Is Naturalism an Ideology?

Thomas J. Spiegel

Abstract: This paper argues that naturalism has a special logical status that differentiates it from other philosophical perspectives. Such a peculiar status can be grasped particularly by the expressions of the "worldview" and "ideology". Indeed, naturalism is not just a purely philosophical thesis, but rather a current of thought that is interwoven in cultural and social processes in an unusual manner for a philosophical debate. The article proceeds as follows. Part 1 reconstructs the concept of naturalism as scientific naturalism, which can be shared both by proponents and opponents of naturalism. Part 2 explains the concept of ideology with the help of research in recent Critical Theory. Thereby, three characteristics of ideologies emerge: (i) ideologies are products of social practice and are reproduced socially, (ii) ideologies have practical effects and (iii) ideologies feature a so-called dual deception. Part 3 argues that the concept of naturalism essentially satisfies these three characteristics.

Keywords: Naturalism; Scientism; Quietism; Critical Theory; Ideology.

Introduction

Naturalism is perhaps the most pertinent paradigm in contemporary analytical philosophy. This has already been observed by some philosophers: both Richard Rorty and Brian Leiter agree that the opposition between naturalism and Wittgensteinian quietism is the "deepest and most intractable difference of opinion within contemporary Anglophone philosophy", their loyalty being to different sides of this Faultline (Rorty 2010, 57). Mario De Caro and David Macarthur write something similar in an influential anthology critical of naturalism: "scientific naturalism is the current orthodoxy, at least within Anglo-American philosophy" (De Caro & Macarthur 2008, 1). Likewise, renowned physicalist Daniel Stoljar: "[...] we live in an overwhelmingly physicalist or materialist intellectual culture" (Stoljar 2017, §17). In addition, there is at least some empirical evidence of the popularity of naturalism in a *philpapers* study. David Chalmers and David Bourget interviewed 931 philosophers "naturalism or non-naturalism?": 25.8% rejected naturalism, 24.3% said "other" and

* Universität Potsdam thomspiegel@uni-potsdam.de

49.8% agreed to naturalism (Chalmers & Bourget 2009). Ultimately, the dominance of naturalism can be seen in the large number of so-called naturalization projects that try to show that a certain phenomenon can be reduced to naturalistically respectable entities or eliminated entirely (De Caro 2011, 27). Popular goals of such naturalization projects are justification, knowledge, morality, normativity, intentionality or mathematical entities. Some of the most popular naturalization programs are gathered under the "Canberra Plan" label (Braddon-Mitchel & Nola 2008, Jackson 1998).[1]

This relative dominance of naturalism raises the question why it appears to many as a plausible, perhaps inevitable, theorem. Naturalism may not necessarily have the status of an ordinary philosophical thesis. It seems that there is a peculiar thetic 'surplus' in the theoretical phenomenon of naturalism that needs to be explained. The hypothesis of this essay is that naturalism has a special logical status that distinguishes it from other philosophical theses. Sometimes naturalism is associated with more or less pejorative expressions like "scientism", "worldview" or "ideology". The suggestion is that this thetic 'surplus', which makes naturalism out to be more than a simple theory, can be grasped with the expressions of the "worldview" and "ideology" in order to make naturalism theoretically comprehensible on a metaphilosophical level. This should make it clear in the course of the reasoning that naturalism is not just a purely philosophical thesis, but a current that is interwoven in cultural and social processes in a way that is not usually the case for a philosophical thesis (cf. section 3). Probably the most obvious and well-known instances of this interweaving is the ongoing US-American conflict between politically motivated, conservative creationists and their opponents (especially Daniel Dennett). In this area, the label "naturalistic", which is often taken to imply "atheistic", plays a political role comparable to the words "liberal" or "progressive". However, this conflict hardly plays a role in philosophical contexts outside the USA.

It seems clear that naturalism is a metaphysical position (Tetens 2013b). As a variation of materialism, it is reasonable to argue that naturalism ipso facto also has a status as a so-called worldview or world image like other metaphysical options of dualism and idealism (Jaspers 1925, Heidegger 1977). The central thesis of this essay is that naturalism can also be qual-

[1] The explanatory success of the natural sciences is often used as a reason for justifying naturalism. It can be demonstrated however that science's success cannot be properly utilized for this purpose (Tetens 2013a, 272).

ified as an ideology, that is, as a position that is not only a metaphysical view of the world, but rather features an ideological character.

