VALUE, TRANSCENDENCE AND ANALOGY

Gabriele De Anna
Universität Bamberg and Università di Udine

Abstract. Current naturalistic accounts of value face the problem of explaining the normative constraints that value impose on agents. Attempts to solve this problem have progressively relaxed the strictness of naturalistic requirements, up to the point of seeking theistic solutions. However, appeals to God are also problematic, since it is questionable that a relevant notion of God is conceivable at all: if God is wholly other He cannot matter for our choices and if He is a being among natural beings He cannot explain our normative constraints. Engaging a discussion with Fiona Ellis' treatment of the problem, this essay sketches an account of transcendence, which vindicates the conceivability of a notion of God suitable for the explanation of value. The proposal rests on the possibility of transcendental arguments based on analogy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The word 'value', as I understand it, refers to the fact that some objects and states of affairs are choice-worthy. Value, then, has to do with human action and with its normative constraints. Naturalistic accounts of value — broadly understood — locate the source of value in choice-worthy things (objects and states of affairs) themselves. They can be distinguished from non-naturalistic accounts, according to which value originates from abstract objects or properties (values, in the plural), existing in a separate, Platonic realm of reality. Supporters of naturalistic accounts appeal to many different reasons to favour their view. I will mention here only three, those which seem stronger to me. Firstly, naturalism does not require the introduction of a special, ad hoc faculty (intuition) to access abstract values. Secondly, it is easily compatible with the results of sciences. Thirdly and above all, it seems to bypass the main problem of non-naturalistic approaches: if values are abstract things existing in a Platonic realm, how can they matter to us in our dealings with choice-worthy things?

The advantage of naturalistic accounts wanes in accounting for normativity. Normativity seems a non-eliminable feature of value, but it can be hardly accommodated in a strictly naturalistically conceived world. The dangers of the naturalistic fallacy are always behind the corner, and naturalists have progressively relaxed the requirements of their versions of naturalism in order to bypass the problem. The sources of value, it seems, cannot be outside of nature, but they cannot even be investigated with purely scientific methods. The idea is that the sources of value must be features of the natural world, which require peculiar, although natural, ways of access. In this context, even theistic solutions have been recently proposed. This move, however, has its problems: how can the features of reality which ground value interact with physical features, the features that science studies? That interaction is necessary, if value has to matter in our lives, and thus it must be possible. However, for that interaction to be possible, the sources of value should be open to scientific investigation too. Naturalistic accounts of value seem to end up in a paradox: either the sources of value do not matter to us, or they are wholly natural and should be fully accessible in scientific ways after all. In this essay, I will try to solve the paradox by sketching an account of transcendence, which makes the idea that there may be different, although related realms of reality conceivable. The aim is not to suggest that there are reasons to divide reality into a natural realm and a super-natural realm, but to suggest that such a division is conceivable. That the supernatural realm is not empty is beyond the scope of this essay.

In next section I will briefly revise the reasons of naturalists to relax their naturalistic requirements, in order to make room for the normativity of value, and, ultimately, to consider a theistic solution. I will not support those reason here, although I share them and I have argued in that direction somewhere else.[1] My goal here is to show how the paradox originates and to clarify the conditions that a solution of it should satisfy. In the following section, I will show how the paradox originates and I will consider a solution by Fiona Ellis, which is only partially satisfying, and requires further clarifications. In section four, I will sketch my proposal concerning the concept of transcendence. Finally, in the fifth section, I will discuss an epistemic problem connected with that concept of transcendence and suggest the possibility of transcendental arguments based on analogy.

II. NATURALISM AND THE NORMATIVITY OF VALUE

In this section, I will try to explain why naturalistic accounts of value have a problem explaining normativity, why various authors have relaxed naturalism in order to solve that problem and what requirements an acceptable solution should meet. Before doing these things, however, I shall say some more about what a naturalistic account of value is: that is necessary in order to explain the difficulties of naturalist views. Above, I defined naturalistic accounts of value as those which take the sources of value to be in the valuable things themselves. This is a very thin characterisation, but its implications can go in very different directions. I will sketch my way of looking at the problem, which I have argued for somewhere else.[2] I do not think that using my way of looking at things will bias the accounts of the different naturalistic accounts, although, of course, it will have its importance in setting the requirements that in my view any naturalistic account should meet. On that front, naturally, my proposal will be open to argument.

Since value is the fact that some objects and states of affairs are for us choice-worthy, any account of value must explain how value matters in action, i.e. from the point of view of a human agent. Human actions are intentional doings, i.e. doings that an agent considers her own and for which she would accept responsibility. That happens when the agent would explain — if asked — why she did that thing by giving a reason. A reason for action involves at least one fact, but is not identical with it: for an agent to have a reason, i. she must see some goodness in a fact f; ii. she must recognise ways in which the goodness of f can be improved; and iii. she must recognise that she can do something to improve the goodness of f. For example, the fact that John is starving is a reason to feed him for me, just in case I see him as worthy of going on living, I recognise that starving endangers his life, and I recognise that I can do something about it.

The upshot is that reality is made of facts, which ground potentialities for the actualisation of further states of affairs, and that agents respond to some facts in reality and to the potentialities that they ground by exercising their powers in order to actualise some of the viable possibilities. Value results from the responsiveness of agents to facts and to potentialities existing in reality. This is a naturalistic account, since the sources of value are the potentialities of things and the subjects who recognise some potentialities as worth actualising.

