Remarks Belowground: excerpts from a notebook.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Edited by Stephen Grover

Naturalism/non-naturalism: naturalism is the view that there is nothing besides the subway. Non-naturalism typically involves belief in an aboveground world and in life after exit and before entry. Naturalism denies both. Many non-naturalists claim that even when the evidence from experience after exit and before entry is discounted, there is reason to believe in an aboveground world. This naturalism must deny. Naturalism need not deny that *if* there is life between entry and exit, there is an aboveground world. Many questions are independent of the naturalist/non-naturalist question. Many depend on it. (1)

The naturalist believes there is nothing besides the subway and its riders. Some non-naturalists believe there is also an aboveground world, and life between, but nothing besides. Other non-naturalists believe there is also a supernatural world, and life after death, and perhaps also God. Many arguments used by the first sort of non-naturalist to attack the second sort can be used to attack non-naturalism of both sorts. For example, mystical experiences are dismissed as uncheckable. But how do we check claims about what is aboveground? (11)

Naturalism, non-naturalism, and supernaturalism. Below, above, beyond. (11L)

Non-naturalism and supernaturalism give the same account of the subway. They differ on the nature of the aboveground world, or at least, they differ on its significance. For the non-naturalist, the aboveground world is all that there is. Above and below, but no beyond. (63L)

To naturalists and non-naturalists alike it is plain that supernaturalists believe what they wish were true. They believe it because they wish it were true. But to the naturalist it is plain that non-naturalists also believe what they wish were true. Very often, the explanation of belief is that the believer wishes it were true. (43L)

Nearly always, the answer to the question ‘Why do I believe that X?’ is ‘I wish that X were true’. A philosopher should not spend her time coming up with reasons for believing what she wishes were true. If I would believe something even if I didn’t have the reasons I have, those reasons are probably not good ones. I wish non-naturalism were true. But I wish supernaturalism were true as well. (26L)

Supernaturalism: souls, spirits, ghosts, magic, occult powers, superpowers, angels, life before birth or after death or both, astral planes, nirvana, gods, goddesses, God, the One. The relation that these supernatural beings bear to the aboveground world is just the relation that the aboveground world bears to the world below. (43)

Non-naturalists who believe in the subway, aboveground and life between but nothing besides often describe themselves as naturalists. They deny the supernatural—heaven, gods, ghosts, souls, etc. Aboveground is just as natural as below. But if above is just as natural as below, how can above account for the existence of below? If below exists for the sake of above, what does above exist for? (11L)

To defend naturalism, the view that there is nothing besides the subway, it is necessary to defend the view that there is *at least* the subway. And then to defend the view that there is *at most* the subway. These two movements are contrary: one, to establish that there is something beyond subjectivity; the second, to limit what there is beyond subjectivity. The first asserts reality, the second denies it. The reasons given for the first must therefore not apply to the second, or vice versa. (3)

Naturalism: there is nothing besides the subway and its riders. Solipsism: the incoherent view that there is nothing besides my current experience. Incoherent, because the ‘my’ is not available to the solipsist, nor the ‘experience’, nor the ‘current’. *Which* experiences are mine? *When* do I have my experiences? *What* are my experiences *of*? (3L)

What reason to believe in aboveground have I, when I am below? Clearly, everything could appear just as it does and there be no aboveground, for I am below. (12)

I am entitled to believe in the subway and its riders, given my current experience. Given my current experience, I am not entitled to believe in anything else. (33L)

Experience entitles me to believe in whatever must be real if I am to have the experience I have. In the subway my experience is only of the subway and its riders. Nothing but the subway and its riders need be real in order for my experience to be as it is. So my entitlement from my experience in the subway can extend no further than belief in the reality of the subway and its riders. (40)

The subway and its riders are all that can be known from here in the subway—but the subway and its riders *can* be known. (27L)

Naturalism rests on a moderate empiricism: significant claims about reality must be checkable. If a claim cannot be checked, it is not significant. The naturalist need not deny that there are ‘truths of reason’ that are uncheckable—but these truths are not about reality. They are about the form of reality not its contents. They are not truths as checkable truths are truths. But there are also those truths that are immune from doubt because of the place they occupy in our worldview. (40L)