This is to bring together two otherwise seemingly largely separate concepts of theoretical philosophy (the concept of naturalism) and practical philosophy (the concept of ideology). Debates about ideologies are particularly widespread in Critical Theory, but play virtually no role in theoretical philosophy, especially in philosophy of science and metaphysics in which naturalistic approaches dominate. Incidentally, the term "naturalism" (or antiquated "positivism") is sometimes used as a means of demarcation in Critical Theory as something to decisively avoid. Conversely, the term "naturalism" is often used in theoretical philosophy as a positive self-attribution (Papineau 2015, 1). Regarding both sides, however, research on the conceptual-logical status of naturalism is underdeveloped. For example, Petersen (2014) claims that naturalism is an ideology but does not specify what "naturalism" and what "ideology" even are supposed to mean. In the contemporary debate on naturalism, no sufficient justification for this consideration has been put forward. This gap needs to be filled.

The main difficulty of this undertaking is that both the concept of naturalism and the concept of ideology are widespread, but at the same time their content is notoriously unclear. Accordingly, both terms are subject to certain ambiguities and controversies. Nevertheless, it is necessary and possible to achieve a sufficiently clear understanding of both terms, at least for this context of interest.

The essay proceeds as follows. Part 1 reconstructs a substantial concept of naturalism as scientific naturalism, which can be shared by both proponents and opponents of naturalism. Part 2 explains the concept of ideology with the help of research in recent Critical Theory. Three characteristics of ideologies emerge: (i) ideologies are products of social practice and are reproduced socially, (ii) ideologies have practical effects and (iii) ideologies feature a so-called dual deception. Part 3 argues that the concept of naturalism essentially satisfies these three characteristics.

1. Naturalism

It is not trivial to determine the content of naturalism in a detailed and substantial way, since it presents an ambiguous position (Dupré 2004, 36). The main difficulty is to find a formulation that both proponents and opponents of naturalism can accept. This is compounded by the fact that the-

re is an abundance of literature with very different "naturalistic" positions and that the expression itself has a complicated history (see Keil 2000).

Unfortunately, only a few representatives of naturalistic positions make the effort to make the content of their position clear. Hilary Putnam complains accordingly that it is a common feature of naturalistic texts that "as a rule naturalism is not defined" (Putnam 2008, 59). Similarly, De Caro and Macarthur (2008, 2) suspect that the dominant status of naturalism can be recognized by the fact with what little effort it is introduced and justified. Papineau (2015) even concludes from this variety of uses that it would be useless to determine and prescribe an 'official' content of naturalism. *Pace* Papineau, however, we can show here that an adequate description of the content of the naturalism thesis can be found.

The most fruitful and robust form of naturalism is the variety of so-called scientific naturalism or scientistic naturalism[2]. Scientific naturalism is determined by an ontological and a methodological aspect[3]:

Ontological aspect:	The only things that really exist are those things that the natural sciences postulate as existing. All other things must be in some way reducible to entities countenanced by the natural sciences.
Epistemological aspect:	The only genuine knowledge of the world is knowledge gained through the natural sciences.

This way of construing naturalism is shared by relevant commentators, including De Caro & Macarthur (2008), De Caro (2011); Rydenfelt (2011), 115; Tetens (2013a, 2013b), Papineau (2015), and Moser & Yandell (2000, 3-5). A canonical formulation of the ontological aspect can be traced back to Wilfrid Sellars' *scientia mensura* statement: "Science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is

[2] In what follows, I shall use "naturalism" and "scientific naturalism" interchangeably.

[3] This construal already implies more modest forms of naturalism which are characterized by a (i) respect for science, (ii) a rejection of philosophical foundationalism, (iii) and a rejection of supernaturalism. A full reconstruction of scientific naturalism would implicate a third, methodological aspect which is, however, not necessary here.

not" (Sellars 1997, §41). The epistemological aspect is formulated by Rea (2007, 107) and Petersen (2014), for example[4].

This presentation leaves open which disciplines fall under the natural sciences; physics, chemistry and biology present uncontroversial cases. Deflationary and inflationary readings of the ontological thesis, of course, are possible. Borderline cases such as psychology, quantitative social sciences or economics are considered candidates motivating inflation. The deflationary approach wants to adapt the ontological aspect to physicalism, i.e. the future ideal form of physics as the only true natural science on which all others are somehow dependent (Pettit 2010, 297; Field 1992, 271).

The formulation of naturalism by the ontological aspect and the epistemological aspect is chosen in such a way that the naturalism thesis is made so strong that triviality is avoided, but not so strong that it becomes a mere straw man. Nevertheless, it may be the case that not every philosopher who describes himself as a naturalist feels represented by one of these aspects or even both. Nevertheless, a significantly higher degree of inclusiveness seems hardly achievable without making naturalism uncontroversial.