The point I have now reached is not yet sufficient as an account of value. We have a *normative intuition*, according to which not all possible responses that an agent might have in a certain practical situation are equally acceptable: some are better than others, some are mandatory, and some are unacceptable. Killing John is not the right way of responding to his starvation, other things being equal: it is unacceptable. Giving him food is better than giving him cash, if there are no shops nearby and his need for food is really urgent. Doing something about it is mandatory, if one can do anything. Hence, there are right and wrong ways of responding by agents in practical circumstances and a satisfying account of value must

1 De Anna Gabriele, "Theism and the Ontological Ground of Moral Realism", forthcoming in *Ontology of Theistic Beliefs*, ed. Miroslaw Szatkowski (De Gruyter, 2018).

2 De Anna Gabriele, "Realism, Human Action and Political Life.: On the Political Dimension of Individual Choices", in *Moral realism and political decisions*: *Practical rationality in public contexts*, ed. De Anna Gabriele and Riccardo Martinelli (2015) and De Anna Gabriele, "Human Action and Moral Realism", *Ethics&Politics* XIX, no. 2 (2017).

explain that too. How can the normative intuition be accommodated in a naturalistic account of value? On this point, different versions of naturalism diverge.

The strictest form of naturalism can be called — following an established terminology[3] — *scientific naturalism*. The idea is that the sources of values (valuable facts and states of affairs, and responding agents) must be accounted for in purely physical terms. This variety of naturalism can take reductive or eliminativist forms, but in all cases the idea is that the features that make facts and states of affairs valuable and agents responsive to features of reality can be physically accounted for. According to this stance, the current physical arrangement of the world is the result of its physical history, the most recent stages of which were led by the evolutionary processes which brought about complex forms of living organisms, including us. From this point of view, nothing can explain our normative intuition. Our conviction that not all responses of agents to situations are equal depends on an irresistible illusion generated in us by our evolved cognitive and volitional capacities. Normativity is explained away.[4]

Naturalists who are not ready to renounce to the normative intuition have expanded naturalism, in order to allow more in it than strict physicalism accepts, in an attempt to save the normative intuition without renouncing the fundamental naturalistic idea. The mildest variety of expansion is normally called *expanded scientific naturalism*. The expansion concerns in this case the range of kinds of accepted scientific explanations. Whereas the strictest form of scientific naturalism takes only physical explanations to be genuine, this version accepts more forms of scientific explanation. One version, for example, focuses on the explanatory capacities of the human sciences.[5] Human subjects and the facts to which they are responsive have a level of complexity which cannot be reduced to their physical underpinnings, and we need special sciences and special methods to investigate them. According to another version, the force of the normative intuition induces us to recognise that the universe is heading towards a certain end, although current physics cannot account for that; however, we can imagine that a future state of physics will be able to account for the teleology existing in the world and thereby reconcile nature and normativity.[6] This kind of solution is also insufficient — according to many — to account for the normative intuition: even granting that there are psychological or neurophysiological accounts of how best to satisfy desires, why should we consider some forms of desire-satisfaction, which occur in non-standard human beings, unacceptable? And why should the fact that the universe is heading somewhere be a reason for us to go in the same direction?

A further expansion of naturalism leads to the rejection of any scientific attempt to account for normativity: it is *expansive naturalism*. The point is that human beings and the facts to which they are responsive are wholly natural entities, which physics can investigate. However, these things have features, which cannot be detected through the third-personal perspective assumed by science. They are features that appear only to beings who are sensitive to them: these features are values.[7] Values are in a sense like secondary qualities, e.g. colours: they are response-dependent entities. However, unlike colours, they require forms of responsiveness, which are not just the result of biological development, but the result of a form of construction, of a *Bildung*. One just needs to grow in a biological sense to be able to see colours. On the other hand, one needs to receive a proper education and to form thereby a "second nature" to become sensitive to values. The "second nature" cannot be investigated by science, but it is not scientifically odd, since it is just a certain way of operating of entities of a purely physical kind, human beings. This move promises to vindicate the normative intuition: it accounts for the fact that not all the responses available to a subject in a given practical situation are equally acceptable, by suggesting that the subject has a second nature resulting from her education, which makes some responses acceptable and

3 Fiona Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).

4 John L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong* (Penguin, 1977), Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (MIT Press, 2006).

5 Peter Railton, "Moral Realism", *The Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (1986).

6 Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the materialist neo-Darwinian conception of nature is almost certainly false* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).

7 John H. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

others not. To many, however, this reply is insufficient. The normative intuition seems to require criteria to evaluate also the actions of others not only one's own. In other words, it suggests that some responses must be unacceptable for anyone, not only for someone with a certain education. If someone wants to kill starving John, she must be responding wrongly. And if she justifies herself by saying that that seems right to her, on the basis of her *Buildung*, I would think — and I think that everyone should do the same — that something must be wrong with her *Building*.

