CHAPTER 4

Scientism: Reflections on Nature, Value, and Agency

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I

That there is a distinction we make between "scientific" and "scientistic" is reflected in the fact that many who have no phobia of science, indeed admire it greatly, have declared that they find scientism distasteful. Since a chapter, even a book, gives one insufficient space to say what "science" is, let me take for granted that we have some instinctive grasp of what we intend by that term, and ask: What is "scientism"? Even a glance at the writings that recoil from scientism would suggest that it is perceived to be a kind of overreach in the name of science, taking it to a place beyond its proper dominion.

One form of overreaching has tended to take the form of making large claims on science's behalf, claims that are philosophical rather than scientific, yet, in doing so, relying – by a sleight of hand, a fallacious conflation – on the authority of science. In this chapter, I explore one such claim, the claim that *there is nothing (no property of or in nature, no fact of or in nature) that cannot be brought under the purview of natural science's inquiries.* Such a full coverage of nature on science's behalf is a claim that is philosophical, not scientific, since no science contains that claim. Yet many consider the assertion that nature contains properties that natural science does not countenance to be unscientific. That is the just the sort of sleight of hand that is said to be typical of scientism. But even suppose that no one declares it to be unscientific. The question I explore in this chapter is whether it is overzealous on behalf of science – in the way that scientism is – to say that any denial of the claim which I have italicized above is bad *philosophy*.

It is worth noting (one would not understand the real nature of the claim if one did not) that this claim, despite the sort of overreach I've just mentioned, is often accompanied by quite genuine expressions of humility which admit to having brought very little of what is in nature effectively within the purview of natural science's explanatory scope. The point of the claim is not to say that what can be done has been done. The point of the

claim is not even perhaps best presented by saying that it can be done. Rather it is to say that it is the business of natural science to cover in its inquiry all that is there in nature. It is this last point that the opponents of scientism are resisting.

I want to explore a familiar (and contentious) ground of such a resistance, which repudiates scientism by asserting that nature (and the world we inhabit, more generally) contains value properties and facts, for instance moral facts, and these are not the proper subject of science.

What are these facts and properties? This very question should perhaps be seen as expressing a prejudice. For now, let us just say in response that such facts are what are specified by sentences such as, "The Malabar forest is valuable," "Gandhi's civil disobedience was courageous," "The genocide of Jews was cruel," "The treatment of Palestinians by the Israeli government is inhuman," when these sentences are true; and when they are true, the predicates "is valuable," "is courageous," "is cruel," "is inhuman" are satisfied by the relevant value properties. I have said "for now" let us characterize these value properties in this relatively uninformative sense because, as the chapter unfolds, more substantive characterizations will emerge that elaborate the nature of values by linking them *intrinsically* to practical agency. The more tentative and uninformative characterization just given is intended merely to show that there is no reason to think (that it would, in fact, be a prejudice to think) that there is anything more mysterious about value properties than there is about any other properties which we unselfconsciously speak of in the sentences we utter, and so there is no particular need to withhold notions of fact and of truth, when speaking of values in sentences that deploy the vocabulary of value than there is in speaking of anything else in any other vocabulary we unselfconsciously deploy.

Of course, none of this will satisfy those (many) who simply deny that the notion of truth (and the objectivity it is supposed to reflect) so much as applies to sentences or propositions that contain an (irreducible) vocabulary of value. What I aim to provide in this chapter are grounds for withdrawing this denial. But before I proceed to do that, I should expend a few words to register skepticism about a widely held view that *only* certain considerations (not present in the grounds I aim to provide) can ground the proper applicability of the notion of truth. Thus Bernard Williams, echoing many others,[1] has proposed that only the natural sciences are characterized by a certain *accumulation and convergence* in judgment that is *necessary* to ground a proper application of notions of

[1] See Williams 1985. A similar argument was made earlier by Richard Boyd and by Hilary Putnam.

truth, objectivity, and realism to their propositions and the objects and properties and facts they posit and describe. The argument goes roughly as follows. Science is the *only* cognitive enterprise in which the results of inquiry have built upon each other over the centuries and cumulatively arrived upon a convergence. And there can be no other explanation of this convergence but to say that the judgments of science are tracking the truth and that their theoretical posits are *real* objects or properties in the world. Where there is no such convergence in judgment, we lack a proper ground for the attribution of objectivity and realism that is carried by the concept of truth.

Let me express my skepticism about this argument by asking: When did we *start* converging in this cumulative way upon the truth? Did we start doing so from the very beginnings of human thought? Surely not. For centuries there were all sorts of false starts and false leads that were abandoned. In fact, Williams himself is quite explicit that it is only sometime in the seventeenth century that we began upon such a convergence. Why is that? Because it is only with science in the modern period that we were set on the right path, says Williams, and, once on that path, the results of scientific inquiry began to accumulate, building upon each other, toward a convergence. So now, let us further ask: What makes this path that opened up sometime only in the seventeenth century the *right* path? What is that word "right" doing there? If we become clear about what makes that path the right path, we would have established the objectivity and realism that William hankers for in science, and we do not need the rest of the accumulation and convergence as an argument for scientific objectivity and truth. For Williams' argument to be the argument it is, it must presuppose what he wants to argue for. He is presupposing *truth* in his assumption of a *right* path in the elaboration of the argument for truth via convergence. That notion of truth is not compulsorily tied to any considerations of convergence. Thus, the domain of value, even if it cannot be characterized by such a convergence, can nevertheless be host to the full prestige of *truth*.

Returning then to my anti-scientistic claim, which appeals to the presence of value properties, it is important for me to give a careful answer to the question why it is that value properties, if they exist in the world we inhabit, are not the proper subject of natural science. We can, of course, study values by methods of study that are disinterested and systematic in the way that science, at least when it is exemplary, aspires to be, but there is something fundamental about values that will necessarily be left out in such study. It is this fundamental fact about values that constitutes the real

source of the resistance to scientism. Much of this chapter, therefore, seeks to elaborate this source of resistance more or less exactly in an argument.