2. Ideology

The concept of ideology is complex insofar as it is part of ordinary language as well as the subject of political philosophy. It is not possible here to provide an account of the convoluted history of the concept of ideology here. Instead, the strategy will be to provide an adequate description of the conceptual content that provides guidance but is not committed to the goal of traditional conceptual analysis, according to which the goal of philosophical conceptual analysis is to find a set of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient for the correct application of a concept. Ideologies also share characteristics of other mental phenomena. For example, ideologies are systems of beliefs with propositional content. It is thus not possible to only have a single one ideological belief. Rather, she who is subject to an ideology must have many different beliefs that make up the whole of this ideology and which stand in a supportive, mutually reinforcing relationship of justification. However, the same also applies, for example, to beliefs which form a specific individual scientific discipline.

[4] The epistemological aspect is sometimes also called "scientism". Scientism is the unjustified, overly confident belief in the explanatory possibilities of the natural sciences (Haack, 2011).

There is a semantic proximity between the terms "worldview", "worldimage" and "ideology". I will use the terms "worldview" and "worldimage" interchangeably (*pace* thinkers like Dilthey and Jaspers) and differentiate "ideology" from either of them. Neither are all ideologies necessarily worldviews, nor are all worldviews ideological. Worldviews always concern the world as a whole. At least some ideologies initially seem to be more localized. However, consistently taken to their conclusion, ideologies can always be extended to the whole of the world[5]. First, there are three characteristics to specify the idea of worldviews as such:

Metaphysical character. It is notoriously controversial how exactly the concept of metaphysics should be characterized. Relatively indisputable features of metaphysical theorems, however, are that they deal with objects or explanations beyond sensory experience and generally relate to the structure of the world as a whole in the traditional sense of a *metaphysica generalis*. Worldviews have a metaphysical character insofar as they concern the structure of the world as a whole.

Generality. Worldviews affect not only one area of life or thought, but the whole. Accordingly, worldviews are neither like singular, individual beliefs ("There is a lamp on my nightstand."), nor like regular philosophical theorems (for example, the analysis of knowledge as a true, justified belief), nor like scientific theories with a manageable scope (for example, the oxygen theory of combustion). The materialistic view of the world therefore presents a view of the world *in its* entirety, namely that everything is material.

Presuppositional status. Worldviews are characterized by a presuppositional-a priori status. This is shown by the fact that worldviews (and the propositional contents with which they can be grasped) do not have easy-to-determine truth conditions like everyday statements (such as "There are three knives in the knife block"). This is closely related to two other points: in first place, worldviews cannot be 'refuted' or 'proven' in the same way as statements made in ordinary language[6]. Instead, worldviews have the character of a transcendental framework. It is therefore unclear

[5] The ideology of neo-liberalism seems at first to be confined to social matters. However, it has to potential to view *the whole world* through an economic lens.

[6] Cf. Wittgensteins *hinge propositions* (*Flussbettsätze*), cf. Wittgenstein (1984), §§94-99, 341, 343; Coliva (2016).

whether and how a worldview can be reasonably justified, or whether the acceptance of a worldview can only work in a decision-making manner.

The three characteristics are obviously closely interwoven. This description of worldviews is intentionally wide and allows a variety of systems of thought to be included. How exactly these characteristics are realized will always depend on the worldview in question. As a metaphysical position, naturalism seems to meet these conditions in a relatively trivial way. Tetens (2013b) simply describes naturalism as a world view (along with dualism and idealism) without further justification. This, of course, has been recognized by other influential thinkers in various forms. Heidegger speaks, for example, of the "calculating worldview" (*rechnendes Weltbild*) (Heidegger 2000a, 2000b), Jaspers of the "physical worldview" (*physikalisches Weltbild*) (Jaspers 1925) (which determines that what is measurable really is) and Sellars of the "scientific image of man" (Sellars 1962). Analogous considerations can also be found among recent representatives of metaphysics (Loewer 2001, Kim 2003, Stoljar 2010). In this way it is possible to speak in terms of Markus Schrenk about a pixel world view:

> [David] Lewis makes a profound realist assumption: the world is, fundamentally, a four dimensional space-time mosaic of instantiations of point size categorical properties […]. [If] you say everything about the microstructure then, maybe, what can be known about macro stuff follows already from summaries of the micro world because the macro consists of the micro[7].