An idle supposition: there is an aboveground world and a life between exit and entry, but we forget about it as we enter (and remember all about it when we exit). (29L)

What forces us, when in the subway, to acknowledge the existence of anything besides the subway and its riders? There is no secure inference from below to above—neither from the fact that there is a subway rather than nothing, nor from the fact that there is this subway rather than some other. (Cosmological, Teleological) (16L)

Is it more probable than not that there is an aboveground world? It is true that if there is an aboveground world of the sort non-naturalists believe in, it is unsurprising that there is a subway. Equally, if there is a supernatural realm of the sort supernaturalists believe in, it is unsurprising that there is an aboveground world. But, just as we would expect there to be a better aboveground world if there is a supernatural realm than not, so we would expect the subway to be better if there is an aboveground world than not. Yet the subway is characterized quite as much by bad as by good design. (26)

Belief in the aboveground, and belief in life between. Together, these beliefs account for the existence of the subway, and for its functionality. But what accounts for the aboveground? What is gained by postulating something besides the subway, if that something is as unaccounted for as the subway? (1L)

Non-naturalists explain belowground by aboveground, claiming belowground cannot explain itself. Can aboveground explain itself any easier? (14L)

Why is there anything below, if there is nothing above? Well, why is there anything above, if there is nothing beyond? (48L)

*Principle*: when an argument from below to above has a parallel in an argument from above to beyond, both must be accorded equal treatment. This rests on a more fundamental principle: that when two arguments are parallel, one must accept both or neither, but not one rather than the other. (26L)

An apology for naturalism.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Naturalism *might* be true.

2. Naturalism *might well* be true.

3. Non-naturalism *might* be false.

4. Non-naturalism *might well* be false. (13)

Naturalism might be true. Just as we do not need to suppose there is a God in order to account for the existence of the world, we do not need to suppose there is an aboveground world in order to account for the existence of the subway. (14)

Naturalism might well be true. Non-naturalism is no more likely to be true. For whatever argument the non-naturalist gives will apply to the non-naturalist position, and support supernaturalism. If the subway exists to take us from one place to another in the aboveground world, what is the aboveground for? (15)

Non-naturalism might be false. What compels us, when in the subway, to believe that anything exists besides the subway? If the answer is ‘Nothing’, non-naturalism might be false.[[3]](#footnote-3) Whatever is presented as a reason for believing in an aboveground world is equally a reason for believing in another world above, and another above that, and so on. (16)

Non-naturalism might well be false. The non-naturalist might concede that, while in the subway, current experience cannot provide grounds for belief in the reality of aboveground and life between. But lacking grounds for belief is not the same as having grounds for disbelief: “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”. What grounds are there for disbelief? What evidence of absence? Accounts of what is aboveground, outside the subway, are radically inconsistent with one another, fantastical, and incoherent. But this doesn’t really prove absence. Also, the argument from unintelligent design: but this does not prove absence either. (17)

Naturalism does not say that non-naturalism is certainly false, but only that no-one is entitled to believe it true. [Just as naturalism and non-naturalism alike say that no-one is entitled to believe that supernaturalism is true, but not that supernaturalism is certainly false.]

God could signal Her existence unmistakably but She does not. Similarly, the aboveground world could signal its existence unmistakably, but does not. (33)

Challenges to naturalism: how to account for the existence and character of the subway; how to account for the fact that there are some things we ought to do and others we ought not; how to account for persons and their identity over time; how to account for mind in the subway. An aboveground world helps, for a moment, with the first, but is of no use at all with the others. And with the first the help is only momentary, for what accounts for the existence and character of the aboveground world? (20)

Difficulties on theory: functionality in the subway; devices of extreme utility. As descent with modification by natural and sexual selection explains biological functionality and organs of extreme perfection, so evolutionary naturalism can account for the functionality there is in the subway and for devices of extreme utility. Design theories, in contrast, while accounting for adaptation and perfection easily, can say nothing about maladaptation and imperfection: bad design. There is a great deal of bad design in the subway. (20L)

