Integrating first and second nature: Rethinking John McDowell's liberal naturalism[1]

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Abstract: McDowell's 'naturalism of second nature' is one of the most important attempts to defend liberal naturalism in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Liberal naturalism stands as an umbrella term for philosophical accounts which place normative entities within the realm of nature. McDowell's attempt to form an account which leaves room for normativity in nature is based on the distinction between 'first' and 'second' nature. In the present paper I shall attempt to shed light on McDowell's notions of 'first' and 'second' nature and thereby provide an account about the status of normativity which is McDowellian in spirit. However, I suggest that human sciences offer an even more acute challenge to the conceptions of nature that aspire to be liberal naturalist, and I argue that McDowell's account needs to be completed with a further conceptual distinction in order to cope with the challenge of human sciences. In particular, I argue that we should distinguish between the notions of explanatory reduction and normative eliminability.

Keywords: liberal naturalism; normativism; John McDowell; Second Nature; Hegel.

1. *Introduction*

In contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, "liberal naturalism" stands as an umbrella term for the philosophical accounts which seek for logical room and, respectively, for a viable intermediate position between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism (Macarthur & DeCaro 2010: 9). Scientific naturalism qua 'naturalism' identifies reality with the realm of nature and qua 'scientific' identifies the realm of nature with the subject matter of the natural sciences. Supernaturalism, on the other hand, is taken to be the philosophical commitment to the existence of "entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (Mackie 1977: 38). Philosophers who are committed to those entities or relations are also prone to accept a special kind of epistemic faculty (Macarthur & DeCaro 2010: 3) – such as mental intuition – which is supposedly indispensable for grasping supernatural entities

[1] I am indebted to Evgenia Mylonaki for our long-term discussions on naturalism.

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or relations. Nowadays very few philosophers would accept for themselves the label of supernaturalist. Most philosophers place themselves within the broader philosophical camp of naturalism, thus, the term supernaturalism is used more as a philosophical accusation rather than a label which someone would endorse.

As many surveys of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy imply (Kitcher 1992: 54; Leiter 2004: 2; Rorty 2010: 57), most philosophers who reject supernaturalism adopt a scientific version of naturalism. These philosophers think that metaphysical naturalism (Risjord 2014: 9), i.e. the view that the human mind is part of the natural world, necessarily entails epistemological or methodological naturalism, i.e. the view that natural scientific understanding is the only legitimate way of making things in the natural world intelligible. Furthermore, many of them think that metaphysical naturalism also entails meta-philosophical naturalism (Risjord 2016: 2), i.e. the view that philosophy is continuous with the empirical science. Despite its popularity, scientific naturalism does not come without philosophical worries. The main problem is related with what is often called the "normative problem" and concerns the status of normativity. "Normativity concerns what we should or ought to do and our evaluations of things or states of affairs" (Macarthur & DeCaro 2010: 1). Normative facts cover the entire range of human consciousness and behaviour, presuppose the notion of rationality, and are characterized by dichotomies such as true/false (epistemic facts), good/bad (practical facts), beautiful/ugly (aesthetic facts), and so on. According to scientific naturalism, normative facts should be explained in the way that all other facts are explained, i.e. by employing the explanatory patterns of science.[2] This entails that normative explanations are not genuine explanations and should be reduced to descriptive or empirical explanations of science. In short, we could say that scientific naturalists are anti-normativists (Turner 2010).

Rejecting the genuineness of normative concepts threatens to turn notions like freedom, responsibility, morality, justice, or even truth into mere illusions. Against this threat many contemporary philosophers seek for an alternative which still rejects supernaturalism but leaves room for normative facts in the realm of nature. This alternative is often called "liberal naturalism" in contrast to the restrictive conception of scientific naturalism. The main position of liberal naturalism is that embracing metaphysical or ontological naturalism does not necessarily entail epistemological or meta-philosophical naturalism. Thus, normative concepts can unproblematically be used in order to make things in

[2] In Stephen Turner's terms (2010: 11), so-called normative facts should be placed into the "ordinary stream of [empirical] explanation". This means that they should be reconstructed out of conceptual materials that belong to science. See also §2 below.

the natural world intelligible. In this sense liberal naturalists are normativists.