Schrenk draws the picture of a metaphysical bottom-up construction of objects in a four-dimensional space, which consists essentially of smallest pixels. This worldview thus has a natural affinity for physicalism, determinism and scientific realism which does address reality as a whole. Hence, it seems generally uncontroversial to call naturalism a worldview.

However, it is an additional question whether naturalism is an ideology. Ideologies mostly fulfil these three characteristics of worldviews. In addition, however, they have central additional properties. In addition, ideologies have the following characteristics.

1. *Practical implications*. Ideologies have practical implications and are socially efficacious (Jaeggi 2009, 269ff.) Because they offer an interpretation of the world in terms of which actions are acceptable and are posi-

[7] Schrenk (2016, 136f).

tively sanctioned (Stahl 2013, 230). The most relevant impact of this kind is the legitimation of existing power structures and political or social relationships[8]. Ideologies are thus both descriptive and normative, since they offer a description or interpretation of the world, but at the same time have a practical impact on the world, paradigmatically in the form of consolidation of power and affirmation of existing relationships.

2. *Cognitive deficiency*. Ideologies represent cognitive deficiency in the sense of a dual deception (Stahl 2013, §I). To call something "ideological" means to call it wrong in two different ways. First, ideologies are cognitively deficient in that the type of relation to the world they enable does not meet certain standards of justification. Second, the beliefs that make up an ideology are false in the ordinary sense of being false, i.e. that they do not align with relevant facts[9]. Nevertheless, under the influence of ideology, thinkers are not just wrong in the ordinary sense. They are also prey to second-order misinterpretations of their first-order beliefs. This means that individuals who are subject to an ideology have false meta-beliefs, i.e. false beliefs about their false beliefs, in the following special sense: thinkers see their ideological beliefs as timeless, general and objective (Stahl 2013, §5).

In addition to these two characteristics mentioned by Jaeggi and Stahl, a third central characteristic has to be added.

3. *Self-immunization*. Ideological belief systems are special in that they seem to have an intrinsic pull to self-immunize. This gives ideologies a special justification status. Thinkers under the influence of an ideology tend to reject information and reasons that conflict with their ideological beliefs. Instead, this thinker will rather try to integrate this conflicting information and reasons into the ideology, for example by adding certain collateral hypotheses. Thus, ideologies integrate their own contradictions. In this sense, ideology is a worldview into which everything can be made to fit.

Neo-liberalism, certain conspiracy theories (for example, the "flat earth theory"), certain forms of religion or racism are generally considered to be uncontroversial examples of ideologies. The latter should only be briefly

[8] Stahl and Jaeggi further contend that an essential feature of ideologies is that they are a result of social practice. This point, however, seems to be trivially true about virtually all belief systems, for example, scientific or philosophical theories. Therefore, this does not seem to constitute an interesting characteristic of ideologies.

[9] This view is problematic insofar it presupposes a representationalist picture of truth. Nevertheless, such formulations seem to express ordinary conceptions of falsehood which play a role in debates of the ideological status of certain beliefs.

illustrated here. Racist belief systems are ideological in that they very well display the three characteristics mentioned above. First, racist belief systems are themselves the result of social practices since the development and consolidation of certain racisms can usually be traced back to the contexts of certain epochs and localities in the history of ideas. Second, racist belief systems are composed of descriptive and normative beliefs. Racist beliefs are particularly apt to maintain certain power structures that (at least in the Western world) benefit white people. Third, racist beliefs can be viewed as incorrect; at least there seems to be some kind of consensus in parts of philosophy and science (Block 1995, Hacking 2005). In addition, proponents or carriers of racist ideologies are confused about the status of the falseness of their own beliefs. The confusion lies in the false meta-belief that the first level racist beliefs are unquestionable, in a sense are eternal and natural, i.e. represent wholly mind-independent facts. Thinkers under the influence of racist ideology thus show a lack of sociological imagination (Mills 1959), i.e. the ability to understand that certain phenomena could at least partly have social, not just natural, causes.

3. Is Naturalism an Ideology?

Unlike in the case of racism or neo-liberalism, however, it is much more complicated to answer the question of whether naturalism can be understood under the concept of ideology. In what follows I try to demonstrate that naturalism fulfils the three specific characteristics of ideologies. This demonstration is mainly based on paradigmatic examples.

First aspect. Does philosophical naturalism have practical implications on a societal and cultural scale, similar to those exhibited by standard examples of the concept of ideology, such as racism or neo-liberalism? Does naturalism have practical effects that are able to legitimize certain power structures and hierarchies? There is at least some evidence of such social and political relevance. To get to this conclusion, I briefly reconstruct three examples from Akeel Bilgrami, Jürgen Habermas and Gerhard Roth.

