo so as to understand nature. For example one may value, consider ideals, and judge where these experiences further one's acquaintance from within a personal context. This personal context may then be used to understand a social or public context, where "social" or "public" can be interpreted to mean the larger context of nature itself (see Merleau-Ponty 1969, 109-10).¹⁴ Thus Buchler thought that the personal perspective *can* move toward a validation if it so chooses, but it does not necessarily have to achieve intersubjective validation so as to be considered real knowledge. One can most certainly assimilate the world and communicate that assimilation to one's self through various forms of judgment, but public verifiability and consequent scientific appraisal is not a strict requirement for being acquainted with the natural world.

For Buchler, physicalism is the "narrow" version of naturalism (Ryder 1991, 201). Rather than take nature to be "levels" of material functions—and rather than understanding consciousness, the experience of freedom, valuation, judgment, and so on to be products of those functions—one finds Buchler assigning relevance to all levels of nature by placing them on an equal plane with his notion of ontological parity. Here one finds that Buchler's concept of ontological parity is tied to his "ordinal" position: an *ordinal* ontology acknowledges nature's objective determinateness on equal footing with human activity and the intangibles of the proceptive domain. When attempting to describe nature, one can phenomenologically avoid ascribing any primacy to the material or physical orders of nature, yet one can also maintain that the various orders of nature are still related and equally relevant—whether strongly or weakly, depending upon one's line of analysis. On the ordinal view, one is able to think about nature relationally, while considering the epistemic objects that are typically relegated to a lesser role in many other naturalistic ontologies

¹⁴One of Buchler's major critiques was that human query often reads a human face upon nature. In other words, nature gets the last vote when it comes to what counts as real and legitimate, not the previous policies of experts and decision-makers in a scientific community; those viewpoints can be overturned. On Buchler's view, the ultimate "social" context of the natural world is an encompassing nature itself (which could never be any particular category), not the verifiability tests of human beings and their specific categories of observation and knowledge classification.

(see Buchler 1966). It is the principle of ontological parity that Buchler contrasts with any dualism stating that one segment of reality—say, the physical—is somehow more “real” than the mental. “Ontological priority” is squarely evidenced in the empirical tradition, Buchler stated, and it has had its hangover in many of the twentieth-century American naturalists with their penchant for placing such stress on stating “evidence,” rather than describing and reflecting upon observations. Hence, it seems that Buchler has *radicalized* naturalism’s initial aims of knowing nature by providing it with a more throughgoing opportunity for analysis into the generic concepts of nature (rather than narrowly focusing on the material aspects of nature and corresponding sense-data).

In summary, Buchler’s ordinal position means that there can be no distinction between a “really” real world of fact, or nature, *pace* Hume, and those values which are a “mere” addition to it, *pace* Quine. Intangibles, discussed earlier in this essay, find rights to co-equal habitation alongside perceived physical objects, all being part of what prevails in a nature that is wider in a scope of *what is* and what can be known, privately or socially: both encompassed by the domain of proception. The dual epistemological and metaphysical desideratum in Buchler’s metaphysics is, overall, one of relational interdependence that makes room for personal and intangible experience to stand on its own as a form of acquaintance with the natural world. Thus there can be no absolute primacy for any one order of nature—there may be primacy in general, but unlike what is the case in traditional epistemological and metaphysical views of naturalism, it is not exhaustive of any one particular quality. Nature, *unrestricted*, demands balance and harmony when one decides to choose which of its innumerable orders that one would like to describe and know. Buchler clarifies,

on the basis of the unrestricted view as stated thus far, science would be said to be concerned not with nature in an unqualified sense but with a given world of worlds—the physical world, the social world, the psychological world. These worlds are pervasive orders of nature, for we no longer can make sense of “the” order of nature... A tenable conception of nature recognizes many orders occupied by man among the innumerable orders not occupied by man and many orders devised by man... Nothing is implied about a totality or whole or collectivity, no embarrassing commitment is made to an ultimate integration which lacks integrity. (Buchler 1966, 273-74)

Rejecting an “ultimate” integration means no one order of nature

(physical, ideal, social, biological, moral, logical, and so on) reigns supreme. The physical universe, as great as it is, is but one world of nature. The proceptive domain of nature takes nature to be an availability of orders, not any one particular order of the world.

