

# HOW TO SAVE NATURALISM FROM PLANTINGA?

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**ABSTRACT.** I argue that Plantinga's Proper Function and Evolutionary arguments fail against *liberal naturalism* defined in a broad sense as the view that „there aren't any supernatural beings". The former argument can be interpreted in at least three ways: deductively, inductively and theistically. None of these, however, is successful. The latter argument suffers from several deficiencies of which two major ones are: (1) The unlikelyhood of the reliability of our cognitive faculties, given (liberal) naturalism and (varieties of) evolutionism, is not shown. (2) Agnosticism with respect to the likelihood of our cognitive reliability is insufficient to establish the self-defeating character of naturalistic evolutionism, unless it is also shown that the belief in this reliability lacks an independent warrant. The last condition has been neglected by Plantinga.

**KEYWORDS.** Proper function, naturalism, evolutionism, Plantinga.

In *Warrant and Proper Function* (Plantinga 1993, chs. 11, 12), in the context of the development of his epistemology, Alvin Plantinga first formulated two arguments against naturalism: the Proper Function Argument against Naturalism [henceforth PFAAN] and the Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism [EAAN]<sup>1</sup>. The former concludes that naturalism is false, given its inability to account for normativity, and the latter concludes that it is self-defeating, given its inability to account for the reliability of our cognitive faculties. Both arguments – especially EAAN – have been further worked out and thoroughly scrutinized since their first formulation, especially in Plantinga's unpublished but widely circulated paper *Naturalism Defeated* (Plantinga, unpublished *a*) and in a book of essays edited by James Beilby *Naturalism Defeated?* (Beilby 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, Plantinga's attack on naturalism is not an exception. See Craig – Moreland (2000), Robinson (1993), Wagner – Warner (1993). In a detailed scrutiny of naturalism and its present situation Michael Friedman in the Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association (Friedman 1997) claims that naturalism „has reached the end of its useful life."

I shall argue that neither PFAAN nor EAAN is successful against the doctrine that Plantinga explicitly claims to be after and which I will call *liberal naturalism*. This is defined in a broad sense as the view that „there aren't any supernatural beings – no such person as God, for example, but also no other supernatural entities, and nothing at all like God.” (Beilby 2002, 1). Based on what I say in this paper, both PFAAN and EAAN *might* be successful against *conservative naturalism* – I have little to say about this alternative. By ‘conservative naturalism’ I mean here a family of doctrines stronger than the liberal naturalism. Thus, not only there is no God, but neither anything like irreducible normativity/teleology, consciousness, intentionality, etc. Sometimes, this family of doctrines is also called *physicalism* and/or *materialism*, although the terminology here fluctuates widely.<sup>2</sup>

The paper has two parts. In the first part I argue that none of the three interpretations of PFAAN – deductive, inductive, theistic – successfully refutes (liberal) naturalism. In the second part I do three things: (a) I give a brief overview of EAAN; (b) I present three complaints against Plantinga's case that *the reliability of our cognitive faculties* [henceforth R] is high, given *naturalism* and *evolutionism* [henceforth N&E]; (c) I argue that the probability of R, given N&E, is inscrutable only apart from the consideration of the independent support of R. However, since it is likely that we do have some independent warrant for R (or, at least, since Plantinga has not shown that we don't), the probability of R given N&E is high; consequently, N&E is not (shown to be) self-defeating. In the conclusion I make a few comments on the elusive nature of (liberal) naturalism.

## **1. Proper Function Argument against Naturalism**

On Plantinga's view, the notion of proper function is not analyzable in terms of properties acceptable to a naturalist. In fact, it requires intelligent design. Since the „only plausible designer for us human beings is God or something very much like God”, the truth of theism (and the de-

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<sup>2</sup> Under different names, the distinction between liberal and conservative naturalism is explicitly endorsed, for instance, by Armstrong (1980/1995), Willard (2000), De Caro – Macarthur (2004), and others. Those interested in the history of twentieth-century ideas should see Willard (2000, 45 n. 1), for further bibliographical references. Plantinga himself [„Against Materialism”] uses the expression ‘materialism’ differently, namely for the view that human beings are entirely material. In this sense, materialism is compatible with theism, i.e. it does not imply (liberal) naturalism.

nial of naturalism) follows from the existence of entities with proper functions. Plantinga's argument (Plantinga 1993, ch. 11) can be understood in various ways. I consider three such interpretations. I argue that according to none of them does Plantinga make his point that (liberal) naturalism is false.