Summer heat: where does it come from? When it is hot, trains are (usually) cooled; the heat is pumped out of the train into the subway. This heats up the subway. But there must be *extra* heat to account for the seasonal variation. Where does it come from? We know that heat can be pumped out of the train. Surely, if there were an aboveground, the heat would rise (or could be pumped) out of the subway. That the subway is hot is therefore evidence for naturalism. It is no good postulating seasonal variation aboveground—for if there is an aboveground there is somewhere for the heat to rise or be pumped in summer. Why pump heat out of the train into the subway but refuse to pump heat out of the subway into the aboveground? (53L)

Look around, and what do you see? Only the subway, and its riders. Must there be something besides the subway, in order to account for what you see? Certainly not, if ‘what you see’ means the visual stimulus. What I see is not a visual stimulus but the rider opposite, the floor of the subway car, the advertisements, etc. These concepts: must there be an aboveground world in order for them to apply? (18)

A ‘transcendental argument’ to the existence of aboveground? Not likely. But to life between . . .

The ‘I think . . . ‘ that attaches to all experience: must this I be steady rather than gappy? But this I is not there in sleep. (18L)

How, when I enter the subway, do I know I’m still me? The sentence, ‘I’m still me’ is a very peculiar sentence. When, outside philosophy, is anyone tempted to say, ‘I am still me’? But we can imagine a use.

My clothes don’t change much, trip to trip. Nor what is in my pockets. Only very rarely do I find myself carrying anything. I have little baggage. (29)

Why should a gappy life raise the question of how I persist through time any more than a steady life? True, we cannot trace a gappy life continuously—for, necessarily, there are gaps in a gappy life. (8L)

Can the naturalist account for our identity? The naturalist denies life between exit and entry. On what basis can naturalists maintain that I am the same person on this trip as I was on my last, and will be on my next? I exist only between entry and exit. Then I cease to exist. Then I re-exist. And so on. What has to be true in order for it to be me again? Same body? No: ‘same person’ does not mean ‘same body’. Both ‘body’ and ‘mind’ are secondary; ‘person’ is primary. A person is not composite. (8)

Suppose there is life between: still, life would be gappy rather than steady. Sleep interrupts consciousness but not life. Life between provides for bodily continuity, which is neither sufficient nor necessary for personal identity.[[4]](#footnote-4) (10L)

Consider the moment of entry and ask: what guarantees that I am the same person as I was when I exited? Suppose that we were steady rather than gappy: exactly the same issues concerning identity would arise. Mere spatio-temporal continuity solves nothing. Psychological continuity is what concerns us (Farkid).[[5]](#footnote-5) (10)

I remember the Underground long ago when I was a girl. What justifies the I here? In what sense is that girl me or me that girl? (29L)

Conservation of matter & energy is ensured if, every time a rider exits, another enters. This is not true of one subway in isolation (the missing mass problem). If there are other subways . . .

Might every possible subway exist? That would, in a sense, explain why this one does. (8L)

Variety in subways: gauge, AC/DC, 3rd rail or overhead catenary, rubber or steel, left- or right-hand running, couplings, voltage, construction method, train-formations, faregathering, and so on. (58L)

Maximal Possibility: every possible subway is real. Null Possibility: no subway is real. Minimal Possibility: only this subway is real. If Null obtained, it would do so because of its simplicity. Maximal is also, in a way, very simple. Minimal is not.

Maximal, Minimal, Null, Various, Multiple, Repetitive. (58L)

Other subways: an answer to the question, why is there this subway rather than another? The answer: there is this subway *and* that other. If every possible subway is real, it is unsurprising this one is. But the Maximal Possibility is a very special possibility, so it would be very surprising if it obtained.