On the basis of akin considerations, some have further expanded naturalism, in the direction of an *expanded theological naturalism*. The idea is that, once we have granted the achievement of expansive naturalism, we can definitely vindicate the normative intuition if we grant that there is a God, who sets the limits of acceptable responsiveness by subjects.[8] According to different views, the features and the role of God may differ. God can be absolute Love and Self-givingness, Who matters in action since in recognising another person, an agent is called to renounce to her-self and love the other, and sees the criteria for the correctness of her responsiveness in the requirement to love and give herself. From other perspectives, God can be the intelligent and perfectly good principle of an order immanent in reality, as a consequence of which there are ways in which agents should be "constructed" and ways in which the world should be perfected, so that the spectrum of acceptable responses of agents is constrained.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the purpose here is not to argue in favour of any of these views, but to explain why the normative intuition is a problem for naturalism and why naturalism has been consequently progressively expanded. The points I touched in this section allow us also to spell out three requirements that any satisfying naturalistic account of value should meet: firstly, it should cohere with the normative intuition; secondly, it should explain how the natural sources of value could actually guide our actions; thirdly, it should not be inconsistent with science. The first requirement emerged in the introductory remarks about naturalistic accounts of value: as we have seen, the attempt to meet it drove the progressive expansions of naturalism. The second requirement is implicit in those very remarks about naturalistic accounts of value: if value has to contribute to guide our actions, we must have access to its sources in the course of our normal practical engagement with reality. The third requirement can be easily seen to hold, if we consider that science certainly disclosed and is still disclosing new aspects and features of reality to us, and we cannot overlook its results. We can relax our naturalism and allow ways of knowing reality or even realms and features of reality that science must overlook. However, these ways of knowing and these realms and features of reality cannot be inconsistent with what we know about the world through science. The problem for expansive naturalism about value that I want to discuss arises when we attempt to meet these three requirements.

III. NATURALISM VS SUPERNATURALISM: A PARADOXICAL DISTINCTION?

The expansive naturalist can protest against the expansive theological naturalist that the latter's further expansion is unavailable. McDowell has indeed argued against this extra move, suggesting that it introduces a spooky domain of reality, a "region of darkness." The complaint cannot simply be that science makes no room for God, since God could be beyond the reach of science, and still exist. In other words, the world could be a world exactly as science describes it, but there could be another, unrelated realm or reality containing God. The problem is rather that, if we want to meet the third requirement, we end up in a dilemma: either God in no way interferes with the natural world, or He interferes with physical forces and then can be a cause among physical causes, a being among other beings, and could then be investigated by science.

The first horn of the dilemma cannot be followed, for two reasons, one general and one concerning the explanation of value. The general reason is that if God were completely detached from the world (wholly other, as some theologians say), then He would be explanatorily idle and there would be no

8 Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, ed. Bettina Bergo (Stanford Univ. Press, [1986] 1998), John Cottingham, *Why Believe?* (Continuum, 2009), Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature*, De Anna Gabriele, "Theism and the Ontological Ground of Moral".

reason to grant that He exists. The reason related to the explanation of value is that this horn violates the second requirement. If God were completely undetached from the world, there would be no traces whatsoever of Him in nature, and that means that in no way could He be a source of value to which we could have access in our practical engagement in the world.

The second horn of the dilemma has also a dead end, again for two reasons, one general and one specific to the explanation of value. The first, general reason is that if God interfered with physical forces he could be investigated by scientific means: he would not be a being outside of nature but just one of the natural beings. Since, however, science explains much without granting His existence it would be futile to argue that He exists. The second reason, related to the explanation of value, is that such a God would be just another agent among agents, moved, like us, by desires and passions. The problem, in this case, is that we fail to meet the first requirement: such a being does not explain the normative intuition, since he is different from us only in being more powerful. His desires, however, are just desires, like ours. When we run against them, we only risk being frustrated because of our weakness. Anything that we can — i.e., with our power — do, we can we legitimately do. This runs against the first requirement, since the normative intuition suggests that certain ways of responding to the world are wrong *in all cases*, regardless of how much power the respondent has.

The theological expansive naturalist has the burden of escaping this dilemma, and Fiona Ellis has worked towards a way-out in a recent, praiseworthy book.[9] The book must be appreciated for the reconstruction of the whole debate about expansive naturalism and the problem of value, and especially for the case it makes for expansive theological naturalism. Its attempt to escape the paradox that I am considering is also very instructive, although the proposed solution is not fully satisfying as it stands. My purpose now is to consider her contributions to the problem of the paradox in order to work out, in the next sections, a solution which takes on board some of her results.

Ellis tries to find her way between the two horns of the dilemma, by attempting to grasp what is right in the objections that can be raised on each side, while rejecting some hidden assumptions which are problematic for the arising of the paradox. Concerning the secondo horn (i.e., that God is a being among beings and a cause among causes), she remarks:

> There is something absolutely right about the expansive naturalist's response here if the point is simply to deny that God is part of the natural world. For God is on a different ontological level from anything that is to be found within the world — He is not, and could not be, a being amongst beings. This much sets God apart from the gods who lurk within … the totally enchanted world [criticised by McDowell], … [However], even if we grant, as we surely must, that God cannot be naturalized in *this* sense, it does not have to follow that the natural world is not divinely enchanted. To put it another way, it does not follow from the fact that God is not a god — or any other finite being for that matter — that He must be squeezed out of the picture. To suppose that this *does* follow is surely to commit a structurally similar error to that which is operative when value is eliminated on the ground that it does not conform to a scientific paradigm.[10]

The point is, then, that the claim that God is not a being among beings or a cause among causes does not imply that He must be completely detached from the world, nor that the natural world cannot have any traces of His presence. Her argument is that the assumption that there is no other way to cause than being a natural cause or no other way of being than being a natural being is as gratuitous as the claim, to which the expansive naturalist objects, that there are only those features of the world that science can discover. The passage leaves, however, two problems open: firstly, does this claim imply that there might be other, non-natural ways in which God can actively exercise His influence into the world? Secondly, is the "natural world" (or the "world," which Ellis uses as equivalent) the whole of reality, or is reality a larger domain which includes the (natural) world, but possibly other domains (e.g., one including God)?