The first interpretation goes as follows:

Argument 1 (Deductive PFAAN):

P1: There exist properly and improperly functioning entities.

P2: Proper functioning is not analyzable (reducible) in naturalistic terms.

C: Naturalism is false.

The truth of P1 is very plausible and although it is possible to object Plantinga here, I would like to grant him this premise and attack him on other grounds. What evidence does Plantinga bring in favor of P2? He shows that there are various flaws in the naturalistic analyses (reductions) of proper function taken from or inspired by Pollock (Plantinga 1993, 199 – 201), Millikan (Plantinga 1993, 202nn.), Bigelow and Pargetter (Plantinga 1993, 200 – 211), Wright-Levin (in Plantinga, unpublished c), and so on. Suppose that Plantinga is right and that indeed all these accounts fail. Does it follow, however, that proper function is not *analyzable* within naturalism? Surely not. For all I know there maybe an article just in print in the *Journal of Philosophy* which provides such an analysis.

But perhaps I am just misreading Plantinga. Maybe he does not intend PFAAN to be a deductive but merely an inductive argument. This brings us to the second interpretation:

Argument 2 (Inductive PFAAN):

P1: There exist properly and improperly functioning entities.

P2: Many smart naturalists have been attempting the naturalistic analysis of proper function for a long time.

P3: So far, there is no adequate naturalistic analysis of proper function.

C': Naturalism is likely to be false.

There are two problems with the Inductive PFAAN: (a) it is an argument based on the existence of explanatory gaps within naturalism; arguably, this approach has often failed in the past (see John Post's quote in II.B of this paper); (b) it rests on a questionable assumption, namely:

- P4: Naturalism is incompatible with a naturalistically non-analyzable proper function.

Why does proper function *need* a naturalistic analysis? Why couldn't naturalists take normativity as one of the fundamental properties of a Godless reality, along with extension, mass, spin, etc? Some *soi-disant* naturalists, for instance, Dewey (1958) consider irreducible normativity acceptable, although others do not. This, however, is a disagreement between liberal and conservative naturalism, rather than between naturalism and theism.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps, there could be given still another interpretation of Plantinga's argument according to which he would not argue *against* naturalism but *for* theism.<sup>4</sup> I doubt Plantinga would agree with this interpretation. I shall mention it here, anyway. The argument would run as follows:

Argument 3 (Theistic PFAAN)

- P1: There exist properly and improperly functioning entities.  
P2: Proper function is analyzable *only* in terms of an Intelligent Designer.  
P3: Intelligent Designer can *only* be God or „something very much like God“.  
C: Theism is true (and naturalism false).

Both P2 and P3 are questionable. As for P2, it is plausible that proper function is analyzable in terms of an Intelligent Designer; not that it is analyzable *only* in this way. As for P3, again, it is not obvious why an Intelligent Designer can *only* be God of traditional theism. (*Prima facie*, it seems that the Intelligent Designer sufficient to account for proper functioning may lack any of the following: transcendence, uniqueness, omniscience, omnipotence. Arguably, it could even lack consciousness.

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<sup>3</sup> It would seem that the naturalists to whom irreducible normativity is acceptable owe us an account of *how it is* that there is this uncreated irreducible normativity. Some of these naturalists, however, could simply refuse to answer and point out that explanations must end somewhere. They could take normativity as ultimately unexplainable similarly as other non-normative physical properties are for them ultimately unexplainable (and similarly - they would claim - as God is ultimately unexplainable for a theist).