The fundamental fact about value properties in the world (including nature) that makes the natural sciences beside the point is that when we perceive such properties in nature (in the world around us, generally), they prompt our *practical* agency, not our theoretical agency, not our agency that seeks to explain and predict in a detached and disengaged form of inquiry, but the agency that seeks to address the *normative* (in the sense of practical) demands those perceptible values make on us. Invoking Kant, we might say that value properties in nature and the perceptible world, generally, fall outside the scope of science because their scope really falls within practical reason or agency, the subject of Kant's *second* "Critique," quite outside the reach of physics and mathematics that are the explicit examples of the *theoretical* domain mentioned in the theme-setting "Preface" of his *first* "Critique." Kant himself did not put things as I have ("value properties in nature and the perceptible world prompt our practical, not theoretical, reason") because he thought nature and the properties of the perceptible world (what he called "phenomena") were entirely the domain of theoretical reason and, in particular, Newtonian science. That is why practical reason was relegated by him to what he called "noumena," for him a nonnatural realm. So, my appeal to Kant here is, in some strict sense, partial. But if we put aside the gratuitous metaphysics of the distinction between phenomena and noumena (a distinction forced on him only because of the sheer artifice of his equation of "nature" or "phenomena" with "that which is exhaustively the domain of Newtonian science"), the insight that there is *a disjointness* between practical and theoretical agency (needing two quite different critical philosophical inquiries or "critiques") is a natural starting point to explore the real source of the resistance to scientism.

Now, these considerations of agency that I am bringing to center stage may, with some right, be thought to offer a more radical and perhaps deeper path of resistance to scientism than I pursue in this chapter. As I said, what I am pursuing is a resistance to the scientistic claim that nature contains only what the natural sciences countenance by providing an argument for the counterclaim that nature contains value properties that natural sciences do not countenance, because unlike the properties that the natural sciences do permit they are intrinsically tied to our practical agency. The more radical path against scientism appeals to considerations of agency in a more pre-emptive manner than the resistance

I pursue by denying *the very articulability* of the scientistic claim we are discussing. It might go like this.

Natural scientific explanation, its laws and predictions and the ontology of objects, properties, and facts that these laws and explanations deliver, are an outcome of theoretical *agency*. Once these deliverances of this sort of agency is in place, we have a metaphysical picture of what the world contains, and then scientism appeals to just this metaphysical picture to say: "We do not find values in that picture, nor can we fit values in that picture." The radical path of resistance to such scientism says in response: You have things the wrong way round. You proceed as if the metaphysical picture is primary and comes fully formed, as if from nowhere. You, thus, present the ontology as what is given first, ignoring the fact that it is the deliverance of an exercise of (theoretical) agency. Science is first and foremost a *practice*. The practice, of course, has its outcome (it's deliverances, as I put it), but philosophy must make the practice the primary focus, not the outcome, since it is the practice that makes possible the outcome. And if, for that reason, it is made primary, we will find that in the practice, the practitioners are constantly and ineliminably speaking of how evidence *justifies* certain hypotheses, to generate its laws and predictions. That talk of justification is normative talk; it speaks to *values* of rationality. So, it is neither here nor there that we cannot find a place for values in the *metaphysical outcome* of this practice. The values are present in the very thing that makes the outcome possible, the exercise of theoretical *agency* in the practice of science. Philosophy must not make the metaphysics primary. It is the agency and practice that is primary.[2] If so, scientism cannot so much as get off the ground. I have considerable sympathy with this path of resistance to scientism because I have sympathy with its conception of philosophy, but since it will only carry conviction for those already possessed of such meta-philosophical commitments, I proceed more patiently without assuming those commitments at the outset.

Two more preliminaries – first an historically contextualizing point and then a ground-clearing one – before I lay out in detail the chapter's argument for the anti-scientistic conclusion that the perceptible world, including nature, contains value properties.

[2] Pragmatists have long stressed the primacy of practice, yet many have failed to see the more radical implications and succumbed to one or other version of the scientism we are discussing. The diagnosis for this deserves a careful accounting elsewhere.

John McDowell (1979) has, in recent years, attributed just such a conclusion to Aristotle.[3] But Aristotle is a very high philosophical location for it and high philosophy is only a narrow strand of intellectual history. It was a pervasive part of the worldview of a wide variety of folk and spiritual traditions (including popular Christianity) for centuries before and after Aristotle. These traditions, unlike Aristotle, mostly viewed the source of perceptible value properties in the world to be sacred and conceived nature as being shot through with value *because* it was shot through with the presence of the divine. It was only after the desacralization of nature in the modern period that such a view of nature began to be treated with a special hostility, not initially by those who proclaimed the "death of God" (that came somewhat later) but even before that by those who arranged for the "exile of God" ("Deus absconditus") to a distant place outside the universe of matter and nature in a strictly "providential" role.

This was not a purely intellectual hostility.[4] It was often motivated by political and material considerations. Those who continued to see nature as sacralized by God's presence were dismissed as "enthusiasts" both for seeking to make God democratically available to all who inhabited his earth rather than exclusively accessible only to the learned scriptural judgment of university-trained divines, as well as for placing metaphysical and theological obstacles in the way of prospects for taking from nature with impunity. I say "with impunity" for a reason. Human beings have, of course, been taking from nature ever since they came to inhabit it, but in every social world until this period, there were rituals enacted before and after cycles of planting (and even hunting) to show respect and reciprocation to nature for the gifts it presented. By contrast, with desacralization, taking "with impunity" seems a quite apt description of the human – at

[3] McDowell has developed the view he attributes to Aristotle along interesting and attractive lines, though for a radical disagreement between us on one central matter – the supervenience of value properties on the properties that natural science studies – see chapter 5 of Bilgrami 2006 and McDowell 2006. See also the exchanges in the symposium on my 2006 book in Baldwin 2010, Normore 2010, and Bilgrami 2010.