One of the leading figures among contemporary liberal naturalists is John McDowell (Leiter 2004; Macarthur & DeCaro 2004; 2010; Rorty 2010; Turner 2010). McDowell uses a variety of terms in order to express the idea that there is room for normativity in the ontological territory of nature: "naturalism of second nature" (MW[3]: 86), "relaxed naturalism" (MW: 89), "naturalized Platonism" (MW: 91), "Aristotelian naturalism" (McDowell 1998a: 197), and of course "liberal naturalism" (McDowell 2009: 262). McDowell's strategy for coping with the normative problem is explicitly influenced by Wittgensteinian quietism[4] and does not aim at the construction of a theory that can resolve the problem, but at the detection of the ideas or assumptions that create the 'anxiety' in the first place. In the process of dissolving the problem of placing the normative into the realm of nature, McDowell exploits the Aristotelian notion of second nature. Thus, he ends up by rejecting the scientistic assumption that nature is exhausted by the subject matter of the natural sciences and by accepting the genuineness of the normative realm.

In the present paper, I shall attempt to forge an account which sheds light on McDowell's notions of 'first' and 'second' nature and thereby provide an account about the status of normativity. This account aspires to be liberal naturalistic, and furthermore McDowellian, with respect to three fundamental issues: a) it does not depict normative facts as illusions and does not consider normative vocabulary eliminable; b) it retains the distinction between the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason and other kinds of intelligibility and thus includes normative explanations in a proper understanding of the world; and c) it understands normativity in a collectivistic and historical way in contrast to ahistorical and individualistic philosophical accounts. On the other hand, the account I am attempting to forge is distanced from McDowell's line of thought since mine aims to reply to the question about the relation between first and second nature in a more constructive – in contrast to a quietist – way. In addition, my account ends up being more sympathetic to, and reconciled with, the empirical sciences in general and the human[5] (social and behavioral) sciences in particular.

[3] The abbreviation MW stands for *Mind and World* (McDowell 1996).

[4] According to Leiter (2004: 2-3), most philosophers who react to Quinean-inspired naturalism are influenced by Wittgenstein. Thus, the two main camps with regard to the metaphysical worries over the relation between reason and nature are the naturalism of Quinean descendance and Wittgensteinian-inspired quietism. As also Richard Rorty (2010: 57) points out this division reflects "the deepest and most intractable difference of opinion within contemporary Anglophone philosophy".

[5] I am not following here the standard but quite obscure academic division between the social sciences and humanities. With the term 'human sciences' I refer to all empirical sciences that are concerned with human thinking and behaviour such as sociology, economics, social anthropology, cognitive science, etc.

More specifically, my line of argument will take the following course: in the following section I show how we can understand the normative problem as an explanatory problem or a problem of kinds of intelligibility. In the third section I present McDowell's liberal naturalist account as it was presented in MW. In the fourth section I present a popular anti-normativist argument which I call the 'transition problem' and argue how we should deal with it with the aid of the McDowellian work. In the fifth section I refer to McDowell's revisions of his initial perspective. Next, I argue that while the revisions made McDowell's account even more refined and science-informed, the latter does not respond with the same sensitivity to the lessons from the human sciences. Thus, I suggest that the human sciences offer an even more acute challenge to the conceptions of nature that aspire to be liberal naturalist. In the sixth section I present three available philosophical strategies to avoid scientific naturalism in light of the emergence of the human sciences. I show that the first two are problematic and I conclude that only McDowell's strategy is viable. In the seventh section I argue that despite its advantages, McDowell's quietist strategy is not strong enough against the threat of scientific naturalism which takes into account the emergence of human sciences. Thus, I provide a further argument in order to restrain the threat of scientific naturalism and sketch a liberal naturalist account. Finally, I discuss two main consequences of my liberal naturalist conception which diverges gravely from McDowell's view.

2. *The normative problem as explanatory problem*

In recent years the problem of the status of normativity has attracted numerous contributions in various areas of philosophical inquiry (Finlay 2010: 331-333). The source of epistemic norms (Kornblith 1993, Chan 2013), the normative dimension of meaning (Gibbard 2012), the motivational or binding force of practical reason (Parfit 2006, Broome 2007), the special status of social sciences (Risjord 1998; 2014) are only a few examples of coping with distinct philosophical problems which are related to the general problem of the status of normativity. I will focus on the normative problem from a very specific standpoint, i.e. I will treat the normative problem as a problem of explanatory genuineness. From this standpoint the crucial question is the following: should we take normative explanations to be a genuine kind of explanation or we should understand them as merely provisional forms of intelligibility which need to be reduced to the legitimate explanatory patterns of the empirical sciences?