Bilgrami (2010) provides a genealogical reconstruction of the socio-political ramifications that apparently made possible the popularity of naturalism in the intellectual culture of the early modern period in Europe. He notes that the introduction and acceptance of the concept of nature as it is implied by naturalism depended partly on economic motives. The fundamental idea is that naturalism offers a view of nature as disenchanted,

that is, free of intrinsic meaning and normative properties (Bilgrami 2010, 24-32). Accordingly, the *Royal Society* was able to assert its image as the dominant view of the English establishment, because the idea of a disenchanted world provides a suitable intellectual foundation for the economic interests of the early industrial sector. Viewing themselves as drawing simply metaphysical consequences of Newton's system, the *Royal Society* thus completed the exile of the Father God from the universe into a transcendent beyond, that is, the process that Nietzsche later calls the 'death of God' (Nietzsche 2014, §125). The contradicting view of the *Freethinkers*, however, held on to the metaphysical understanding of the concept of nature as it can be found in a theistic world view. Disenchanted nature offers its inventory as resources that can be used for industrial purposes without having to worry about any normative or divine status. Bilgrami's far-reaching point is, therefore, that naturalism is of "broad cultural and political importance" (Bilgrami 2010, 24.)

Someone may triumphantly claim that Bilgrami's argument looks merely at historical circumstances that led to the rise of naturalism as a philosophical doctrine rather than at the content of the doctrine itself. Anyone who confuses origin and validity of an idea commits a trivial mistake, one might stress. But against such objections it can be shown that the naturalistic worldview still has practical implications that are independent of economic interests at the beginning of its initial consolidation. Bilgrami's narrative, admittedly, does seem a bit grandiose. Certainly, the process of disenchanting nature cannot be viewed as monocausally brought about by economic interests (not that Bilgrami claims that either). However, his remarks provide interesting clues as to how naturalism is socio-politically, not purely philosophically, relevant.

To illustrate this further socio-political relevance, the following second example is pertinent. Jürgen Habermas has repeatedly drawn attention to the practical effects of the scientific worldview in (post-) modern thinking and for modern societies as a whole. Habermas sees the primary threat to the naturalization of the mind in that it de-socializes our self-image as human beings (Habermas 2001, 17f.). The crucial aspect of naturalism that is subject to such naturalization projects is that humans are not intrinsically normative beings, i.e. people in the full sense, but primarily and fundamentally a mere, albeit highly complex, conglomerate of the smallest particles. This perspective alone can potentially threaten respect for human dignity and the (Kantian) principle of not using people as a means but only as a purpose. Bilgrami states that naturalism disenchants

nature; Habermas extends this idea insofar as naturalism also disenchants *human* nature.

A third example has already been touched upon with Schrenk's formulation of the pixel worldview. Since the pixel worldview of naturalism seems to entail in determinism, it is not compatible with free will. This is itself a practical implication of naturalism insofar as it includes a denial of real practical freedom and spontaneity of the human mind. What is more pressing, however, is that the free will debate is not anymore just a purely verbal matter internal to academic philosophy. Instead, certain varieties of this view have found their way into public discourse in recent decades. The most well-known form of this topic is of course the relatively young combination of brain research and legal scholarship, that is, whenever neuroscientists draw practical consequences from their research. The central claim of some neuroscientists is that the progress of neuroscience shows that actions are not determined voluntarily, but by neural mechanisms (Roth 1996, 303-313). The perceived free will, which we perceive introspectively when making a decision, is the claim, a mere illusion, at best an incidental epiphenomenon of our nervous system. The socially relevant belief, which we should therefore jettison as it were, is that of culpability as such. Because if the brain determines actions in a closed causal chain, the agent cannot be held responsible for such actions. This argument has caused some critical reactions in the context of critical neuroscience (Lavazza & De Caro 2010, Choudhury et al. 2009, see also Habermas 2004); however, this debate cannot be further pursued here. What matters is that the bold suggestions of certain neuroscientists illustrate another social influence of naturalism and the associated pixel worldview.

These three examples exemplify that naturalism is often used to legitimize certain social questions of power and the consolidation of hierarchies. The characterization of naturalism as ideological in this sense demonstrates that it is not unwarranted to consider naturalism not only as a (meta-) philosophical thesis, but in a structural context with cultural and social processes. The three cultural and social ramifications mentioned here are: the prioritization of economic rationality since the early modern period, the depersonalized self-image of people and the legal revision of the idea of culpability as such. However, a complete analysis of the various interrelationships between naturalism, culture and rule deserved a much longer and more systematic examination, which cannot be offered here[10].