[4] There were intellectual issues at stake as well, and on one central such issue, that of *motion*, it is not obvious that the "enthusiasts'" view (the presence of God in all matter and nature) was any less warranted than the Newtonians' ("the exile of God"). Neither side of the dispute was getting prizes in this period for any kind of atheistic denial of God. Newton's laws were apparently compatible with the existence of God for all sides. The crucial point is that there is no reason to think that it was only God conceived as stationed at an external or Archimedean point, providing for motion as a clockwinder, that was compatible with these laws. The enthusiasts' quite different conception of God as present in nature and providing for motion as an *inner* source of dynamism, was quite as compatible.

any rate, European – outlook on nature. It was such an ushering out of God to this remote station, external to nature and matter, that made possible the scientistic claim that nature contained no properties that natural science (then known as "natural philosophy") did not study. It emerged in the seventeenth century, and grew into an entire outlook, a zeitgeist, as a result of worldly alliances formed first in England (spreading next to the Netherlands, and then to the rest of Europe) between the (high church) Anglican establishment, the institutions around science (such as the Royal Society founded in 1660 and somewhat later the Royal Institution), and commercial interests, determined to transform the very concept of nature into the concept of natural resources.[5]

This deracination of God from nature resulted over time in an illicit extension of the notion of desacralization to the more general notion of "disenchantment."[6] The exile of God, thus, led to evacuating nature of *value* properties as well, which was perhaps an unsurprising consequence in a time when values were pervasively assumed to have religious foundations. Thus, by the time of the eighteenth century, in high philosophy, Hume was presenting values as wholly derivable from our *states of mind* (our desires and moral sentiments, our capacities for sympathy, etc.), whereas the *world* we inhabit was a fully Newtonian world, bereft of all properties that fall outside the scope of explanation by Newton's laws. For all the vehement disagreements on the nature of values that contemporary Humeans and Kantians have registered in recent years, Hume and Kant were one on this particular issue – their radically different ethical and meta-ethical views *both* ruled out the possibility of even a *secular* enchantment of nature, that is to say, a conception of nature that contained value properties without any sacred source underlying them.

The second and ground-clearing point is this. It may seem that such a resistance to this form of scientism by appeal to values is pushing at open doors. Isn't the heyday of a no-holds-barred "naturalism," in which natural science claims this kind of exhaustive coverage, a philosophical outlook that has now passed? Has there not been a frequent acknowledgment that human subjects, because of their unique possession of "reason," language, self-consciousness, etc., are set apart in not being subsumable under the laws with which we aspire to explain the natural phenomena in the world

[5] For a fine account of these alliances, see Jacob 1981. See also Schaffer 1997 and Jacob 1978.

[6] It is a pity that there is no Latin expression such as "Deus deracinus," since "Deus absconditus" gives the misleading impression – at least to English speakers – of a fugitive fleeing, whereas it was a willful putting away of God to a remote outpost. But, in fact, "absconditus" does not mean what it sounds like to the English-speaking ear. It means, roughly, "put away for safeguarding."

they inhabit? This acknowledgment, which though it may have come late to philosophers in the English-speaking tradition (it was explicitly made much earlier in the "verstehen" and hermeneutical traditions in European philosophy), is now increasingly voiced by "analytic" philosophers.

But it is not these doors against which the anti-scientism in question is pushing. As I said, Kant's very claim, in his second work of "critical" philosophy, to a pure practical reason that was radically disjoint from theoretical (what Kant sometimes called "speculative") reason, the subject of his first such work, was already an acknowledgment of the limited coverage of Newtonian science. Rather, it is the very fact that Kant had to seek a distinct domain from the perceptible world of "phenomena" for practical reason that reflects the scientism being resisted. Hence, the acknowledgment by the hermeneutical tradition and more recently by analytic philosophers that human subjects are set apart from the rest of natural phenomena as objects of inquiry misses the point that what is being resisted is just the idea that values are a construction of human subjectivity, that is to say, of human states of mind (moral sentiments, to use the vocabulary of Hume and Adam Smith). The resistance is precisely claiming that human states of mind such as moral sentiments are themselves formed by the *perception* of values *in the world*, that is to say, the "phenomenal" and natural world that human subjects inhabit; in other words, it is claiming – to put it in Weberian terms – that it is shallow to think that it is merely *we* who are "enchanted" while we inhabit a *world*, including a natural habitat, that is disenchanted. So, the argument I try to lay out is for the conclusion that it is *only because* the world that human subjects inhabit *is* (to continue with this Weberian vocabulary) "enchanted" that human subjects are.

II

I have said that the fundamental path of resistance to scientism that I follow is the one that denies the claim that "there is nothing, no facts, no properties, in nature that fall outside the purview of the natural sciences" by asserting that nature (the perceptible world, generally) contains facts and properties described in irreducibly value terms, and these cannot be brought under the sort of detached inquiry that natural science undertakes in its explanations and predictions because our perception of value properties (or, more simply, values) in the world prompts our *practical* agency, not our disengaged and detached theoretical inquiry. *So, it is really by exploiting the conceptual tie between values and (practical) agency that one takes this path of resistance.*

One can first get a glimpse of the relevant considerations of agency if we consider an utterly familiar ambiguity we find in the following thought or proposition, which is so often on our minds and lips:

"I will do . . . "

It could be interpreted in one of two ways:

(1) I intend that I will . . .
(2) I predict that I will . . .

These are radically different thoughts that can be expressed by the same words; different because (1) and (2) harbor entirely distinct points of view or perspectives on oneself. When one predicts that one will do something, one is taking a disengaged or detached point of view on oneself. One is viewing oneself to be an object rather than a subject. When one intends something, one has an engaged perspective on oneself, one takes oneself to be an agent. In (1), both occurrences of "I" are the I of agency. But in (2), only the first occurrence of "I" is the I of agency. In the second occurrence of "I" in (2), the personal pronoun denotes an object. This is because in (2) the subject in the first occurrence of "I," speaking or thinking these words or this thought, views himself or herself in a purely disengaged and detached way.

One can have both these perspectives (engaged and detached) on oneself, but not at the same time. In other words, one cannot at the same time both intend and predict that one will do something. The one perspective necessarily displaces the other. Moreover, and more important for the purposes of this chapter's argument, unless one had an engaged perspective on oneself, one would not be a practical agent. Or, to put it from the other side: (3) *If one only had or if all one had was a detached or disengaged perspective on oneself (as exemplified in [2]), one would cease to be a practical agent*. This is a point of real significance, which I exploit later.

Why do I use the term "practical" agent in making this significant point? Because, as I said, in (2) the first occurrence of "I" *is* the I of agency. But in (2) that agency is exercised in a purely theoretical way on oneself, explaining and predicting one's behavior. Predicting and explaining are, of course, agentive acts, so there is no denying that one is an agent when one is viewing oneself with detachment and predicting what one will do. But one's angle on oneself, being detached in this way, restricts one's agency in (2) to theoretical agency. It is only when one's angle on oneself is engaged, as in (1), that one is a practical agent. That is why, were we only to possess the perspective present in (2), we would not be practical agents, even if we were agents.

