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**O'Brien, Dan (2007). *A Critique of Naturalistic Philosophies of Mind: Rationality and the Open-Ended Nature of Interpretation*. The Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, New York. Pp. 304.**

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**D**an O'Brien opens *A Critique of Naturalistic Philosophies of Mind* with a look toward McDowell's *Mind and World*, which he sees as the inspiration for his work. He notes at the outset that "analytic philosophy is in danger...of descending into another period of scholasticism" (7) and he sees McDowell as a thinker who invests himself in important and fundamental issues about the mind's intentional contact with the world, instead of getting caught up in narrow debates that lose touch with the big picture. However, he is disappointed with McDowell's actual product: "The lack of argument is sometimes infuriating. His book is something of an impressionistic piece... My aim is to add persuasive argument to McDowell's suggestive sketch." (8)

While McDowell inherits the familiar mind-body problem—that humans appear to be natural, that nature appears to be lawlike, and yet that the mind does not seem subject to such laws (p 96)—he is also content to live with it. That is, he believes the problem is not in the seeming contradiction, but in our very puzzlement over it. We should simply accept two aspects of nature: "it is...this kind of inquiry that McDowell, in a Wittgensteinian spirit, hopes to quell. Philosophy should not attempt to answer such questions; it should instead attempt to dispel the worries that only appear to make such questions pertinent in the first place." (98)

But McDowell didn't quite succeed on this tack with O'Brien. It is the second proposition—the lawlike construction of nature—that O'Brien believes can be further explored to come up with actual answers instead of what he sees as "flowing metaphors" (8). Where most contemporary analytic philosophies take lawlike nature for granted and pursue an understanding of mind through this foundation, O'Brien wants to question the foundation to start with, and see if there is another way altogether that is pointed towards through McDowell's recognition of the *sui generis* nature of the mind. Thus the book is a focused critique of scientism.

O'Brien adopts McDowell's pithy shorthand for the enemy, and begins with an overview of "bald naturalism" (it should be noted that he doesn't investigate the other half of McDowell's two-pronged attack, rampant platonism). He also divides the bald naturalists into two camps, the redundant "crude bald naturalists" and the seemingly incongruous "sophisticated bald naturalists".

The first half of the book is an exposition of these analytic philosophies of mind. The crude bald naturalists (in this section he looks at Quine and Paul Churchland) consider the world to be fundamentally physical, with the mental nothing but a secondary effect of the chemical or causal interactions at the physical level; it has no impact on what actually happens. Essentially, we are "epistemic engines" (67), machines which are programmed to be knowers. Although extremely complex, ultimately the mind is a computer to a crude bald naturalist.

The sophisticated bald naturalists (here he considers Fodor, Lewis and Putnam), on the other hand, are interested in intentions and functions as part of the chain of causes. Yet the sophisticated bald naturalist still believes that since intentions themselves must arise from the physical to start with, none of is outside the chain of cause and effect: what happens must still be explained scientifically. In the section on sophisticated bald naturalism, it is a quite specific difference between them and McDowell which is under scrutiny: "The philosophical tension is not only caused by the metaphysical demarcation between the space of reasons and the realm of law, but also by the assumption that the only way to see phenomena as intelligible or natural is to see them as lawlike. McDowell rejects the latter claim, while the bald naturalist rejects a strong construal of the former." (101)

McDowell's theory allows for the two "realms" to exist separately and without our being concerned over their relation—the quietist approach means that we simply accept that the mental is not explicable by deterministic laws, without seeking to explain why. McDowell doesn't want to claim the mental as another fundamental element, as that would make him a dualist, and he believes the mind emerges naturally—yet still is somehow different. O'Brien thinks we should take from McDowell the insight that the mind is different and turn this back on nature: maybe it is bald naturalism that is limited by only being able to see the world one way, according to the strict rules of rationality. By opening up the view to a more flexible interpretation, perhaps another way can be found. In the second half of his book, O'Brien offers us alternative rationalities.

Now, to suggest rationality could come in any number of forms seems a basic misunderstanding of rationality as it is classically understood: we cannot do math any way we please, and the rules of logic seem just as rigidly determined. But O'Brien wants to argue that they are not. As examples of alternate rationalities he suggests Taoism, passages from Heraclitus, interpretations of the holy trinity, and translations

of ancient texts which “used a four value logic: true, false, neither true nor false, and, both true and false. For them, therefore, rationality was not constrained by the law of non-contradiction...” (234).

To push the point further, O’Brien imagines two towns made up of people with alternative kinds of rationality: City State Gullible and City State Frustration.