Livonia: [[6]](#footnote-6) there can only be one subway, for otherwise there would be stops that are impossible to reach. But a stop is *somewhere the train goes*. (58)

Livonia: every stop is reachable from every other, so there can only be one subway. If the Metro or Tube are real, they are reachable; if they aren’t reachable they aren’t real. (58L)

The Staten Island Railway is not accessible from the subway; yet it is on the map. (58)

Something that did not ever get riders where they are going would not be a subway at all. (58L)

I exercise choice over when to enter, and where. Perhaps also over *which* subway to enter. *Where* to enter: 163 Street - Amsterdam Avenue[[7]](#footnote-7) when going to 71 - Continental Av – Forest Hills[[8]](#footnote-8) but 157 St when going to 86 St.[[9]](#footnote-9) And *Les Halles* when going to *Olympiades*.[[10]](#footnote-10) (23L)

If riders exercise some choice over *when* to enter, does it follow that riders exercise some choice over *whether* to enter? Choosing to enter is like choosing to exist. But ‘choosing to exist’ is, strictly considered, nonsense. (23)

‘I exist’ = ‘I am in the subway’. If I choose to enter the subway, I choose to exist. But nothing is called ‘choosing to exist’. Two choices: when and where to enter. A third: *which* subway to enter.

Most riders, if we are to judge their mood from their affect and attitude, feel that they have no choice but to be on the subway—that they are not on the subway by choice. (54L)

The ‘enthusiasm gap’: riders don’t look happy to be going where they are going. (17L)

Kosciusko[[11]](#footnote-11) Dilemma

‘Do not lean on door’. Kosciusko says that what is prohibited is what is hated by the gods, and the gods (uniformly) hate doorleaning. Recast in monotheistic terms: is doorleaning bad because God forbids it or does God forbid it because it is bad? (21L)

‘Do not lean on door.’ Why not? ‘It is risky for you.’ Or, ‘It harms the door.’ Or, ‘It is forbidden.’ Do not touch: it is dangerous or fragile or sacred. No ethics here. Why should prohibitions have something in common?

It is also prohibited to lean on the doors at the *ends* of the cars (Woodlawn).[[12]](#footnote-12) (34)

‘Do not hold doors.’ Why not? ‘It delays the train.’ So what? ‘If the train is delayed, so are all its riders.’ This is an ethical consideration. Can the naturalist account for it? What harm does a doorholder do, if naturalism is true? (34L)

Why not hold the doors? It delays the train. But why not delay the train? If naturalism is true, what does it matter? (62L)

Saratoga: [[13]](#footnote-13) no one does evil willingly and knowingly. But consider the doorblocker. Does the doorblocker not know that he is impenetrable, solid, and has to be gone around? Does he not know that the doors open for a purpose and that this purpose is defeated if he does not move?

‘If naturalism is true, doorblocking is harmless; doorblocking is not harmless; so naturalism is false.’ This begs the question or trades on ambiguities in the notion of ‘harm’. (55)

‘Do not hold doors’. ‘Do not lean on door’. Why not ‘Do not block door’? But doorblocking is in a different category from doorholding or doorleaning. Doorblocking is not risky to the doorblocker or damaging to the door. (55L)

Can naturalism account for obligations? Again, belief in aboveground and life between makes no real difference. If ‘Why be moral?’ is a good question below ground it is a good question above. How is moral scepticism any easier for the non-naturalist to refute? Supernaturalists have an easier time with the moral sceptic (until the Kosciuszko dilemma is brought up, at least).

Obligations and prohibitions that are other-regarding are as easy for the naturalist as the non-naturalist (or as hard). What about those obligations and prohibitions that are self-regarding, eg., the duty to rush? (21)

Rushing is an *urge*, like the urge to fight or flee[[14]](#footnote-14) or fuck. It has an explanation, but this is not a justification. The urge to rape no doubt has an explanation too. (22L)

Urges do not rest on beliefs; they are neither justified nor unjustified. Acting on an urge, succumbing to it, is justified or unjustified, but not the urge itself. (47L)

The urge to remain in being cannot ground the urge to rush as it grounds the urge to eat. But neither can it ground the urge to fuck. (28L)