<sup>4</sup> The two are not equivalent since theism and naturalism (as Plantinga defines it) are contraries but not contradictories. (There are two other possibilities left: (a) there is no Nature but only God, (b) there is no Nature and no God.)

## 2. Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism

Plantinga argues that given the conjunction of naturalism and evolutionism it is unlikely that our cognitive faculties produce mostly true beliefs – or at least we don't know whether it is likely. It is irrational to believe anything that is produced by cognitive mechanisms that are unreliable or not known to be reliable.<sup>5</sup> This includes the conjunction of naturalism and evolutionism itself, which is produced by those cognitive mechanisms. Therefore, even if naturalism and evolutionism were true, it would be irrational to believe it.

First, I give a more detailed overview of EAAN; the first premise (P1) of this argument is that the probability of R given N&E is low or inscrutable. Second, I address the first disjunct of the P1 – the probability of R, given N&E, is low. I argue that the truth of this proposition is not established (for liberal naturalism). Since, however, at this point, I do not show that the probability of R, given N&E, is high, we can take the value of this probability as unknown (inscrutable). This leads, third, to the second disjunct of the first premise – the probability of R, given N&E, is inscrutable. I argue that this is right only insofar as considered apart from the independent warrant for R. When it is admitted that R has an independent warrant (which Plantinga sometimes admits, other times fails to disprove), the probability of R, given N&E, trivially turns out to be high and thus it does not follow that N&E is self-defeating.

### A. Overview of the Argument

We start with a brief schematic representation of EAAN:

- E – set of propositions comprising *evolutionism*;
- N – set of propositions comprising *naturalism*;
- R – the proposition that *human cognitive faculties are reliable*;
- $P(R/N\&E)$ <sup>6</sup> – probability of R, given N&E.

Argument 4 [EAAN]:

P1:  $P(R/N\&E)$  is either low or inscrutable.

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<sup>5</sup> A cognitive faculty (perception, memory, reason...) is *reliable* „if the great bulk of its deliverances are true,” see Plantinga in Beilby (2002, 2).

<sup>6</sup> This is a standard symbolization in Bayesian epistemology. For an introduction see Talbott (2001).

- P2: If a person accepts N&E and P1, she has a rationality defeater for her belief in R.
- P3: If a person has a rationality defeater for R, she has a rationality defeater for all of her beliefs, one of which is N&E.
- C: N&E is self-defeating.

At various occasions Plantinga presents sophisticated defense of all the three premises and of the overall validity (or inductive strength?) of the argument as a whole. I mention here only his defense of P1 since it is primarily this premise that I question in this paper (although I will also make some clarifying additions to P2).

*Plantinga's defense of P1.* First, Plantinga asks us to perform the following thought experiment: Suppose, there exist creatures which are similar to us in all relevant aspects of rationality and behavior and which are not designed by God but have evolved completely on their own (according to our current evolutionary theory). Concerning the relation between their beliefs and their behavior there are four possible scenarios:<sup>7</sup>

- S1. Epiphenomenalism: The beliefs of the creatures have no influence on their behavior and therefore are „invisible“ to evolutionary pressures. Consequently, there is no reason why the natural selection should pick some beliefs (true) over other beliefs (false). Given epiphenomenalism,  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low.<sup>8</sup>
- S2. Semantic Epiphenomenalism: On this possibility, beliefs are causally efficacious but not in virtue of semantic „content“ but in virtue of their electrochemical or neuro-physiological properties. Again, since truth/falsity is a semantic property of beliefs, there is no evolutionary pressure for cognitive faculties to produce *true* beliefs and on this view  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low.
- S3. Beliefs are causally efficacious – semantically and otherwise – but maladaptive (the creatures would be better without them). Obviously,  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low.
- S4. Beliefs are causally efficacious – semantically and otherwise – and adaptive. It would seem that  $P(R/N\&E)$  *could* be high for this po-

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<sup>7</sup> At various places, the number of possibilities on Plantinga's list differs (they are, however, always jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive). This oscillation is irrelevant to the main point.