In City State Gullible, all citizens believe everything they’re told—including the ridiculous claims made by devious tourists passing through—regardless of how these statements match up with experience, or previous statements made by tourists. This means that citizens will end up believing both  $p$  and  $\text{not-}p$ . O’Brien wants to claim that even at this extreme level, a society could function in this ‘alternative rationality’. His claim is that for Gullibians, trust is so primary that it trumps the details of whether the facts match the beliefs. In City State Frustration, citizens share a different alternative rationality: their desire for  $F$  leads to the pursuit of  $\text{not-}F$ , and vice-versa. The explanation for this is that perhaps they are driven by guilt. The purpose of considering these sets of variation in rational thinking is to argue that the bald naturalist cannot account for multiple rationalities but McDowell can:

“The crucial characteristic of the bald naturalist account of interpretation is the static and fixed conception of rationality upon which it depends. (...) Since rational thought is simply an aspect of the lawlike structure of the world, then with enough empirical enquiry it is something that can be once and for all mapped by the bald naturalist.” (256)

But by these examples, it seems as if O’Brien has it backwards, since the bald naturalists only consider rationality secondarily. It is McDowell who wants to claim that the mind is the “space of reason”, as distinguished from the material “realm of law”, while the bald naturalists would simply explain everything by beginning from the realm of law.

The Churchlands, for instance, would not be concerned over whether the behavior was rational, but only that the underlying mechanical nature was lawlike—so as long as those “adrenal glands” and “endogenous opiates” (74) are acting in accordance with cause and effect, then whatever random motivations or behaviors we think we experience would just be our (mis)interpretation of the “real” chemical facts. If Gullibians behave differently than us, it’s because they have more or less of some chemical or other.

The so-called sophisticated approach makes intentions an actual part of the scheme, but again, there would be no need to turn to rationality first. Instead, the sophisticated bald naturalist would claim that intentions simply have to be restructured with more complexity to fit Gullibians or Frustratees in. If a Frustratee ultimately favors guilt

over comfort, then the action which produces guilt instead of satisfaction is chosen, and an intentional scheme could then be mapped which would reflect this. This doesn't show an alternative rationality but just alternative intentions. The case of the Gullibilians would be harder to map by normal causal relations as it only seems to go one level deep: any statement leads to belief, but which beliefs lead to action? The bald naturalist would find the model lacking here, but that doesn't mean we've discovered an intelligible alternate rationality. Instead, it is ordinary rationality that is stunted by inefficiency. According to a bald naturalist view, it would be hard to see how the town would function unless some other form of decision-making were taking place that reflected the "true" levels of beliefs. But this doesn't prove an alternate form of rationality has been discovered, since it's just a thought experiment. To a sophisticated bald naturalist, it would presumably be only intelligible to a certain degree, and if such a place existed, she would be interested to discover what was "really" happening in a town that was supposedly functioning normally, where residents claimed to both believe and not believe that ammonia is good to drink, or red lights mean go, or pedophilia is acceptable. Which behaviors actually took place? Did patterns still emerge? The causes of those would be the concern, rather than beliefs which didn't seem to impact behavior.

What makes it difficult for this book to achieve the point it seems to be aiming at is that it can't seem to get out of the same frame of thinking as the bald naturalists. Hence, thought experiments like the Gullibilians or Frustratees comes across not as eye-opening examples which bald naturalists will find hard to deal with, but rather logically constructed games that fit right into their abstract world-views. An additional layer of logic or an extra arrow here or there, and we're back to the computational matrix, because we aren't dealing with the real complexities of human life—actually *sui generis* spontaneity—but exactly the same sort of rational methodology: let's suppose in every situation  $x$ , that each  $g$  does  $y$  instead of  $z$ .

While the results may be bizarre by human standards, the logic is perfectly acceptable once it is scraped of meaning and simply fed into equations, because it is applied across populations, making the fundamental assumption that what we have are groups that follow basic rules rather than individuals who live by free will. What makes human beings hard to graph is that we might act like Gullibilians, or Frustratees, or perfectly Spock-like Vulcans, or any number of other versions of ourselves (as the Whitmans and Emersons of the world are always good at reminding us...)—but one never knows which behavior we will choose. Thus, as McDowell tries to argue, while the action of nature follows a pattern, the actions of people are of another category, and should not be analyzed by the same methods.

O'Brien's initial problem is appealing: McDowell's inconclusive conclusion is unsatisfying to many readers who may nonetheless be intrigued by his willingness to

take seriously the idea that the nature of the mind doesn't fit into our standard notions of deterministic natural law. But when O'Brien tries to reconcile spontaneous mentality with the physical world, he loses track of what it is that is unusual about the mind, and in the last chapter suggests that perhaps a good next step is Dan Dennett. This may be slightly more sophisticated bald naturalism than Fodor and Lewis, but it is ultimately not that original.

There are moments of insight in O'Brien's book, but for someone concerned about "messy" philosophy, he is fairly careless himself, especially in the handling of the relation between human judgment and pure rationality. The first half will mostly be of interest to those in his field; as a reader of McDowell from a more pragmatic tradition, I can hardly say he manages to pull analytic philosophy out of scholasticism. The second half has some surprising ideas in it, but perhaps they would have been more fruitful if he had worked them through with more serious focus on real human experience rather than abstractions.