The urge to remain in being cannot underpin a duty to remain in being. Buhre[[15]](#footnote-15) was right about that, but wrong to look elsewhere for an underpinning. But why do we have the urge to rush? All other urges can be traced back to the struggle for existence. If we resist the urge to eat or drink we will soon be dead. Fucking is a different matter. Lots of sexual urges are unrelated to reproduction. But this just means tracing these urges back is a complex matter. They *now* have nothing to do with breeding. (22L)

Children are in no rush. (38L)

The non-naturalist justifies rushing by appeal to the delights aboveground between exit and entry. Can the naturalist account for rushing, or must the naturalist hold that we should all slow down? The naturalist can take the fact that riders rush as primitive, on an analogy with the fact that organisms strive to survive and reproduce. The ‘struggle for existence’ is manifested in urges—to eat and drink, to fuck, to fight, to flee. Though these urges have an explanation, that is, a physiological basis, this *cannot* justify us in satisfying the urge. It is not the urge to eat that justifies eating. An urge confers no obligation. (22)

Compare the urges that constitute the ‘struggle for existence’: food, sex, power, safety. These urges have a physiological basis—an explanation—but an urge neither has nor lacks a justification. ‘Justified urge’ is like[[16]](#footnote-16) (37L)

How can naturalism provide any justification for rushing? The answer is: it cannot. But the naturalist can take the fact that (most) riders rush for granted; as the theory of evolution takes for granted the fact that (most) organisms strive to survive and reproduce. This is no justification however. The naturalist can also point out that most rushing is unreasonable. And finally, the naturalist can simply say that rushing is unjustified: we should all slow down.

Natural selection takes for granted that organisms strive to survive and reproduce. It cannot explain what it presupposes. Similarly, naturalism takes for granted that (most) riders rush and cannot explain it. Rushing is unreasonable when there is no reason to rush and when there is reason not to rush. Rushing and non-naturalism belong together. The urge to rush is occasionally overwhelming; at all other times it should be overcome. (37L)

Nihilism: rushing as fleeing. (28L)

How can the urge to rush be wrong if it is so powerful and so general? For everyone feels it and few can resist it. Naturalism needs an ‘error theory’. (37)

Error theory: if there is no aboveground or life between, why is belief in them widespread? The answer to this is surely connected to the puzzle of rushing. If there were an aboveground and a life between, would that give us reason to rush? Only if we have reason to live. That many believe in above though all there is is below, is no more—nor any less—puzzling than that many believe in beyond though all there is, is here and now, and not beyond. Natural histories of religion provide a parallel. (47)

Rushing does not rest on belief in aboveground but accounts for it: riders believe there is somewhere they are going because they are rushing toward it. Why would they be rushing, if there was nowhere they were going?[[17]](#footnote-17) Similarly, the urge to remain in being does not rest on belief in a life beyond but accounts for it. ‘I couldn’t keep going if I didn’t believe in a better life beyond’ means ‘In order to keep going I must believe in a better life beyond.’ (47L)

If there is no reason to rush, why do so many people rush? What accounts for the urge to rush? Other creatures aren’t in a rush, unless fighting or fleeing, etc. Rushing may have evolved at a time when rushing did make a difference. Compare cravings for high-fat high-sugar food and drink—urges it is now bad to satisfy but which persist because there is insufficient selection-pressure to eliminate them. Rushing is just the same.

If rushing is a relic of an earlier stage in human evolution, like the urge for high-fat or high-sugar food and drink, can this help explain the fact that expresses are for rushing? (28L)

In the primitive subway, rushing paid off. But now there are expresses to rush for us. (58L)

Why look for the train while waiting? Looking is a manifestation of impatience. Connected therefore with *rushing*. (35)

Riders waiting on a platform often stare longingly into the tunnel. It does not make the train arrive any sooner, and usually makes the wait seem longer. (35)

It does not make the wait any shorter, and usually makes it seem (much) longer. (35L)

Stand looking the wrong way on a crowded platform and you will find it difficult to face all those faces face on. The Great Beast. (35)

Might riders be for other riders? Teleology is excluded here, isn’t it? No organism is for the good of another. Every organism is for its own good, *if* it is for anything; but this is not a purpose (nor am I merely an organism). Only the *parts* of an organism (including its *behavioural parts*) are for anything. Not all the parts of an organism are for anything; male nipple, female orgasm. (49)