One might hope to find light about these two questions in another passage:

9 Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature*.
10 Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature*, 85.

> the supernatural — which here embraces both God and His communicative action — is not a spooky superstructure, extrinsic or added on to a nature which is complete in itself. Rather, it is a quality or dimension which enriches or perfects the natural world. This grants us the right to allow that man can be inwardly transformed by God.[11]

Here Ellis seems to accept than there is more to reality than the natural world, and to rehabilitate at least one sense of the word 'supernatural'. The "supernatural" is not spooky in the way that the expansive naturalist, e.g. McDowell, might fear, since it is populated by things that do interact with the world. Indeed, the supernatural "enriches and perfects" the natural world. This is supposed to offer a way out from the first horn of the dilemma, since if the world is enriched and perfected by God, man can find the traces of God's action in the world in his practical engagement with reality.

At this point, however, one might want to know more about the ways in which one can think of the supernatural enriching and perfecting the world, and then a new delusion arrives: the relation between natural and supernatural is said to be such that the latter is a quality or a dimension of the former. The delusion is due to the fact that we were expecting to be told in what way two different things are related, and then it turns out that they are nor really two things, but one thing and some quality or "dimension" of it. One feels caught in an equivocation: "enriches" or "perfects" are verbs which can refer both to the action of bringing a richness or a perfection about, and to the inhering of a valuable attribute (quality or dimension) in something which is thereby made better off. One was promised an answer pertaining to the first sense ("the supernatural … here embraces both God and His communicative action"), but is then served a claim pertaining to the second sense (the supernatural is said to be perfected, since it has a valuable quality or dimension).

The offered answer is anyway insufficient: what brings the valuable quality or dimension about? It cannot be the supernatural, i.e. the very quality or dimension that is brought about, since it is not around before being brought about. However, there is nothing else around other than the natural. That means that the valuable quality or dimension arises spontaneously in the natural or is caused by something natural. Hence, nature perfects and enriches itself. The theological expansive naturalist is back in the domain of standard expansive naturalism, with no solution for the problem of the first requirement.

We can identify the source of this failure to escape the paradox in the hesitation about the ontological relation between the natural and the supernatural, when they are defined in ways which are suitable for the purpose of avoiding the paradox. Are they two different things or a thing (the natural) and an attribute of it (a quality or dimension, i.e. the supernatural)? A clear sense that this is really a metaphysical hesitation can be grasped from the following passage:

> [Rahner's] position occupies the conceptual space between dualism and pantheism, and it is intended to accommodate their respective insights whilst avoiding their difficulties. The insight of dualism is that there is a distinction between God and the world; the insight of pantheism is that it is unlike any distinction within the world. It is unlike any distinction within the world because God is not a part of the world. The idea that God is not a part of the world suggests that He cannot be distinguished from things in the way that we distinguish *between* things — a point which rules out the possibility that He hovers beyond the world in any spatial sense. So He is not outside His creation in this sense, and could be so only at the cost of being reduced to an item within it. Rather, He is the *source* of the distinction between God and world. It is in this sense that we can say that God establishes the difference of the world from Himself. The further claim — implicit in the suggestion that He *is* this difference — is that the closest unity is established in this differentiation. That is to say that the reality God creates is not ultimately separable from Him.[12]

The problem is here whether there really is a conceptual space between dualism and pantheism. If there is one, it is not here clear what it is and how it can be spelled out. On this front, Ellis adds here at least two interesting indications, although she does not pursue them further. Firstly, she seems to need a notion of diversity (non-identity), which is at the same time a negation of strict-identity but it is also different from the way in which different natural things are not strictly identical with each other (I charitably overlook

11 Ibid., 91.
12 Ibid., 100.

here the equivocation between identity and identification contained in the text). In other words, she needs a notion of identity of things which is not spatio-temporal continuity. Secondly, she needs to make room for the possibility of an action of God through which He can bring nature out of himself and establish a relation with it according to which nature is different from Him but remains necessarily dependent on Him: He must sustain it throughout its existence.

A suggestion on how to tackle the first and the second issues can be found in the following passage. Let us pay here attention to the independency that God must give things in the world, by letting things "do their own thing":

> The idea that God does everything in a manner which allows, and indeed, requires things to do their own thing — this 'form' of a solution to our predicament — is precisely what is to be expected on the assumption that He is wholly other in the required sense. For, being wholly other, He is neither within the world nor beyond it. So He cannot be distinguished from the world as a separate or rival cause, nor can He be conceived as a spatially distinct being. As Brad S. Gregory has put it, God, if real, 'would be wholly present to everything in the natural world precisely and only *because* He would be altogether *inconceivable* in spatial categories.[13]

The thought is here that God must somehow act ("does everything") on the entire nature in a way which establishes all natural things and their relations, but does not interfere with them. The distinction between God and the things, therefore, is not in spatio-temporal location, but in the independency of action. In this sense, things are different one from another if and only if they act independently one from the other, not if they occupy different space-times. God makes things be, sustains them in existence and at the same time leaves them free to act alone according to the powers that He has given them.