<sup>8</sup> It would be more exact to write ' $P(R/N\&E\&S1)$  is low' but for the sake of simplicity I do not do so.

ssibility. But is it? Not really, since what counts is not only belief but desire as well, and there are many belief-desire combinations producing the *same* (adaptive) behavior but involving false beliefs. In Plantinga's words, „Natural selection doesn't care what you *believe*; it is interested only in how you *behave*.”

Concerning the fourth scenario, Plantinga grants the inscrutability of  $P(R/N\&E)$  and he is even willing to grant that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is high: Still, the *overall* probability  $P(R/N\&E)$  of all four scenarios taken together will be *low*. For those who are not convinced, Plantinga can go even as far as granting that the overall probability is inscrutable.

Second, Plantinga points out that since for these creatures  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low or inscrutable, and they are in all relevant respects similar to us,  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low or inscrutable for us too.

In the next two sections I object to Plantinga's defense of the first and of the second disjunct of P1, respectively. I do not distinguish between  $P(R/N\&E)$  as specified to us or to the hypothetical creatures – I grant Plantinga the plausibility of the argument from analogy.

## B. $P(R/N\&E)$ is low

I have three complaints against Plantinga's case for  $P(R/N\&E)$  being low. None of the three taken alone is sufficient to undermine Plantinga's argumentation – they need to be taken together. The first complaint is that not all of Plantinga's scenarios are acceptable to (all) naturalists, especially S1 and S2. The second is that a naturalistic account of mental causation has not been shown to be *impossible* but (at best) currently *non-existent*. The third is that it has not been shown that the (liberal) naturalistic evolution does not „care” for truth (i.e., that it does not lead to the increase in the amount of true beliefs).

*First Complaint: Are There Four Naturalistic Scenarios?* Plantinga takes the four above given scenarios – S1 to S4 as possible within a naturalist ontology. Some naturalists, however, would protest. For instance, Armstrong (1978 and 1980/1995, esp. 36 – 40), in his defense of naturalism, argues against any causally impotent entities imputed by Plantinga to naturalism in S1 and S2. Similarly, against S1 and S2 taken as empirical hypotheses, Levin (1997, 95 – 96) invokes Occam's razor that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity. Consequently, for certain types of naturalism, S1 and S2 should not be included in the calculation of

P(R/N&E). This complaint alone is not decisive since even if Plantinga agreed that S1 and S2 are not to be taken into consideration, there remains S3 and S4 and it can still be argued on these two scenarios that P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable.<sup>9</sup>

*Second Complaint: Is Mental Causation Impossible?* This complaint concerns Plantinga's discussion of mental causation. The form of Plantinga's argument about mental causation is the same as in the Weak PFAAN.

Argument 5:

- P1: Mental causation is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for evolution to be able to give preference to true over false beliefs.
- P2: Many smart naturalists have been attempting at the naturalistic analysis of mental causation for a long time and have failed.
- C1: Evolution is not able to prefer true beliefs to false ones.

Plantinga sometimes seems to intend to show that mental causation cannot be accounted for in naturalistic terms. At other times, however, he only seems to intend to show that it is *unlikely* that somebody will succeed in this enterprise since nobody has succeeded so far. Neither the former, nor the latter has been established. In the latter case, Plantinga's approach is open to the following charge of John Post:

Thus, after the dust has settled, Plantinga's underlying strategy proves to be very old: point to a stubborn, strategic explanatory gap, argue that (probably) they'll never be able to close it [...]. Like all such explanatory-gap arguments, this one is vulnerable to, among other things, a kind of meta-inductive argument: in the past when the science on which naturalism draws was criticized for failing to explain this or that, the gap was eventually closed (or shown to be bogus); what was regarded as an impossibility, or at least improbability, proved to be instead a lack of imagination or knowledge.

Again, this complaint alone is not fatal to Plantinga, since even if naturalists came up with a good account of mental causation, evolution *apparently* „cares“ only for survival, not for truth and this alone would be sufficient to make Plantinga's argument successful. This brings us to the third complaint.