I have put this last qualification "even if we were agents" in this conditional and hesitant form because it is highly implausible that we could possess agency *at all*, agency of *any* kind, if we possessed no practical agency. The idea that we are agents who are only capable of detached observation and prediction and explanation but no practical agency whatever is, in the end, an incoherent idea, though I won't argue for that here.[7] The point I keep in focus till a little later, however, is the italicized point (3) – that we cannot really be agents in the practical sense at all if we only have a detached perspective on ourselves as in (2). Point (3) is a conditional and I am *pretending*, for the sake of argument, that the antecedent in that conditional is coherent, just so as to set up the conditional for the later use I want to put it to.

Now, so far, I have said that an elementary ambiguity in a certain very common thought or expression hides a deep philosophical distinction between two perspectives each one of us can have *on one's self*. But this perspectival distinction (detached and engaged) is a perfectly general one and need not be restricted to the idea of a perspective on oneself. Being general, it should extend and apply quite naturally to the perspective we have *on the world*. That is, we can have a detached perspective on the world or an engaged perspective on it.

In many of our ordinary observations we think of the world in a detached way quite informally ("There is a table in Akeel Bilgrami's study"), but when we do natural science that detached perspective takes its most regimented form and we predict and explain the objects, properties, and events in the world, bringing them under laws and generalizations, moving to a different vocabulary ("molecules").[8] This detached perspective, whether informal or systematic as in science, is simply an extension of (2) from a perspective on ourselves to a perspective on the world. We then have to ask, if that is what a detached perspective on the world is, what is it to have an *engaged* perspective *on the world*? Here one's agency cannot be purely theoretical as it is when one is viewing the world in a detached way as containing elements to be predicted and explained by being brought under laws and generalizations. It would have to be *practical* agency. If so, two questions arise. What is practical agency and what would the world have to contain (over and above the properties that are explained

[7] See the discussion of the superlatively disengaged subject, Oblomov, in Bilgrami 2006.

[8] This point about regimentation makes clear that science has no interest in these common-sense observations of properties or facts – about the furniture in the house, say. But these properties, despite science's lack of interest in them, do not pose a problem for scientism in the way that facts and properties described in value terms do.

by theoretical agency exercised in the detached perspective on it) if we are to have *that* form of engaged rather than detached perspective on it?

It is here that the link between (practical) agency and value comes to view. If we are to be agents, practically engaged with the world, the world must contain elements over and above the elements that natural science (with its detached perspective on the world) studies. It is those elements that we paradigmatically describe in the vocabulary of values (though see just a little later for what is – and what is not – the real significance underlying this). Examples can be multiplied. Someone living by the sea perceives a storm on the horizon. What he has perceived can be described in meteorological terms (condensation, H_2O, etc.), but it can also be described in value terms (as *a threat*, say). Or take an example from Gilbert Harman (1977: chapter 1). Someone is driving past an alley and sees some kids burning a cat. One can describe what she sees in detached terms (*Felis catus*, carnivorous mammal, combustion, etc.) or in value terms (as *cruelty*, say). Unless we *see* the world as described with value terms – that is, as containing such properties as threats and cruelty – we could not be engaged with it in the practical sense. Over and above the condensation (the approaching storm on the coastline) and the combustion (the burning cat) which are captured by the perspective in the extension of (2) onto the world, the world must contain value properties (perceptible threats and cruelties) to trigger the extension of the perspective of (1) onto the world. Thus, a fisherman who sees the horizon of the Bangladeshi coast in detached, meteorological terms will have only the extension of the perspective of (2) on the world, but if he sees it as a threat, he will have a quite different perspective on the world, an engaged or agentive one, perhaps prompting him to go to the local municipality to arrange for some form of protection. So also, someone may go to Calcutta and view another person's condition in detached terms of average daily caloric counts, but then may also perceive that that person is *malnourished*, or as *in need*. When he perceives the world from a perspective that describes it in value terms of this latter sort, he will be prompted to practical agency – perhaps to give money to Oxfam, say.

These are mere examples of how we may take the same distinction as is found in (1) and (2) and extend it onto the world. And I have used the vocabulary of science (caloric counts, condensation, combustion, etc.) and evaluative vocabulary (needs, threats, cruelty, etc.) in formulating the examples to make it clear that the latter describes properties *in the world* that natural science does not study. I should, however, say by way of caution that, though I have used such a contrasting vocabulary to make the

distinction vivid, the distinction between the two perspectives is *not* a linguistic one but a *philosophical* one. Someone who has thoroughly internalized the link between a certain scientific description of the world (some average caloric measure that is counted by public health officials as a nutritional minimum, say) and a person's need, will, without any turn to the thought or vocabulary of needs in how he conceives the person's condition, be prompted to *practical* agency. The point is not that one keeps changing one's vocabulary or concepts as one moves from detachment to engagement or vice versa. The point is only that detachment and engagement are two distinct *perspectives* on the world (as well as on oneself) and the world must contain properties over and above what the natural sciences study in order for us to have the latter perspective on it. That we are paradigmatically using or thinking in the evaluative conceptual *vocabulary* when we perceive the value properties in the world is not what is essential. The distinction is not intended as a linguistic distinction but a philosophical one. Contrasting vocabularies are just an easy way to convey the philosophical distinction but should not be seen as essential to the distinction.

What this eventually points to is that the so-called fact–value distinction is really, at bottom, a distinction in perspectives: the detached and engaged perspectives. If values are properties in the world, the perception of those properties is an apprehension of facts. So, values *are* facts, and can't, therefore, stand in a distinction with them. The distinction, therefore, can be reformulated as a distinction between what makes the kinds of facts that values are distinct from the kinds of facts that natural science studies. And it is in elaborating this latter distinction that we have been invoking the perspectival contrast between detachment and practical agency. The reformulation has radical consequences. It puts into doubt the very intelligibility of what philosophers claim is the "supervenience" of values on the facts that natural science studies, broadly speaking the claim that where there is no difference in the facts or properties that natural science studies, there cannot exist a difference of values or value properties. This claim posits a dependency relation of values on facts. But if values are facts or properties intrinsically tied to a perspective of practical *engagement*, precisely the perspective that is missing in the *detachment* of our angle on the facts that natural science studies, the very idea of such dependency becomes incoherent. I say "incoherent" and mean it. The point about a perspectival disjointness is not to deny supervenience; it is rather to say that supervenience cannot be asserted or denied, no more than it can be coherently asserted or denied that duck facts are supervenient on rabbit

facts. In fact, I would be inclined to say that if supervenience of this kind were a coherent notion, it would indeed be foolish and implausible to deny it. So, it is of real importance to register that supervenience is *not* being denied; rather, the deep and intrinsic link between value and the considerations of agency we have been stressing render the very idea of supervenience unintelligible. (For more on this issue, see the references in note 4.)