This paves the way for possible solutions to the first issue that I opened in commenting the previous passage above: it may be an alternative to identity based on spatio-temporal continuity. Ellis, however does not press in this direction, and does not raise the main question that one might pose at this point: can a notion of identity of this kind be combined with the sort of independency and relations among things that science accounts for? Ellis does face the problem of the compatibility of her naturalism with science, but does not pose the question in relation of a new desired conception of identity, and this brings her back to shaky waters:

> [W]e might even go so far as to say that there is a scientific explanation for everything. After all, this could simply mean that for any subject-matter we can raise explanatory questions that can be answered scientifically. However, it does not follow from this that, for everything, the *only* explanations are scientific explanations, and I have granted with the expansive naturalist that we must resist this implication so as to allow that there are other sorts of explanations which are consistent with scientific explanations but which make things intelligible in a different, non-scientific way.[14]

Having not clearly settled the issue of identity, when trying to meet the third requirement (compatibility with science) Ellis ends up with a form of monism or pantheism again: science can explain "everything," she says. Does it mean that all things, also God, can possibly be scientifically explained? The difference between the natural and the supernatural is pushed back again to a distinction between different ways of looking at the same things (explanation). The point is not that there is no distinction between different kinds of explanation, which can indeed be granted. The point is that Ellis seems now to say that difference in explanation is the only difference there is, there is no difference in the *domain*s of different explanations, since science can explain everything.[15] In this way, she blocks herself again the way to think of a duality that is not a total separation and that is still compatible with science.

13 Ibid., 151.
14 Ibid., 199.
15 The claim by Ellis can have two readings: 1) there is one domain of objects and two sorts of explanation, such that each kind of explanation tracks different properties of those objects; 2) there is one domain of facts (i.e., combination of objects and properties) and two ways of explaining that domain, science being able to explain them all. For reasons of consistency with what she said above, I take it that she means the first interpretation.

Some of the remarks that Ellis makes and that I have considered seem to open the conceptual possibility for thinking about an ontological difference between the natural and the supernatural, between world and God. However, her attempts do not succeed in clarifying the issue of a principle of identity different from spatio-temporal location. She also fails to account for what could follow from such a principle about the possibility of the interaction of supernatural things with natural things. As a result, a conceptual possibility between dualism and pantheism is not established. Given the naturalistic premises, God and the supernatural seem to become inconceivable. Evidence of this failure can be found in this passage, which occurs at the very end of the book:

> God and world do not add up to two, but nor are they to be identified, for God is distinct from the world, albeit not as a distinct thing, and in such a way that He remains omnipresent to all things. So the world is irreducibly God-involving, but God is not reducible to the world.[16]

The first sentence is a violation of strict-identity and makes what follows inconceivable: we cannot understand how God can be omnipresent and different from all things at the same time. If we want to make this latter claim intelligible, we need to bypass the violation of strict-identity. In what follows, I will try to develop Ellis's indications in this direction.

IV. TRANSCENDENCE

The difficulty that Ellis wrestles with concerns the conceivability of *transcendence*, i.e. of a relation between two realms of reality that need to be relevantly different, but connected. Can we define the concept of *difference* in a way that allows for the two realms counting as two, while allowing that at least one of the two (i.e. the things in it contained) constrains the other (i.e., the things in it contained)? I will try to do that on the basis of the reflections that I carried out in the previous section under the suggestions of Ellis.

a. Pluralism of the domains of reality.

We can start by noting that it is conceivable that reality is made of more domains or realms, which are different from one another for the fact that they contain beings of different *ontological* kinds. The difference among the kinds of beings will be ontological, but it can also have consequences on the ways in which we can cognize those beings. For example, reality could contain these domains: i. the domain of things that we can investigate with the methods of science; ii. the domain of things that we can access empirically, but we cannot investigate scientifically (e.g. values and colours); iii. the domain of things that we cannot access empirically, directly or indirectly, but we can discover with the methods of science (electrons, numbers); iv. the domain of things that we cannot access empirically (directly or indirectly) and we cannot discover with the methods of science, but we can reach through other rational means, i.e. transcendentally (e.g., God); maybe there are also domains of things that we have no way to access empirically (directly or indirectly), scientifically or transcendentally.

Some clarification is required here. I claim that empirical access can be direct or indirect, in order to account for the following distinction. I claim that we humans have direct empirical access to event *e* iff we can know *e* through one of our species-specific sense modalities. Now let us suppose that I have direct empirical access to events of kind A and to events of kind B. Let us also suppose that I observed many events of kind A and many events of kind B, and that these observations gave me defeasible evidence that it is a law that Bs are necessarily caused by As. Now, suppose that I have direct empirical access to event *f* of kind B, but I had not observed any event of kind A causing it. On the basis of the above assumptions, I can infer that there must have been an event *g* of kind A, that I had not direct access to and that caused *f*. In this case, I claim that I have indirect empirical access to *g*. Of course, indirect empirical access offers only evidence that is as defeasible as the evidence that the relevant causal law holds.

16 Ibid., 198.

Theoretical entities, like electrons, cannot be empirically accessed, not even indirectly. Indeed, we cannot observe any of their interactions with anything, and so we cannot form the defeasible evidence supporting one of the causal generalisations required for indirect empirical knowledge. However, scientific theories entail that electrons exist, and statements about their existence have the epistemic strength allowed by the assumptions grounding scientific theories and by the empirical evidence supporting those theories.

The non-scientific rational means I refer to as transcendental should be better specified, and I will say something about them in next session. For present purposes suffices it to say that they are arguments concluding for the conditions of possibility of our experience. Such conditions of possibilities have not necessarily to be understood as pertaining to the knowing subjects, as Kant had it. That is one possibility, but they could also be conditions of possibility subsisting in reality.

b. Pluralism of kinds of powers and forces.