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, at this point, Plantinga might just say that he is grateful to Armstrong and Levin for having him spared of the toil to deal with epiphenomenalism and semantic epiphenomenalism.



*Third Complaint: Does Evolution Care about Truth?* Suppose that a plausible naturalistic theory of mental causation has been formulated. Would EAAN thereby be shown to be unsound? Plantinga formulates yet another challenge to naturalists:

Argument 6:

- P1: Enhancing adaptiveness is not correlated to an increase in the amount of true beliefs.
- P2: (Naturalistic) evolutionary processes „care“ only about how to enhance adaptiveness.<sup>10</sup>
- C: (Naturalistic) evolutionary processes do not contribute to the increase in the amount of true beliefs.

The conclusion amounts to saying that organisms which are products merely of evolutionary processes have low probability of having many true beliefs; i.e., the faculties that produce their beliefs are not reliable as far as the truth is concerned (they are reliable only as far as their survival is concerned).

It seems that so far all controversies concern only P1 (of Argument 6). Without reviewing and evaluating this discussion (granting its truth to Plantinga), let me turn to P2. The truth of this premise seems obvious given the standard evolutionary theory – evolutionary processes involve natural selection (in the first place), random mutation, genetic drift, and a few other principles of minor importance. However, I would like to challenge its claim to obviousness. I do not claim to show that it is false, only to show that it is not obviously true. First, let us assume the standard picture of evolution is *true*. Now, what exactly does ‘random’ stand for in ‘random genetic mutation’? It would seem that it couldn’t be understood in the strong – *ontic* – sense: there are laws of physics and these laws – for all we know at the moment – are deterministic.<sup>11</sup> Random genetic mutation can therefore be random only in the *epistemic* sense; i.e., we do not

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<sup>10</sup> There are, of course, related problems for N&E: how could evolutionary processes „care“ about the *future* adaptiveness? These difficulties we leave aside.

<sup>11</sup> It is (still) believed by some that quantum mechanics is an indeterministic theory – which it was according to the once-standard Copenhagen interpretation. The indeterminism came in with the postulation of the „collapse of the wavefunction“. However, „a few philosophers or physicists can take [the postulation of this collapse] very seriously unless they are either idealists or instrumentalists.“ In fact, „quantum mechanics is one of the best prospects for a genuinely deterministic theory in modern times“ (Hoefler 2004).

know its underlying causes and we cannot predict its outcome. It follows, therefore, that the standard picture of evolution is *incomplete* – there are *some* principles and causes which we lump under the label ‘random mutation’ *since we do not know them yet*. This conclusion is further supported by the existence of non-standard (but still non-theistic) evolutionary theories which challenge the completeness of the standard theory and which attempt to fill in other principles and laws governing the evolution of organisms. Examples of the principles proposed to be placed *on the same level of importance* as natural selection and „random“ mutation include, for instance, symbiosis (Margulis 2003) or self-organization (Kauffman 1993).<sup>12</sup> In light of these considerations the truth of P2 becomes non-obvious: if evolutionary processes may and probably do involve some other principles than the ones proposed by the standard theory, then it may be not just adaptiveness that the evolution „cares“ for. It could also be, for instance, better cooperation or greater self-organization. And perhaps, better cooperation or greater self-organization *are* correlated to the increase in the amount of true beliefs. If Plantinga intends to present an evolutionary argument *in general* and not just in some restricted sense, he needs to take all plausible varieties of evolutionary theory into account. Thus, since P2 has not been so far shown to be true, C is not shown to be true either.