The crucial point, for the purposes of this chapter's argument, is that this deep and intrinsic link between agency and value should now have come fully into view. We have a perspective on the world that is an engaged or agentive rather than a detached one only to the extent that the world contains value properties over and above the properties that natural science studies and which trigger the engaged rather than a detached perspective on it.

To recapitulate the argument so far: Starting with a familiar ambiguity in a ubiquitous thought or proposition ("I will . . . "), I've teased out of it, in small steps which introduced the notion of agency, how natural it is to think that values are visible properties in the world. But to show that something is a natural thing to think is not yet to give an argument for it. It is only to show that one may think it without strain. Can we do better and present an argument for the conclusion that the world is populated by values over and above the properties that natural science studies?

III

One way to come to an argument toward such a conclusion might be to raise a challenge for it and answer the challenge. I have relied on the link between practical agency and value to make my claims thus far. It is only as or qua practical agents, that is, as subjects capable of engagement rather than mere detachment in our perspective on the world, that we view the world as containing value properties. The challenge might, then, seek to disrupt this link, denying that in order to be agents of this sort we must see the *world* as suffused with values. Practical agency, it might be said, is a simpler phenomenon than I am presenting it to be. It is a matter merely of acting on our desires and other such states and mental dispositions (including the loftier form they take, our "moral sentiments"). I have the desire to help the poor, I give money to Oxfam. I feel fear and vulnerability, I appeal to the municipality. I feel a combination of sympathy and indignation, I get out of my car and stop the kids from burning the cat. And so on. Values, on this view, are derivable from these desires and other

states of mind and our agency is merely acting on these desires and states of mind. There is no need to add the further complication I am adding, which is that the desires and other such states of mind such as moral sentiments must be *responses to value properties in the world*, in order for us to be agents.

So, what I am insisting on is that desires are *not self-standing* in the way that this challenge proposes. They are responses to something that prompts them; they are responses to value properties in the world. Desires *in us* are nothing if there are no desir*abilities* (and undesirabilities) or values (and disvalues) *in the world* as well. And our agency consists in the fact that these desirabilities or values in the world, when we perceive them, make normative demands on us which trigger the appropriate desires in us upon which we act, as practical agents. (It should go without saying, but in case it does not let me say it: It triggers them only if we are virtuous or rational. If, as I said, they are properly *normative* demands that the world and its properties make on us, then the prompting to agency by those demands is not a causal, at any rate not a *merely* causal, prompting.[9]) And the challenge to us, which views desires as self-standing, simply denies this, claiming instead that agency consists merely in acting on our desires and those desires do not answer to any *external* calling of desirabilities or values in the world.

Can our agency be adequately characterized in terms of desires viewed as self-standing in this way? This is a good challenge because the view of agency it offers as an alternative is simpler and, therefore, may seem to be more intuitive than the more complicated one I am insisting on. To respond to the challenge, let me introduce some more conceptual apparatus.

There is a curiosity that was first pointed out by Gareth Evans (1982) in an insightful passage in his book, *The Varieties of Reference*. When we are asked, "Is it raining?" we tend to look out of the window and respond. And (this is the curiosity) when we are asked, "Do you believe that it is raining?" we tend to do the same. We don't scan our interiors to see if it contains the belief that it is raining. We simply look outside and respond. In short, we tend to do the same thing whether we are being asked about the *world* or about a state of *mind*, such as a belief. Evans went on to draw

[9] In saying this, I am presenting another mark of what I have insisted on throughout – the irreducibility of value properties to nonnormative properties (purely causal ones in this example). I am taking such irreducibility for granted in this chapter, without argument. In Bilgrami 2006, I present an argument for it that combines considerations derived from Moore and Frege. See also the exchanges in Baldwin 2010, Normore 2010, and Bilgrami 2010.

very interesting conclusions from this curiosity about the nature of self-knowledge, but I want to exploit the curiosity for a different purpose on the specific theme of this chapter.

I think it is perfectly plausible to *extend* Evans' insight about beliefs to *desires* as well. If we are asked, "Do you desire *x*?" we don't, in the normal and routine case (allowing, as exceptions, other unusual contexts, such as for instance on a psychoanalyst's couch), scan our mental interiors to see if it contains the desire for *x*, we simply consider the desir*ability* of *x*.

Two quick points of clarification, before I proceed further with the argument. First, for the sake of simplicity and convenience, I work with just the term "desires" here, as philosophers so often do, to function as a sort of omnibus term that is capacious enough to take in a range of ("conative") states of mind, including "moral" desires or what have been called "moral sentiments." So also, I take "desirabilities" in the world to be the more general term that is capacious enough to include "values." Second, by "consider *x*" I mean *either observe x* if it is available in our vicinity and consider whether it is desirable *or*, if it is not available in perception, we may *imagine* its desirability – and I am assuming that imagination in these cases, as in all cases, depends on some background of previous perceptions of *x* or of other things and properties like or approximating *x*.

If I am right that Evans' point can be extended to desires in this way, the dependence of desires on desir*abilities* (or values) in the world that McDowell and a large number of other moral realists[10] have laid claim for, is, prima facie, established. But someone, determined to press the challenge further, may deny that what seems prima facie so, is so. This denial would stubbornly maintain that when we are asked about whether we desire something, unlike what Evans said about beliefs, we simply do not and cannot look to desirabilities since there *are no* such things or properties. On this view, *facts* (such as that it is raining) may rightly be viewed as "believabilities" (to coin a term that is the counterpart to what

[10] There is a vast amount of writing on moral realism presenting very different positions. To name just three: Some take moral properties to be real in what might be called "Platonist" terms, not intrinsically tied to motivation in practical human agency (Parfit), nor to their routine perceptibility by human subjects in the world around them (Moore, who thought they are the objects of a special moral "intuition"). Others take values to be properties in the world but seek to reduce them to physical properties or nonnormatively characterized causal-dispositional properties, or see them as standing in some dependency relation to them. The moral realist position I am arguing for is neither of these, but rather sees these properties as at once irreducible to nonnormative properties (even unassessable for supervenience relations with nonnormative properties) *and* tied intrinsically to human motivation and practical agency.