What is the purpose of my trip if there is nowhere I am going? It has none. This is no harder to grasp—nor any easier—than the fact that my life has no purpose. I am not for anything. Is my trip pointless if there is no aboveground nor life between? No more—nor any less—than my life is pointless if there is no life after death. The non-naturalist locates the point of the trip aboveground, in a life above. But what is the point of the life above? Where is it located? The supernaturalist has an answer: the point of life above is to be found in the life beyond. But where is the purpose of the life beyond to be found? (48)

How can life above give purpose to life below if life above has no purpose? If life below finds its purpose above, life above must find its purpose beyond. Life above cannot give point to life below if life above has no point. (50L)

Reincarnation gives life two purposes: to prepare for my next life; to make up for all the harm I did in past lives. Life between: how does it give purpose to our trip, if life has no purpose? The non-naturalist finds the purpose for our trip in the life above. But where is the purpose of life above found? (50)

Supernaturalist faiths and the subway: of the supernaturalist faiths, Christianity and Buddhism are, in their attitude towards existence and conduct, closest to naturalism. They preach resignation; and resignation is how to be-in-the-subway.[[18]](#footnote-18)

On a crowded platform I am in everyone’s way. I must aim at non-existence. (63)

1. These remarks are culled from a small, black notebook found on a Coney Island bound F train in April, 2012. The finder, a member of Congregation Beth Torah on Ocean Parkway, gave it to her rabbi. He—eventually—passed it on to a professor of mathematics at Queens College; from whose hands it came into mine.

The notebook contains 67 double-pages, the right-hand pages numbered 1 through 67. It is often clear that the remarks on the right-hand page were written before those on the left-. I have therefore numbered the left-hand pages 1L through 67L. The notebook contains a number of pseudo-Wittgensteinian thought-morsels of dubious merit that I have ignored. None has to do with the subway. Some remarks referring to the subway or things within it I have also excluded because they do not deal with what, in the notebook, is called 'naturalism': the view that there is nothing besides the subway and its riders. The remarks that remain are presented in the order that, in my judgement, best reveals their significance. I have corrected some infelicities of expression; others I have let stand.

There are connections between these remarks and Myrtle Willoughby's 2010 Halsey Lecture, 'Stoppism: Retrospects and Prospects', a version of which is printed in the *Journal of Philosophy*, Volume CIX, Number 4 (April 2012), pp. 281-94. I do not believe the remarks are from the same hand as the lecture. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This programmatical remark announces the theme of the next four right-hand pages. I have preserved the order of the notebook here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The notebook has ‘naturalism’ rather than ‘non-naturalism’ here, but clearly ‘non-naturalism’ is intended. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This entire remark is crossed out in the notebook. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Farkid is not the name of any station in the subway. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Livonia Avenue is a station in East New York on the BMT Canarsie Line (L). Willoughby, 2012, refers to the Livonian Society in a note on p. 281 and to Livonia herself on p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 163 Street – Amsterdam Avenue is a local stop on the IND Eighth Avenue line in Washington Heights (C). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 71 – Continental Av – Forest Hills is an express stop on the IND Queens Boulevard line in Forest Hills (E, F, M, R). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 157 St and 86 St are local stops on the IRT Broadway – Seventh Avenue line in Manhattan (1). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Two stations in the Paris *Metro*. *Olympiades* is the southern terminus of Line 14 in the 13th *arondissement*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kosciusko Street is a skip-stop station in Bushwick on the BMT Jamaica Line (J). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Woodlawn in Norwood is the northern terminus of the IRT Jerome Avenue Line (4) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Saratoga Avenue is a stop in Brownsville on the IRT New Lots Line (2, 3, 4, 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Above ‘flee’ is written ‘flight’. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Buhre Avenue is a station in Pelham Bay on the IRT Pelham Line (6). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Presumably an oxymoron is in the offing. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Written next to this sentence: (No! The belief and the practice are there together.) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The words ‘Christianity’ and ‘Buddhism’ are crossed out. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)