IV. CONCLUSION ON A PHENOMENOLOGICAL NOTE

The title of this essay reflects *phenomenology* in the American vein. In asking how Buchler's ordinal naturalism is phenomenological and takes into account the widest available conception of nature, the philosophical method developed by Edmund Husserl might provide a clue. Nature taken in its "ordinality" means that one honors the scope and generic integrity of any and all available objects, experiences, and dimensions available for description within nature as such. Knowledge is redefined in terms of relevance and description, and a field of epistemic objects is opened up before the human inquirer that is not limited to the material realm. One may reflect on the meaning and importance of these objects in personal experience, and apply those reflections in the process of getting acquainted with the natural world. The world and phenomena, relations and qualities, things, facts, and values, all stand together without any sense-perception privileging orders to sway or dominate a generic-level analysis (Corrington 1992, x). In this way, Buchler's term "order" signals a sensitivity to the ways in which human beings experience nature in its robust dimension, and "ordinality" serves to remind us that all qualities and relations are experienced fundamentally through relationships, an "intangible"—they are located among other orders of nature (Corrington 1992, x). Traits being ontologically equal and neutral, preferring "physical objects" to "Homer's gods" would be just that: *a preference*, for one is just as real as the other; each is an order among innumerable others.

Robert Corrington, entitling his own Buchlerian-inspired naturalism "ecstatic naturalism," claims that Buchler's ordinal phenomenology agrees with Husserl's methodological aim in opening up a "descriptive clearing within nature" that resists a "drive toward categorical encompassment giving way before a more tentative and open-ended description of the pervasive features of the world" (Corrington 1992, x). On Corrington's view, and I agree, Buchler has also moved beyond Husserl in paving the way for metaphysics and phenomenology to require each other. Corrington notes that, as such, Buchler's brand of phenomenology "does not privilege consciousness by assuming that it must be the mysterious origin of all phenomenal features. . .," indicating that neither the physical nor the ideal is ascribed supremacy, and a Husserlian description of the essential features of consciousness is turned toward the world at large (Corrington 1992, 2-3). Corrington continues that,

ordinal phenomenology relies upon a very different conception of naturalism and the natural standpoint. The ordinal perspective understands naturalism to be inevitable and to entail the human process to be fully embedded within a nature that is forever beyond its own making. Yet naturalism, in this view, does not entail materialism, physicalism, or any other type of reductive monism. Ordinal naturalism rejects the very notion that nature can be characterized as a specific 'what' or 'essence.' Put simply: nature is the constant availability of orders of relevance, and not some kind of material substrate that obeys rigid causal laws. (Corrington 1992, 13)

The following quotation from Husserl has a meaning that resembles Buchler's ordinal approach and it serves as a concluding note for my own analysis. In the end I hope that I've brought Buchler's thought into closer connection with phenomenology and have illustrated as well a more just and open understanding of nature by having explored Buchler's ordinal naturalism. I hope to have explicated how his phenomenological method extends the range of human inquiry to include the many and varied traits of natural phenomena that are not "simply" the result of sensate experience or material functions, and that personal phenomenological reflection on the intangible phenomena of experience may count as a way to become acquainted with nature where nature means whatever exists, in any way.

I have an idea of the god Jupiter: this means that I have a certain presentative experience, the presentation-of-the-god-Jupiter is realized in my consciousness. The intentional experience may be dismembered as one chooses in descriptive analysis, but the god Jupiter naturally will not be found in it. The 'immanent', 'mental object' is not therefore part of the descriptive or real make-up [*deskriptiven reellen Bestand*] of the experience, it is in truth not really immanent or mental. But it also does not exist extramentally, it does not exist at all. This does not prevent our idea of the god Jupiter from being actual, a particular sort of experience. . . . If the intended object *exists* [my emphasis] *nothing becomes phenomenologically different*. (Husserl 1901 [2001], 558-59)

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