I have called "desirabilities"), and so Evans' point is right about beliefs, but since there is no equivalent to facts in the case of desires, my extension of Evans' point, which claims that there are desirabilities we look to, is unwarranted. Therefore, in responding to the Evansian question about whether we desire something, we must and do look inwards into our minds to see if it contains the desires being asked about.

I won't indulge the temptation I have here to say that this just begs the question and denies without argument what I have concluded from my extension of Evans' point, viz., that there is indeed a counterpart to facts in the case of desires, that is, desirabilities. This would only result in each side to the dispute claiming that the other is begging the question. I was supposed to give *an argument* that there are value properties or desirabilities, it will be said, and I have only given *an analogy* with beliefs in extending Evans' point; I have not given an argument. But something more specific can be said by way of argument to break this impasse.

Let's proceed, then, as if this challenge does not beg the question and ask, instead, what follows from its denial of my extension of Evans' point to desires. It would follow from the challenge's conclusion that we do always look into our minds in order to answer questions of the form, "Do you desire . . . ?" That would mean that we always step outside of ourselves and look at ourselves from the outside in, as it were, before we respond. We look at ourselves as objects to be scanned for whether or not we possess the relevant desire. In other words, we take the *detached* perspective *on ourselves*. And if there were no desirabilities, only desires in the self-standing sense, then our desires would *only and always* be available to us as such objects of detached self-scrutiny. Our entire relation to our desires could only be one in which they are given to us or available to us as desir*ed* by us. They would not be given to us or available to us via the desirabilities we perceive since there are no desirabilities to be perceived. We have no other way of being with our desires and experiencing them except by way of detached self-scrutiny of them. It is here that (3) strikes us with its relevance. That claim was: *if one only had or if all one had was a detached or disengaged perspective on oneself (as exemplified in [2]), one would cease to be a practical agent*.

The challenge, therefore, can only be successful by depriving us of our practical agency. But we manifestly do possess practical agency. So, the self-standing view of desires that the challenge assumes can only be true by denying something else that is manifestly true of us – that we are practical agents. That is why I had said that we could not so much as be agents, in the practical sense of agency, if desires were self-standing rather than

responses to external callings, responses to the normative demands on us that come from desirabilities, or value properties in the world.

Though the argument, as I have presented it, is complicated, with the complications in place, the conclusion should be presentable in rather obvious terms.

Consider what is the philosophically significant difference between my thinking or saying as an observation of myself, "*x* is desired by me" and my thinking or saying "*x* is desirable."

In the former thought ("*x* is desired by me") the desire itself lacks motivational power for me *qua agent*. Even if the desire were to dispose me to act, that act will be something that *happens* to me. I will not *enact* it. It will be an "*act*" only by courtesy, as it were. It will not be an agentive intervention in the world. I will merely be the *carrier* of the intervention in the world. These are the effects on desire of the desire being only available to me as desi*red*, as something that is the object of my detached gaze (rather than via my perceiving some desir*ability*). It is deadened or leadened in its *agentive* motivational power by being an object of a detached perspective on myself.

But now consider the latter thought ("*x* is desirable"). When I think that *x* is desirable, my desire, which is a response to that desirability of *x*, is not an object of my observation. Its being given to me, its availability to me, is indirect, it is not given to me as desi*red*, but *via* my apprehension of a desir*ability*. This is what makes it possible that I have an agentive relationship with my desire, because this indirect way of being given to me allows the desire to have agentive motivational power. The crucial point, then, is that it is *only* when our desires are not directly given to us in our detached perspective on ourselves, but rather are *indirectly* given to us via our direct observation of desirabilities in the world, that our desires have agentive motivational power. And without that motivational power, desires cannot be the basis of our agency, as the challenge claims. So the simpler view, that desires are self-standing and not responses to desirabilities or values, simply cannot make its way to accounting for the agency we manifestly possess.

I admit that the argument I have elaborated in this section for the claim that there are value properties in the world ties value properties to the possession of practical agency, and it will not move a philosopher who is prepared to deny that we do possess such agency. In that sense the chapter's conclusion is modest. The argument has no efficacy against such a philosopher, and I have no argument against someone (an Alamo-style philosopher, prepared to bite all bullets) who denies that we are agents,

except, I suppose, just to say, "Come off it." These just are the limitations of philosophy. No argument is efficacious against *all* comers: what analytic philosophers like to call "knock-down" arguments. At best, one can say: If you don't believe what my argument establishes (in this case, the meta-ethical position that the world, including nature, contains visible value properties that fall outside the purview of natural science), see how much else that seems true you have to give up believing (in this case, that we are subjects who possess practical agency).

IV

This chapter, despite the gestural note it strikes in its concluding paragraph, is not the occasion to explore the wider implications of the meta-ethical claim I have tried to establish – implications for politics, political economy, and the vexed subject of the environment, which I hinted at in my introductory remarks when briefly giving the early historical context of this chapter's themes.[11] Those implications are of the utmost significance and need patient working out, and yet the tradition of philosophy within whose idiom I have made the argument for the claim has shown little interest in relating meta-ethics to these wider subjects and issues. So I particularly regret not having the space to do so here. What I try to do instead, as I bring the chapter to a close, is to address some more immediate and much narrower philosophical implications of the claim, and respond to some sources of doubt about the claim.

Perhaps one immediate implication to be drawn is that ethics is, in one sense, primarily a *perceptual* discipline. I use the word "primarily" and mean it. When I say it is perceptual, I don't mean to suggest that *deliberative* and reflective elements are not important in ethics. They certainly are. But their role *nests within* a more basic perceptual understanding in which our moral agency responds to the normative demands of the value properties we perceive (or fail to perceive or misperceive) as we navigate the world we inhabit. It is when someone has different or conflicting perceptions of value that the role of deliberation (of ranking and weighing and assessing rational support or lack of support among values, etc.) comes into play. So also agents from different cultures or backgrounds may apprehend quite different normative demands in the very same perceptible situation, and when this happens, the relevance of

[11] I make an initial stab at drawing some of these implications in the section on "Enchantment" in Bilgrami 2014.

deliberation via cultural exchange similarly comes into play to resolve the conflicts.