Things in all the imagined domains of reality can have and exercise powers, not only the things in the domains of reality that can be investigated by science or that are empirically accessible.

Someone might think that this claim must be wrong. Natural laws — the objector could complain — strictly hold on the domain of nature and no external power could break them. This remark rules out any domain of reality different from nature that is supposed to interfere with nature and we end up running against the second requirement for the explanation of value. This objection can be resisted, since it assumes a strongly metaphysical understanding of the laws of nature, which was common among modern philosophers but can hardly be supported after the debates on that topic, which took place in the twentieth century. Laws of nature seem to be only generalisations which describe the behaviour of physical objects resulting from the constraints acting upon those objects, due to the structures emerging at different levels of complexity in the physical universe. There could be powers and ways of interacting among things which have so far eluded our recognition, for example because they are not exercised in our sector of the universe. Or they are exercised too rarely for us to notice them. Had we to encounter them, would we possibly have to change the laws of nature we accept.

The objector could insist that, even granting that the laws of nature are just generalisations of the constraints on the behaviour of objects emerging from the complexity existing in the universe, the idea that powers in a region of reality can affect other realms of reality is implausible. The two domains would be thereby connected and any relevant sense in which the domains are different would be ruled out. The domain that exercises its powers on another would be detectable in the other by observing the effects of those powers. On the other hand, the problem cannot be solved by claiming that all domains of reality can exercise their powers only within their own borders, since, in that case, the domains would be completely separated, and we would run again against the second requirement for the explanation of value again.

This line of objection can be answered in two ways, both of which allow me to make steps further in the solution of my problem. The first reply is that it is not true — as it may seem — that the exercise of powers across different realms would jeopardize the distinction among those realms. Suppose that there really is a God, who has powers different from the basic physical forces and who can exercise those powers on the physical world. These powers cannot be investigated by science since they do not follow any regularity and cannot be treated with our scientific methods. Suppose also that we could be aware that He exercises these powers at least sometimes when He does. We would be able to access Him, but this would not make Him or His powers a part of the physical world. Science can investigate only the powers depending on the four basic physical forces and other kinds of powers, if they exist, cannot be treated with those methods, even if their effects can be detected. The objection that we do not experience any such effects is a non-starter: the point here is not the existence of a transcendent God, but the conceivability of Him. Furthermore, the divine exercise of these kinds of powers could be too rare to be noticed and treated with the generalisations which are required by scientific theory or by indirect empirical knowledge.

Let us now turn to the second reply available to the objection we are considering. Following a scenario once suggested by van Inwagen,[17] suppose that the universe is made of fundamental particles and that all physical happenings can — in principle — be explained via interactions of those fundamental particles. Suppose also, that the fundamental particles were created and are maintained in existence by God, who keeps exercising force and sustaining the energy of the universe throughout. In this scenario, the force exercised by God is a condition of the possibility of the existence of fundamental particles, of all physical forces holding among those particles and of all possible interactions occurring among the particles, but it could not itself be an object of scientific or empirical investigation. The powers of God would certainly interfere with the world, but in ways that elude the means of our scientific and empirical investigation.

c. Pluralism about kinds of substances.

This remark brings us to our next point: is a pluralism of ontological kinds of substances conceivable? We have seen Ellis wrestling with the concept of ontological dualism and looking for a way of intending dualism — we can generalise and think of pluralism — that did not make the interaction among substances of different kinds impossible. The problem is that the substances belonging to different ontological kinds must be able to interact, their differences notwithstanding, and — at the same time — that their differences need to be large enough for them to occupy different realms of reality, in some relevant sense. We can now conceive how these requirements can be fulfilled. Let us suppose that there is a God who interacts with the physical universe in the way imagined while discussing point b. above. That God is different enough from the world to be undetectable by the scientific and empirical means of cognition, although, at the same time, He acts on the world.

d. Pluralism in the way of being.

A consequence of the above point is that God cannot be a physical object among the other, neither has He to exercise physical forces. This explains the sense of a requirement spelled out by Ellis, i.e., the requirement that God were not a being among beings or a cause among causes. As we have now seen, He cannot be a physical or otherwise empirically accessible object or cause, but that does not mean that he must be a non-being or that He must be powerless. Maybe physical existence is not the only possible form of existence. To take another point stressed by Ellis: God is not floating around the space. This is comprehensible: the being of God might be different from that of physical objects. Following Strawson (Strawson 1959), we can accept that the objects of our experience occupy a spatiotemporal continuum, but this does not mean that God and the universe must coincide: if God is not a physical object, His being is not equivalent to occupying the spatiotemporal continuum. One could object that this makes his way of being too abstract: He seems to be some sort of abstract object, which cannot have any efficacy onto the world.

This objection is still too attached to a physical understating of being: the point is that as there might be powers different from physical forces, which are still powers, so there might nonphysical ways of being which still involve some capacity to act or to exercise powers, even in the physical world, without being part of it. Let us think, for example, of two different fields of forces of two different physical kinds (e.g. a magnetic and a gravitational field): they can occupy the same space while remaining different fields. Of course, they are not individuals in Strawson's sense, but the point here is only to suggest the possibility that two different things might occupy the same spatiotemporal continuum. That would of course be a problem if both things were particulars for which identity consisted in occupying the spatiotemporal continuum. Granted, however, that existence for God can be something different from that, nothing counts against the possibility that He occupies the spatiotemporal continuum of the physical universe and exercises his powers on it.