[10] More on the entanglement of naturalism and other cultural contexts can be found in Habermas (2009).

Second aspect. Another question is whether naturalists have false meta-beliefs about naturalism. This aspect relates to the mentioned circumstance of the cultural prevalence of naturalism and the absence of considering alternatives. False meta-beliefs in the context of an ideology paradigmatically consist in the fact that one's own beliefs are timeless, general and objective. It can be assumed, of course, that naturalistic philosophers, insofar as they see themselves as critical thinkers, would reject such meta-beliefs that concern universality, objectivity and timelessness in their own position. Still, it seems that the common philosophical practice of treating naturalism as the right answer in practice outweighs verbal declarations. However, such treatment in philosophical practice has always decided on the question of truth and the lack of alternatives to naturalism, insofar as naturalism is treated as a theoretical framework within which reasonable or acceptable philosophy can play out. In addition, the systemic nature of naturalism makes it possible to integrate good reasons against naturalism into the naturalistic framework with relative ease.

Third aspect. Naturalism (or the defense strategy of its proponents) tends to a kind of self-immunization, which usually results in a reformulation of naturalism, whereby the content of the naturalism thesis changes significantly, but the proponents of naturalism are still allowed to use the label "Naturalism". This immunization strategy can be seen as an example from three moves by the defenders of naturalism as reactions to two different arguments against naturalism.

First, it is (rightly) against naturalism that today's physics is far from sufficient to carry out naturalistic reductions of mental and normative properties on physical entities (or entities of other natural sciences)[11]. Second, the naturalism thesis suffers from problems of coherence. The incoherence of naturalism can be formulated in different ways, but the following seems the simplest: If real knowledge is only given by the natural sciences, how should this epistemological principle itself count as serious knowledge? Both arguments are serious, relatively easy to grasp, not very easy to refute and are sufficient reasons to be at least skeptical about naturalism. Defenders of naturalism, however, have three moves in response to these problems.

[11] A *locus classicus* in the debate of anti-reductionism is Fodor (1974). Some naturalists (2012) believe that naturalism can be justified in virtue of introducing much weaker supervenience relations alone. But even those theories face difficult challenges, cf. Stoljar (2017, §9), Horgan (1993), and Buekens (2018).

The first move is to assert that current physics is not yet able to preserve naturalism, but that ideal physics in the future will show that normative and mental properties can be completely reduced. It can be said that naturalism is already true, we just have to have confidence in the explanatory power of future ideal physics (Stoljar 2017, §12.2). The second move is based on criticism of the coherence of naturalism (and criticism of the plausibility of trust in future ideal physics) the naturalism thesis as a project (Rea 2002, 2007, Sukopp 2007) or attitude (Ney 2009, Elpidorou & Dove 2018). Theses can be incoherent, but attitudes cannot, which would easily avoid the problem of incoherence[12].

Someone may object that adapting one's own philosophical thesis to criticism in philosophy is quite normal and desirable. However, these two moves of the naturalist have problems that philosophical defense strategies normally do not have. The first move (reference to future ideal physics) simply represents a form of dogmatism in which it is not clear how a doubter, i.e. someone without this form of trust, could be convinced of it at all. The second move, on the other hand, represents what can be called goal-post shifting. Naturalism is no longer a thesis, but a kind of attitude. It is unclear whether the same topic is still being debated. In addition, the very consideration here is that naturalism as an attitude is no longer truthful and therefore cannot be identified as false. In order to be able to hold onto the label "Naturalism", the chess move of naturalism itself is abandoned.

The third move is to ignore criticism. In view of the confusion and the large number of publications that either treat the naturalist positively or use the terms "naturalism" and "naturalistic" as positive self-characterization, it is astonishing how little literature there is in comparison that defends naturalism against objections. By not responding to the criticism of the opponents, your own thesis remains unaffected. Naturalism is already treated as correct in practice. Ignoring objections is probably the most effective form of self-immunization. The reference to the solution of the problems of naturalism in the future, the goal-post shifting and the ignoring of objections thus exemplify the tendency of naturalism to self-immunization.

Is there anything against considering naturalism as an ideology? First, it may be objected that the subject of naturalism is largely restricted to the academic field and has not found its way into everyday life, unlike, for example, the ideologies of neoliberalism and racism. However, it should be

[12] For factual criticism cf. Peels (2017, 1) and Melnyk (2018).

borne in mind that it is a feature of ideologies to act as a system of shared background assumptions that are effective even without sustained or institutionalized expression. On the contrary, this may well be another reason why naturalism has the status of an ideology, since it has not yet reached a self-confident focus as a certain system of shared background assumptions, just as racist ideologies were effective long before they were self-confidently discussed and criticized were.