What follows from putting perception in primary place on the subject of value, in this way, is that the relevant states of mind (which as we saw are not self-standing) are *at once* our conduits for *apprehending* the world *and* states that *motivate* our agentive responses to what is apprehended. That is to say, it is not as if one sort of state apprehends the value properties in the world via perception of it and another quite self-standing state motivates our actions on the world. Apprehension and motivation are not two radically separated directions from which we relate to the world, apprehension going from the world to us and motivation going from us to the world.[12] Rather, the very fact that it is something like *values* that we are perceiving in the world makes it clear that the perceptions themselves are motivating. It is not as if the perception of the threat in an impending storm and the feelings of vulnerability in the Bangladeshi fisherman, which prompts him – as a practical agent – to seek protection, are two states of mind with two different directions in their relation to the world. To have perceived the threat *is* to have felt vulnerable and vice versa.

This has implications for an entire family of states of mind. Desires, reconfigured in this way as relating in such a bi-directional form to desirabilities and undesirabilities in the world (i.e., relating to a world described and understood in evaluative terms – threats, cruelties, needs), are just one central case of mental states of this kind. Emotions too, very often, are to be conceived in just these terms. And once they are, a common and long-standing misconception about their place in practical human agency stands corrected. These points can do with some elaboration.

Too often emotions are thought of as gumming up the works of deliberation in practical life, and in politics and morals in particular. Practical reason or rationality is frequently described almost entirely in deliberative terms of rational inference, and emotions are seen by contrast as conflicting with and spoiling the deliverances of reason, so conceived (see Elster 1996). Though that no doubt happens sometimes, it is occasional and cannot plausibly be built into characterizing the nature of emotions. If we see emotions along the lines I present later – as of a piece with the conception of desires presented earlier – we can see why.

[12] This is sometimes described by the phrase "different directions of fit." To express the denial of different directions of fit for beliefs and desires, Altham coined the neologism "besires" for states that have both directions of fit at once.

On this reconceptualization, emotions, like desires, are also a mode of perception. How so? Perhaps a good way to begin to convey this is to look at what such a reconceptualization looks like in the case of physical pain. A plausible conception of pain might go this way. Take a toothache. We can perceive our teeth in the standard ways. I can put my forefinger to my tooth and perceive it tactually. I can go to a mirror, unfurl my lip, and perceive my tooth visually. But I can also, more internally, more involuntarily, perceive my tooth by – and here we run out of the right "logical grammar," to use Wittgenstein's term – by paining it. A toothache, thus, is a way of perceiving my tooth, and physical pains generally are internal modes of perception of parts of one's body. Emotions too are modes of perception of this kind, though not of one's body.[13] What, then, are they modes of perception of?

In more than one place, Aristotle writes of anger ("rage" is actually the right translation of his particular example),[14] saying that it relates to belief as follows. If I am angry with a person, that *presupposes* a certain sort of belief, for instance the belief that that person has done me harm. But this does not quite capture the right relation between belief and anger. To show why, I have deliberately emphasized "presupposes." In many cases, that seems the wrong way to think of the relationship between emotions and a belief about the world. The relationship of presupposition here would suggest that the belief is *all in place first* and *then* the anger wells up. But that does not always capture the phenomenology of anger and indeed perhaps it only seldom captures it. Often, my anger is a way of *perceiving* that someone has done me harm. It's not as if the belief is all calmly acquired and gives rise to the anger on reflection (not that this does not sometimes happen). My anger is very often my conduit to, a perception of, the fact that he has done me harm. The perception of something (value-laden) in the world and the emotion are not separable, just as I was suggesting about desire and the perception of the value-laden world.

If this is right, if emotions are ways of perceiving and forming perceptual beliefs about the (value aspects of the) world, then it cannot possibly be right to say that emotions gum up the works of rationality. In fact, far from gumming up the works, they *are* the works. The beliefs that go into rational deliberation are often the deliverances of emotions, conceived in

[13] Spinoza, motivated by his metaphysics, thought of them as being just that. See also Damasio 2004. The view presented here, motivated by an account of value and agency, is quite different.

[14] See *De Anima* 1.1.403a16–32 and *The Rhetoric* 2.2.1378a31. Scholars differ on how to read these passages, but this view is taken to be intuitively plausible by many (Elster, for instance), at least as a first thought about the relationship between emotions and beliefs.

this way as modes of perception. This point is not to be confused with the oft-made point that emotions have a propositional content – what is sometimes called the "cognitive" account of emotions. The point is not that emotions have the same form as beliefs, a propositional form; the point is that they are a path, a perceptual path to belief formation. And, as the previous paragraph makes clear, this conception of emotions cannot even be formulated if one does not view the world as containing value properties. But once one views the world that way, such a conception of emotions is entirely and naturally of a piece with doing so, as is the conception of desires presented earlier.

Desires (and emotions), I have said, are modes of perception of the value properties of the world, and *in being so*, they are *intrinsically* capable of motivating our practical agency. They do the double duty of taking in the world in its aspect of value even as they, thereby, motivate our agency to action. Now, if they are perceptual in this way, they can, of course, sometimes get the world (in its value aspect) wrong. But that is true of all perception. There can be value illusions just like there can be illusions, in general, about the nonvalue aspects of the world. This should not cause either surprise or concern. What does seem to cause some concern is the fact that just as we can have value illusions, we can have, as I admitted earlier, *differential* perception of value properties. The very fact of there being differential or conflicting perception of value properties in the world prompts the doubt that there really *are* such properties in the world. But that doubt is based on a non sequitur. For one thing, there is frequently differential perception of other properties in the world, the physical properties that natural sciences study – for instance, when we have internalized different physical theories about one or another physical phenomenon in the world. This is just a familiar consequence of what is often described as "the theory-ladenness of observation." But no one, no one sensible anyway, is tempted to conclude from this that there are no physical properties in the world. In general, it does not follow from the fact that there is some property in the world that there cannot be differential perception of it; equally it does not follow that if there is differential perception of the property that these are not really perceptions of a real property but rather, as has been suggested by some Humeans in the case of values, a subjective derivation of them from our states of minds such as desires and moral sentiments that is then illicitly "projected" onto the world.