17 Peter van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God", in *Divine and Human Action*: *Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Cornell Univ. Press, 1988).

e. God is not a man in the sky.

The points b-c make it clear that God is not like a man in the sky, and still that stand is compatible with the possibility that He might act casually on all physical and empirically accessible regions of reality. A further resistance could be the following: the anthropomorphic image is meant to recall the pervasive role that God needs to have in the physical and empirical domains, if the appeal to Him has to be able to meet the first two requirements for the account of value. If God has the only role of sustaining the existence of the fundamental physical particles and otherwise the world independently follows the laws of physics, isn't God intervention in the world too thin? This objection cannot be countered just by recalling that the suggested scenario does not make God inaccessible in an absolute sense. It is true that we have granted that there are ways of knowing other than the scientific and the empirical: if the existence of fundamental particles granted enough evidence, God could be known simply as the creator and supporter of fundamental particles. The point of the objection, however, is another one: is the role of a creator and supporter of fundamental particles enough to account for value? We can abstract from the details of the scenario by van Inwagen proposed above, and phrase the challenge in more general terms: if we grant God a hardly- or non-interfering form of interaction in the physical and the empirical, does He still have a role sufficient to explain value?

It seems to me that the objection can be countered. Firstly, van Inwagen's scenario was meant as one of two possible replies to a previous objection: the other reply granted that God could rarely interfere with the physical and the empirical. That possibility, however, is compatible with an influence of God in the physical and empirical domains pervasive enough for theistic accounts of value. Secondly, van Inwagen's scenario was only meant to suggest that God could exercise a continuous power on the physical and empirical universe, while not being cognisable with the means of scientific and empirical knowledge. However, all this is compatible with the possibility that God can influence what goes on in the world. For example, the power exercised by God could bias the direction of evolutionary processes in ways that God values. This possibility would vindicate a theological version of Nagel's view about teleology mentioned in the second section above. This is enough to show that God can interfere with the world enough in order to have a role in the explanation of value, even if He is not an object of the physical and of the empirically accessible domains. Naturally, this only supports the conceivability of God being both external to the world and influential upon it: a suitable account of God will have to fill in the details of the relation between God and world.

f. Plurality of explanatory methods and ontological plurality.

As we have seen at the end of the previous section, for Ellis it is an open question whether the sense in which dualism can be vindicated is ontological or only explanatory: she seems to claim that there is only one reality which can be explained both scientifically and in other ways. The upshot of the previous remarks is that plurality needs not to be only explanatory: the possibility of different domains of reality which can interact with each other leads to the conclusion that different forms of knowledge can be different from one another not only for their methods but also for their domains.

Someone could wonder whether the possibility of interferences among different domains of reality does not question the distinction between the forms of knowledge that I have been supporting. Let us imagine that God really can exercise powers that interfere with the domain studied by physics, in ways that science cannot investigate. As we have seen, this might happen if God's power is not just one of the four fundamental forces, and it is either exercised very rarely — so rarely that we cannot investigate it with the methods of science — or exercised at a level at which science cannot reach, e.g. in making fundamental particles exist. The perplexity then is the following: what if science — in its development — ends up finding the ways to investigate also the powers by which God interferes with the world? Would that not relativize the boundaries between methods of knowledge, and, in case, about ontological domains? Does not this possibility mean that the distinction between the natural and the supernatural could evaporate?

It seems to me that this possibility does not represent a burden for the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. It may well be granted that the exact locations of the borders between the natural and the supernatural might be contingent upon the state of human knowledge. The way I talked of the physical world depends on a definition of science the story of which we can trace back to the beginnings of modernity. It depends on some assumptions about what is real in the world (the distinction between primary and secondary qualities), about the mathematical structure of the physical, and about the role of experimentation in the investigation of nature. The science we have now, including our current views about the four fundamental forces of physical reality, rests on that tradition and shares assumptions which define it. It is possible that, in its development, science might revise its views about the fundamental forces of nature and that this revision might go together with an enlargement of acknowledged powers existing in nature. It is also possible that this might lead even the scientific method to recognise some of the currently unknown powers that God exercises in the world. However, it is also conceivable that some of the powers that God can exercise will never be reached by science as a matter of principle. This could be the case of powers which do not influence the world at all — but that is a case that is not interesting for us. It could also be the case, however, of some of the powers that God –under one of the hypotheses for which He exists — exercises on the world. Think of the power that He exercises for sustaining the existence of particles, in van Inwagen's scenario. What could count as a scientific investigation of those powers? By hypothesis, those powers only establish the domain of physics, and they could not be investigated by it. Or better, in order to investigate them, science would have to change itself to a degree that it could hardly be still called "science," in any sense that allows us to consider the new discipline as a new link in the tradition of the discipline that we consider science now.

In order to appreciate the significance of my complaint against the view that science could investigate everything that exercises powers in the natural word, one should only consider what it takes to think of a transcendental domain of reality. How can one access such a domain? Above, I promised that I would tackle that question in next section. It is now time to do it: that will clarify that science could not develop into that kind of cognition without changing its very nature.

V. ANALOGY

The conceivability of a transcendent domain of reality, which I argued for in the previous section, would be idle for the purposes of meeting the three requirements for the explanation of value, if there were no way of knowing something about that domain, at least in line of principle. The problem that I need now to face is how philosophy can investigate domains of reality that physics or our empirical knowledge cannot access. Given the above sketch of the distinction between different domains of reality, a transcendent reality cannot be accessed with the methods of science, nor through indirect or direct empirical means. I claimed that there can be transcendental methods as well: it is now time to face that issue.