Second, a critic might want to state that idealism and dualism, as classic metaphysical competitors to materialism and naturalism, have equally far-reaching practical consequences. This seems incorrect, however. Instead, it seems that idealism and dualism as metaphysical positions have the status of a worldview but cannot be qualified as ideologies. It cannot be said that idealism and dualism represent a generally accepted view in parts of the academic world or wider society. They simply have fewer – if any – social manifestations of the relevant kind. However, in order to be socially efficacious, ideologies require a certain degree of acceptance, at least within certain social groups; a 'private' ideology would be irrelevant. Therefore, idealism and dualism cannot have the same practical effectiveness as naturalism, demonstrating the exceptional status metaphysics has as both a metaphysical worldview and an ideology.

Third, someone might object that the characterization of the concept of ideology that I have used here is so broad that all philosophical theses which have some normative significance must be characterized as ideologies. In fact, there are some borderline cases. For example, it would not be entirely implausible to argue that the meta-ethical thesis of cultural relativism is an ideology. An analogous argument regarding consequentialist theories in ethics would not be implausible. Conceptual borderline cases of this or a similar kind can be found in all non-formal (i.e. non-mathematical and non-formal logic) terms, *a fortiori* the concept of ideology will always be beset by borderline cases. However, it seems that borderline cases of philosophical theses of this sort are differentiated from naturalism in a central way that disqualifies them as ideologies. This central point concerns the character of dual deception. Specifically, proponents of moral relativism or consequentialism are mostly aware that these positions compete with opposing positions (i.e. moral absolutism or deontology respectively) that cannot already be described as completely 'outdated' or 'obsolete'. Awareness of the possibility that other positions may be correct in the light of better arguments usually ensures that meta-beliefs about universality, objectivity, and lack of alternatives regarding theses such as cultural relativism or consequentialism are absent or at least weakened.

4. What does it mean that Naturalism is an Ideology?

If naturalism is an ideology, then some metaphilosophical and methodological peculiarities follow. What does it mean not only to understand naturalism as philosophically wrong, but to consider it as ideology? Identifying naturalism as false *qua* philosophical thesis is a relatively mundane endeavor, regardless of how complex the dialectical structure of the debate is. This is because not much depends on the truth of a philosophical thesis – especially a position from the field of theoretical philosophy. At the very least, that which is outside of the inner-philosophical inferential network of propositions is hardly impacted if at all. The significance of a philosophical thesis is first and foremost usually limited to the academic philosophical discourse (which should not mean that some philosophical thoughts do not develop enormous practical and social potential over a longer period of time). Criticizing naturalism as a mere philosophical thesis would therefore simply be part of ordinary philosophical life.

On the other hand, to view naturalism as an ideology means, as a first step, to view naturalism *qua* ideology as wrong. This step is trivial insofar as it is part of the concept of ideology that ideologies are wrong. As a second step, it means to look at naturalism as something whose significance is different from that of a number of other, 'ordinary' philosophical propositions. It means working out and criticizing its practical implications. Criticizing naturalism as an ideology therefore means (i) criticizing some of its practical, social implications regarding power relations, (ii) correcting the self-image of its philosophical proponents and (iii) not attributing its status as orthodoxy primarily to its philosophical goodness, but rather on its status as an ideology. These three points are now briefly elucidated in turn.

To consider naturalism as an ideology means, firstly, to consider its relation to power and hierarchy. To criticize naturalism as an ideology is thus, trivially, to criticize social structures. Social criticism in the context of ideology critique mostly refers to the relationship of the ideology in question to the consolidation of power and hierarchy. In the case of naturalism, such criticism has two components. First, such a criticism would have to pertain to the relationship between naturalism and power structures present in external and internal funding allocation and academic politics more broadly conceived. Such criticism required an investigation into whether and to what extent, for example, the allocation of (tenured) jobs, third-party funding and spots in renowned journals favours work with the labels "naturalism" and "naturalistic" as an indicator of 'respectable' philosophy.

Second, such criticism relates to the extra-academic relationship between naturalism and power structures. On the one hand, such a criticism – as in the case of Habermas – can appear more prognostically and abstractly in form of a critique of the de-socialization of the concept of person. On the other hand, such criticism can focus more specifically on the preservation of certain aspects of social power. A current example in which naturalistic thinking in a biological guise becomes socially relevant is in some excrescences of evolutionary psychology, insofar as it is used to positively sanction traditional gender relations and justify them scientifically.