### **C. P (R/N&E) is inscrutable**

So far, I have tried to undermine EAAN by pointing out that Plantinga’s argumentation *fails* to show that P(R/N&E) is low. However, I have not shown that it is high. This means that *at this point* it is unknown whether P(R/N&E) is high or low or in the middle – as Plantinga puts it, P(R/N&E) is inscrutable. P(R/N&E) is inscrutable *only if* N&E were all that we took into consideration. It could be, however, that there is some other source of information about R, an independent warrant for it. In this case (R has some independent support and (R/N&E) is inscrutable as far as N&E is concerned), trivially, P(R/N&E) is high. To illustrate

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<sup>12</sup> Other non-theistic dissidents from the current standard evolutionary theory include Michael Denton (1986). Unlike Margulis and Kaufman, Denton does not propose a new theory instead. His hope is to discover new natural laws to account for the deficiencies. Let me quote at this occasion the famous opponent of Darwin: „Natural Selection‘ acts, and indeed must act, but [...] still, in order that we may be able to account for the production of known kinds of animals and plants, it requires to be supplemented by the action of some other natural law or laws as yet undiscovered“ (Mivart 1871, 17).

this point let us modify one of Plantinga's thought experiments: Suppose that the hypothetical creatures indeed evolved along the lines suggested by the standard N&E but that we, humans, were created by God such that we would know that R holds for us. Upon reflection we would conclude that  $P(R/N\&E)$  for the hypothetical creatures is inscrutable. However, we would make contact with them and gather evidence that R holds for them. Suppose further that we have gathered similar results about more such races of intelligent creatures. Consequently, we would modify our original conjecture about  $P(R/N\&E)$  - we would now consider it high (even though we would lack an account of mental causation or an explanation of how the naturalistic evolution „cares“ for truth).

The independent warrant condition is an important qualification, one which Plantinga addresses in (Plantinga 1993, 229u1-230d17; 231d8-13) but does not discuss in subsequent presentations of EAAN in Plantinga (unpublished *a*) and Beilby (2002). Since the independent support for R needs to be taken into account, the following formulation of EAAN is ambiguous:

Argument 7a [EAAN]

P1:  $P(R/N\&E)$  is inscrutable.

P2: If a person accepts N&E and P1, she has a rationality defeater for her belief in R.

P3: If a person has a rationality defeater for R, she has a rationality defeater for all of her beliefs.

C: N&E is self-defeating.

It is ambiguous because the first premise may be read either as „inscrutable as far as N&E are concerned“ or „inscrutable as far as N&E are concerned *and* there is no independent evidence for R“. To avoid ambiguity (leading to fallacy), it would be better to add one more premise explicitly and to adjust P2 accordingly:

Argument 7b - [EAAN refined]

P4: There is no independent evidence for R.

P2': If a person accepts N&E and P1 and P4, she has a rationality defeater for her belief in R.

Plantinga argues for P2 (P2'?) *via* various analogies - theism and wish-fulfillment (Plantinga 1993, 229u1-230d17; 231d8-13), widget factory (Plantinga 1993, 230d17-231d7), evil Cartesian demon (Plantinga, unpublished *a*, section I), Alpha-Centauri superscientists (Plantinga, unpublis-

hed *a*, section I), and so on. The cogency of all these analogies, however, depends on P4. This can be seen from a new look at the Pollock-Plantinga widget factory example: A person (let's call her Mary) comes into a factory and sees an assembly of apparently red widgets. The shop superintendent tells her that the widgets are lit by red light and so they only *seem* to be red but may not be. Then, the vice-president comes along and points out that the shop superintendent suffers from a very specific hallucination so that he is quite unreliable on topics of red lights. However, the vice-president himself has „a certain shiftiness about the eyes ...”. At this point, Plantinga claims, Mary should become agnostic as to what color(s) the widgets have. I think, however, that Plantinga is wrong, at least unless a further premise is added, namely that the factory looks like a place where the previous experience with the reliability of perception fails – but Mary *knows* that her perception is reliable in *normal* circumstances and there has been no word in Pollock's and Plantinga's example that the factory looks as if abnormal circumstances would take place there. She enters a factory which for all she can tell looks normal.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Plantinga who takes agnosticism to be the proper attitude with respect to the color of the widgets, I take the proper attitude to be Mary's *resuming* the temporarily suspended belief in the reliability of her perception; i.e., her believing again that the widgets are red. My agnosticism is appropriate towards the reliability of what the vice-president and the superintendent are talking about, not towards the color of the widgets. This example illustrates the importance of the independent-support condition (P4): in order to establish agnosticism towards the belief „There widgets are red” or towards R, there must be no further independent support for them.