A related tendency that is also based on a confusion is to think that because value properties in the world, by their very nature, are *intrinsically*

related to the fact that those who are capable of perceiving them *as what they are* are responsive to their normative demands with practical agency, then it must be that these are (unlike other perceptible properties in the world) not real properties after all. There is no plausible inference from the fact that we understand something (value) in the world as being related intrinsically to our capacity for agentive responsiveness to it, to the conclusion that we must somehow be *making up* values all on our own and projecting them illicitly onto the world. For one thing, it is a familiar thought since Locke and Boyle at least, if not since Galileo, that color properties in the world are partly characterized in terms of *our* visual sensibilities (frogs, for instance, do not perceive color properties). But it is quite wrong to conclude from this (not that it has not been done) that the table on which my keyboard presently sits is not brown, nor any other color. I repeat that it is a non sequitur to go from the idea that some property that is perceptible may require a certain sort of subject (one with our sort of practical agency in the case of value, or one with our sort of visual sensibility in the case of color[15]) to the idea that that property does not exist in the world at all, that the subject somehow generates it from his own mentality and projects it onto the world.

I conclude with one final caveat about the nature of these visible value properties that the world (including nature) contains. In elaborating the link between them and our practical agency, I have said that our perception of these properties takes the form of perception of the *normative demands* they make on us and to which our practical agency responds. Now, the expression "normative demand" is, of course, *a metaphor*. It is *not literally* a normative demand made by the perceptible features of the world. In insisting on this point, I am declaring that, in subscribing to the view that there are value properties in the world (including nature), I am not subscribing to any sort of intentional vitalism that attributes intentionality to nature and the world. And by saying this, I am disavowing any commitment to the sort of position taken by Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett and others who think there is some quite literal form of "actants" (I assume that by this term they have made current, they mean *agents* of a kind broader than human agents) that populate nature and the world we inhabit, agents who literally address us with normative demands. My claim

[15] The analogy between color and value (first formulated by McDowell [1985]), is imperfect. There are disanalogies too, since color may quite properly be thought to be supervenient on properties studied by fundamental physics, whereas it is not at all obvious, as I said earlier, that it even makes sense to think that values are similarly dependent.

that there are value properties in the world is a much more innocuous claim than this. I am only saying that there are value properties in the world (including nature), and I am happily admitting that the idea that they make normative demands on us is a metaphor. No doubt this will seem like a copout to those who think we need a bolder commitment to vitalism (see Latour 2004a; Bennett 2010; 2018).

But it is nothing of the sort. In fact, a proper, by which I mean sober, understanding of the nature of value shows such a vitalism to be quite unnecessary for the important issues at stake. Why do I rest with the thought that the expression "normative demands" is a metaphor? Why am I not moved by the doubt that the force of a normative demand is lost if the expression "normative demand" in these uses of it (unlike when we use it to say that I, a human subject, make a normative demand of you) is not literal but metaphorical? Surprising as this may sound, the answer is that I am not moved by this doubt because of the *nature of metaphor*.

It is widely (and surely rightly) said of metaphors that they, at least the good and apt ones, are not paraphraseable away into literal statements. This, as just stated, is, and is intended to be, a claim about the nature of (metaphorical) language. But it cannot *just* be a thesis about language. Though true as a thesis about language, its significance would be limited if it were just a claim in linguistics (pragmatics) or the philosophy of language. As a thesis, its full significance only comes into view if we notice that its truth has a counterpart in a metaphysical thesis, an *extra*-linguistic claim. What is that counterpart metaphysical claim to match the claim of unparaphraseability as a claim in the philosophy of language? It is this: If a metaphor is not paraphraseable away into literal statements or propositions, what that very thesis shows is that there is a fragment or aspect of *reality* that cannot be captured by any expression but *that* metaphor. It is striking that philosophers who have made the linguistic claim don't make this metaphysical counterpart claim explicit.[16] But once made explicit, it becomes clear that there is no loss of force in saying that value properties make normative demands on us, just because the expression "normative demands" is said metaphorically. Without any commitment to intentional vitalism (a commitment that would only be generated if we insisted on some sort of *literal* deployment of the expression "normative demands"), one has said what needs to be said; one has (with a metaphor) captured something real, a fragment of reality and its unique and intrinsic relation to

[16] For instance, Davidson (1978), who makes the claim more vividly than many others, fails to draw the metaphysical significance of it.

our practical engagement. A scientism that has long denied this presence of value in the perceptible world we inhabit is thereby laid to rest without any overreaching into an implausible and unnecessary vitalism.

Latour, however, has insisted on an important point: There had better be a *politics of things* if we are to emerge with some sanity, indeed with some humanity (paradoxical as that may sound), from our destructively human-centered conception of politics (and political economy). Though I have said nothing here about what such a politics would look like, I have tried to do the philosophical ground clearing for it by providing a meta-ethical foundation for a politics of things; and have done so without any implausible commitment to the idea that things, like human subjects, possess intentionality.

This chapter has been about how a scientistic claim, via an illicit extrapolation, swept away value properties from the world (including nature) with the same brush that it swept away sacral properties from it. The claim literally renders these properties invisible. I end by noting that if the chapter's argument carries conviction, we are at least *poised* to pursue a point (on some other occasion) that has implications for politics. Usually, when one speaks of invisibility, the interest is to alert us to the fact that things are below the surface of visibility and need to be unearthed. Sometimes however – as in the theme of this chapter – things that *are* on the surface and plainly visible to us are denied that visibility due to one or other distortion of our ways of "being-in-the-world," which philosophers first perpetrate by overextending the authority of science, but which then, through the exercise of more worldly forces (the worldly forces I cited earlier were the alliances formed between the Royal Society, high Anglicanism, and commercial interests) gets dispersed into the zeitgeist as a pervasive assumption of our time. That assumption might properly be called a superstition of modernity (which is exactly what scientism is), and this chapter has tried to present the philosophy needed (an argument) to exorcise it. But a philosophical exorcism of the particular superstition that I have focused on in this chapter, even if successful, would be an arcane achievement if one did not also see through to the details of a democratic conception of politics that included "a politics of nature," a politics on which we do not have even a preliminary grip, leave alone a sense of its details. But this should not surprise us, considering the long centuries it took for human beings to develop (and to *this day* it has not been fully developed) the details of a democratic politics that included every human being.