Secondly, to criticize naturalism as an ideology requires the proponent of naturalism to understand naturalism as false on the one hand and, moreover, to acknowledge that he or she is under the influence of an ideology of which he or she should free themselves. Whoever describes a system of thought as ideology also calls it a *mere* ideology. In this respect, the predicate "ideological" expresses a thick concept, so it is descriptive and evaluative at the same time. Philosophy is a discipline guided by reason after all, that is, a discipline in which the "unforced force" (Habermas) of the better argument is supposed to decide. However, the third characteristic of ideologies – the tendency towards self-immunization – conflicts with the (*prima facie* justified) self-understanding of naturalists as reason-guided philosophers. If it is true that naturalism tends to self-immunization *qua* ideology, then its proponents consider themselves exempt from the unforced force of the better argument. And this applies regardless of whether the strategy of self-immunization occurs consciously (for example by referring to a future-ideal physics) or unconsciously (by ignoring counter-arguments). This becomes clear in considering examples in which proponents of naturalism, even in the face of sensible criticism, modify the naturalism thesis very significantly[13] in order to still be able to hold onto this -ism. However, there is another social-institutional challenge. Understanding naturalism as an ideology will probably at best result in the naturalist digging their heels in and producing counter-arguments. In the worst case, he or she simply ignores the criticism and continues unfazed. However, the endeavor to understand naturalism as an ideology can also be interpreted in a more positive and charitable way: qualifying naturalism as an ideology is intended as a friendly invitation to take a step back from beloved, seemingly innocuous beliefs.

[13] From a thesis to a project or an attitude, cf. Rea (2002), Ney (2009) and Elpidorou & Dove (2018).

Third, the self-immunization of naturalism as an ideology indicates that ordinary criticism of naturalism does not work from a purely theoretical point of view. The sheer *will* to a certain philosophical idea can be stronger than any argument against it. Naturalism in its status as a philosophical orthodoxy can only affected effectively by identifying it as ideology and then criticizing it as ideology. This point now also emphasizes the necessity of not only looking at naturalism in a philosophical way: a mere theoretical-philosophical critique of naturalism does not meet the status of naturalism as an ideology. In order to advance the debate about the truth or falseness of naturalism, it seems to me that such a fundamental reflection on the status of the naturalism thesis is necessary. This is due to the mentioned socio-political role of the label "naturalistic": On the one hand, this label seems to work in large parts of philosophy as an indicator for "reasonable", "respectable", "not hostile to science". On the other hand, the word "naturalist" sometimes functions as a political demarcation for the left-leaning liberal academic elite, at least in the aforementioned US-American creationism debate. Under the din of such ideological trench warfare, the reasonable force of a good argument against naturalism as a philosophical thesis does not seem to be able to move anyone.

5. Outlook

There are good reasons to subsume naturalism under the concept of ideology. I have argued that naturalism fulfils three central features of the concept of ideology. I then anticipated three objections. In all this, naturalism's almost *compulsive force* is central: we have to be naturalists lest we be "science-phobic", or so some may believe.

If naturalism is an ideology, how are we to proceed? Similar to worldviews, ideologies have a special epistemological status, which means that they cannot be refuted like statements of ordinary language. It is therefore possible that naturalism can only be treated in a certain way in the spirit of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy. This can perhaps be made intelligible if we envision the naturalist as a person who wears glasses of a certain strength and color, glasses which appear unremovable to her (i.e. is 'without alternative'). The aim of the therapy is not to convince the patient that the glasses have a certain strength or distortion, but that the patient wears glasses

in the first place and that actually nothing prevents her from removing them[14]. Accordingly, worldviews are harmless as long as *we* have mastered the worldviews. However, naturalism seems to have become a worldview that has mastered *us*. Luckily, just as one can choose to embrace a certain worldview, you can also decide to reject it.

Within philosophical practice, this critical claim can be based on three interrelated objectives. First, it is necessary to drag naturalism out of the background of non-thematic assumptions and to put it in the foreground of the philosophical theses that are the subject of critical debates. Secondly, at the scale of the organization of academic research, it is perhaps necessary to stop proposing and demanding naturalization projects for some period of time until at least the hermeneutic-inferential progress within the naturalism debate has progressed. Thirdly, it is advisable to reconsider alternative positions more strongly: (absolute) idealism and dualism or even metaphysical quietism.

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[14] This metaphor suggests that there be something like an un-ideological view on the world as a default setting. This is dubious at best which is why this partial dis-analogy in this analogy has to be discounted.

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