But let us suppose that Plantinga slipped when he granted that there was an independent warrant for R<sup>14</sup> and that in fact, Plantinga intends to *assert* P4 – as he did in Plantinga (1993, ch. 11). The discussion in Plantinga (1993), however, was less than satisfactory. First, Plantinga simply assumes that it needs to be argued for – he passes the burden of proof to

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<sup>13</sup> One can object here that the superintendent and the vice president are such weird characters that Mary has a clear clue that this is not normal factory. I still think that besides testimony she needs also some sense-perceptual clues, i.e., the factory is very dark and strangely looking.

<sup>14</sup> „[S]uppose we [...] concede what in any event seems likely: that R is rationally accepted in the basic way, and, so taken, has much warrant for us” (Plantinga, unpublished *a*, section IV. D.).

the one who claims that R enjoys independent support. We cannot, of course, do this with respect to his thought experiment (it is his experiment and he can set up the conditions as he wishes). But why would we have to do this *with respect to us*? Isn't R *obviously* very likely to be true for us? Second, Plantinga considers two arguments for R: According to the *inductive* argument, since nearly all of my beliefs are true, my faculties are likely to be reliable. According to the *scientific* argument, since science tells us that our faculties are most reliable, they will be reliable. Plantinga then (rightly) dismisses both arguments as being „delicately circular or question-begging” (233 – 234). Ironically, it is not the proponent of an independent support for R who is begging the question but Plantinga – here is the structure of Plantinga's argumentation. Given,

P1: A person S argues that she has independent support that R  
(= that her cognitive faculties are reliable)

the following conclusion must be false:

C: A person S „saves” N&E from being a rationality defeater for her belief in R.

And this is the reason:

P2: A person S has a rationality defeater for *all* her beliefs, including those involved in arguing that R has an independent support for her.

But, of course, P2 is shown to be true only if Plantinga has *already* succeeded in showing that N&E is self-defeating – and this he cannot do before he shows that we do not have an independent support for R!

Let me conclude by dispelling a potential confusion. In *Naturalism Defeated* (Plantinga, unpublished *a*, section IV. D and Beilby 2002, 130 – 134) O'Connor argues that R has such a strong intrinsic (independent) support for us that it cannot be *defeated* even if  $P(R/N\&E)$  were low. It cannot be defeated because it is „a natural presupposition of our entire lives”. Plantinga then goes on to show that R is not indefeasible in one sense (the alethic sense) although it may be in another (the proper function sense).<sup>15</sup> The difference between O'Connor's objection and mine is

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<sup>15</sup> Roughly speaking, *alethic* defeaters, upon reflection, make us give up R. However, we cannot live, i.e., properly function, without assuming R. Thus, there cannot be any *proper function* defeater against R. (For more, see Plantinga in Beilby 2002, 205 – 211.)

that I do not claim that R is infeasible. My claims are: (1) it is very plausible that R has *some* independent support, (2) if  $P(R/N\&E)$  is inscrutable – apart from the consideration of the independent support of R – then if R's independent support is considered,  $P(R/N\&E)$  is high, i.e. N&E is not self-defeating. Thus, Plantinga's response to O'Connor (and others, e.g. Talbott in Beilby 2002, 205 – 211) does not apply to my objection.

### 3. Conclusion - Can Naturalism be Defeated?

In this paper I have argued that Plantinga's PFAAN and EAAN – as they stand at the present moment – do not successfully refute or defeat naturalism. In the first part I offered three interpretations of PFAAN – deductive, inductive, theistic – and argued that neither of the interpretations yields a successful demonstration of the conclusion that (liberal) naturalism is false. In the second part I did three things: (a) I gave a brief overview of EAAN; (b) I presented three complaints against Plantinga's case for  $P(R/N\&E)$  being low; (c) I argued that  $P(R/N\&E)$  is inscrutable only apart from the consideration of the independent support of R. However, since R is likely to have some independent support,  $P(R/N\&E)$  is high, i.e. N&E is not self-defeating.<sup>16</sup>

This victory of naturalism, however, does not come for free: I had to distinguish between *liberal* naturalism and *conservative* naturalism and limit the victory only to the weaker doctrine of the former. It would seem, however, that liberal naturalism is a very vague and indeed „slick“ doctrine – whenever it gets into trouble it escapes by claiming that it does not know the answer *yet* or by *denying* that there is any trouble (e.g. by accepting irreducible normativity/teleology or consciousness).