By transcendent methods of knowledge, as I claimed above, I mean methods that search for the conditions of the possibility of our experience. One such method, maybe the main one, is the deployment of analogical arguments.

Analogy takes the form of a proportion, i.e., A:B=C:D. An argument from analogy can be run when one knows A, B, and D, and one knows hat A is similar to C in ways that are relevant for the relations that both have with B and D respectively. The arguments allow one to figure out some previously unknown features of C, i.e. those that it must have to be to D as A is to B. For example, if A is a watchmaker, B is a watch and D is the set of all physical things of the universe, C must be some sort of maker, like A, but it must be different from A in relevant ways.

The appeal to similarities involved in analogy makes this kind of argument inductive and dependent on the epistemic positions of knowers. One example of how the beliefs of knowers affect the probability of conclusions can be the role of similarities of known cases in supporting the conclusions concerning unknown cases. What features of the known cases are relevant and can be projected unto unknown cases depend on what knowers already know or believe.

Analogical arguments can lead to deceiving conclusions, when the wrong features of known cases are projected unto unknown cases. Wrong features are features of the known cases, which are not identical with nor necessarily tied to the features that make the known and unknown cases similar. Let us take the example of the watchmaker again. A watchmaker is strongly independent from his product, once the production is completed. Once the watch is assembled, it operates independently from its maker, who could even stop existing without danger for the watch. Should we conclude that God is distant from the world in a similar manner? The answer must be negative. The watchmaker produces the watch by assembling material, which is already available and exists independently of him. By contrast, God makes the world (also) by making and keeping in existence the stuff which constitutes it. For this reason, we cannot claim that God is similar to the watchmaker also in being quite irrelevant for His product, when the latter is already made.

These remarks about analogy allow me to make some further considerations about the conceivability of transcendence and to complete the discussion of the previous section. There, I suggested that there is a plurality of substances, which defines a plurality of domains of reality and some of these can be accessed through different methods. Now we can add that the relations between objects in different domains are analogical in the sense that 'existence' is an analogical word. To *exist* or *to be* is different for different kinds of things. For a car to be is for its parts to be arranged together in a certain way, for a horse is to have certain biological functions, for a football team is to be playing together one a football field. What all cases have in common is that something exists when it has a unity, which allows us to count it and tell it apart from other things.

Objects populating different domains of reality can have unities and be countable in ways which are even more different that those holding among physical objects. Abstract objects, e.g. numbers, if they exist at all, are different one from the other and are countable, although they have no component physical parts at all.

What is it to be, for God? He has no physical parts, and He cannot be an object in the sense in which a material object is such. (He cannot be a man in the sky, as Ellis pointed out). However, that does not mean that He is *a nothing*. Maybe for Him to be is to have some unity in the exercises of certain powers. The unity can be for example a unity of consciousness supporting intentions. The fact that He has no material parts does not imply that He is a consciousness floating on the void, so to speak, e.g. a consciousness emerging from no base or having no ground. We certainly cannot grasp what His base can be, and our uses of analogy cannot take us so far: we can only know that whatever the base is, it is not a physical base, since He does not live in the physical domain of reality.

VI. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the possibility that there might be a transcendent realm of reality is conceivable. The paradoxes of identity to which Ellis seemed committed can be overcome: God is different from the world, and strict identity is safe. Strict identity, however, is a very minimal notion, since there are many ways of existing. That makes room for the possibility that the fact that God and world are two different objects, does not imply that they are two different objects of the same ontological kind, even in a very general sense of 'ontological kind', e.g. equivalent to distinction between physical and non-physical ways of being. We cannot really understand in what sense God is an object, i.e. what His principle of unity is and what His powers are. However, analogical reasoning can have enough grip for us to claim that He is a being.

We can rephrase Ellis' account of the relation between God and world that I quoted at the end of section three above:

> God and world add up to two beings of very different ontological kinds, which are not to be identified, for God is distinct from the world, albeit not as a distinct thing of the same ontological kind as the world or any of the kinds of things which populate the world, and in such a way that He remains omnipresent to all things in the world. So the world is irreducibly God-involving, but God is not reducible to the world. God transcends the world.

Hence, we can hold that the world (i.e. the natural world) might not exhaust the whole of reality, and that there can be other domains of reality, which we cannot access empirically, directly or indirectly, or through the methods of science. Analogical arguments can allow us to access domains of things related, but not identical to, the natural world. The relations between that domain of reality and the world are strong enough to meet the three requirements for the explanation of value. That domain of reality is what we call "transcendent." Transcendence, hence, does not paradoxically involve conceiving the unconceivable, as some seem to think, although that does not mean that transcendence must be only an attempt to look at things differently and better, with no stretch to a transcendent reality.[18] Analogy allows us to conceive realities, which we cannot grasp as clearly as those which we can access empirically or through science. This does not mean that we have no access to those realities, but that we have an access to them that is different from the empirical or the scientific, e.g. an access which is typical of metaphysics.[19]

That the notion of transcendent reality is conceivable does not of course suggest that we have enough evidence to accept that it exists. The existence of a transcendent reality, however, is beyond the scope of this essay. Supporters of expansive theological naturalism suggest that there is evidence for the existence of a transcendent reality, coming from considerations about the nature of value, and I have elsewhere taken that side.[20] All I have suggested here is that that thought is not incoherent.

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