This observation has led some philosophers, notably van Fraassen, to consider materialism, which he considers as overlapping if not identical to naturalism, to be not a *view* (i.e., a doctrine) but an *attitude*:

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<sup>16</sup> For the sake of comparison: From different reasons, my dissatisfaction with EAAN is similar to Alston's, „(1) The claim that the  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low is poorly supported, as Plantinga himself admits. [...] (2) Even if  $P(R/N\&E)$  is low, it doesn't follow that N&E is a defeater for R [...], unless R fails to enjoy greater warrant than N&E. And it seems plausible to suppose that it does, and in any event Plantinga has failed to show that it does not“ (Beilby 2002, 202).

I propose the following diagnosis of [naturalism]: it is not identifiable with a theory about what there is, but only with an attitude or cluster of attitudes. These attitudes include strong deference to science in matters of opinion about what there is, and the inclination to accept (approximately) completeness claims for science as actually constituted at any given time. Given this diagnosis, the apparent knowledge of what is and what is not [natural] among newly hypothesized entities is mere appearance. The ability to adjust the content of the thesis that all is [nature] again and again is then explained instead by a knowing-how to retrench which derives from invariant attitudes (van Fraassen 1996, 170; I substitute 'nature' for 'matter' to make the passage more poignant).

An *attitude* differs from a *view* in that it does not entail any particular factual thesis. If van Fraassen were right, the whole discussion of PFAAN and EAAN would be moot. Unsurprisingly to me, at this point, Plantinga finds in himself „a wholly unfamiliar inclination to defend the materialist [i.e. naturalist], or at any rate her self-understanding” (van Fraassen 1996, 347 – 352). Maybe, Plantinga says, naturalism is indeed vague and elusive in that 'nature' is to be understood as what the current science says; but this flexibility has its limits: at every subsequent stage the findings of what counts as nature must be „sufficiently similar” to the beliefs of the previous stage. Moreover, in any case, one „thing” is clearly out of the question – the God of traditional theism.<sup>17</sup>

In my opinion, Plantinga is right that due to its incompatibility with the existence of God, naturalism – both liberal and conservative – „is a view, after all, if only a hazy view” (van Fraassen 1996, 352).<sup>18</sup> However, in order to refute or defeat naturalism in this broad liberal sense once and for all, Plantinga would have to acknowledge its many varieties, including naturalism with (irreducible) normativity/teleology (Cameron 2004, Dewey 1958), consciousness (Chalmers 1996, Searle 1992), intentionality (Searle 1992), universals (Armstrong 1978), and so on – and their combinations with the variety of non-orthodox evolutionisms. Further-

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<sup>17</sup> Although even here one could point out to Searle: „For us, if it should turn out that God exists, that would have to be a fact of nature like any other. To the four basic forces in the universe—gravity, electromagnetism, weak and strong nuclear forces—we would add a fifth, the divine force. Or more likely, we would see the other forces as forms of divine force. But it would still be all physics, albeit divine physics. If the supernatural existed, it would have to be natural” (Searle 1998, 35). This, however, I take to be a somewhat idiosyncratic understanding of naturalism and physicalism.

<sup>18</sup> Still, van Fraassen, draws our attention to an important feature of the (liberal) naturalism: ontologically, it is (almost) vacuous (see also Stroud 1996).

more, he would have to refute or defeat *all* these varieties, actual or potential, not just a representative *sample* of them. At this moment, I doubt this can be done ... except by demonstrating the existence of God.

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