2.1. Normative explanations and empirical-scientific explanations

Normative explanations make things intelligible by showing how they conform to norms. For instance, if someone asks why I believe q, I could reply that I believe p and I also believe that if p then q. In other words, I can explain my belief modification by subsuming it in the epistemic norm of *modus ponens*. Accordingly, if someone asks me why I help a stranger to find her way home, I can reply that helping her is an expression of solidarity and solidarity is something good. In other words, I can explain my action by subsuming it to a practical norm. Empirical-scientific explanations, on the other hand, make things intelligible in a quite different way: they show how they fit in the causal order described by the empirical sciences. These are the cases where I explain someone's belief or action by referring to various psychological or social factors that cause the belief or the action in question. Note that when I explain things in the one way or the other it is indifferent whether I refer to myself or to another person. I can use both kinds of explanation for either myself or for another person.[6] What matters is that normative and empirical-scientific explanations have a distinct logical form. Empirical-scientific explanations make things intelligible by placing them into the causal order (laws of nature, mechanisms, etc.) implied by each scientific discipline. In this sense, explanations of this sort are value-free. Normative explanations, on the contrary, make things intelligible by showing how they conform to values. Explaining a belief or an action in a genuine (as opposed to merely a seemingly) normative way is equivalent to justifying this action or belief. Thus, in this sense, genuine normative explanations are evaluative and can be equated to justifications.

2.2. Normative explanations and justifications

Against this, one could object, as Derek Parfit (2006: 43) does, that "[w]hen we claim that someone's state would be sufficient to explain his doing something, we do not seem to be claiming that this person accepts a justification for doing this thing". Indeed, this distinction should be taken into account in various philosophical debates, like the one about the motivational force of reason which Parfit discusses. However, from the standpoint I want to discuss the problem of normativity here, there is no need for stressing the distinction between normative explanations and justifications. Normative explanations,

[6] Akeel Bilgrami (2010: 25) suggests that "it may be sensible to replace the terms the 'first-person' point of view and the 'third-person' point of view with 'the agent's' or 'the engaged' point of view and 'the observer's' or 'the detached' point of view, respectively)". I think that he has a point because what is crucial here is the difference in the logical form of explanation and not whether I am explaining myself or another person.

like justifications, are acts of reasoning which show how a belief or an action conforms to a norm.

2.3. The normative dilemma

From this standpoint we can express the normative problem in terms of the following dilemma: either normative explanations are not genuine and thus they can and should altogether be reduced to the domain of empirical-scientific explanations (scientific naturalists' programmatic claim), or normative explanations are *sui generis* and therefore cannot be reduced to other kinds of explanations without losing valuable informational content about the world (normativists' claim).[7] Thus, in what follows, I will examine McDowell's distinction between first and second nature primarily as an attempt to rescue the genuineness of normative explanations. I will also attempt to provide an argument in favor of the ineliminability of normative concepts. Treating the normative problem as a problem of explanatory genuineness does not, of course, solve all the problems that are related to the status of normativity (the motivational force of reason, the source of epistemic norms, etc.). However, the ineliminability of normative explanations is the last line of defense of normativism, for no version of normativism is viable without presupposing that at least some normative explanations are genuine. In this sense, it is of crucial importance for every other aspect of the problem of normativity.

3. *Second Nature as a Reply to the Normative Problem*

McDowell in his seminal *MW* faces the normative problem as a problem concerning our intellectual freedom. The question is how can we understand the relation between sense experience and thought. The puzzlement arises because something merely natural, i.e., our sense organs and their function, and something which is traditionally conceived in a normative way, i.e., our concepts, should be conceived in a unified explanatory context. In other words, how it is that merely natural movements like the affection of our sense organs by sensory stimuli can affect movements within the space of reasons like the grounding of a belief.

[7] The central normativist thesis does not necessarily entails that normative facts correspond to an (ontologically) distinct substance. See for instance Donald Davidson's (1980) "anomalous monism", according to which, mental phenomena do possess causal powers but they are irreducible to physical events. Actually, the whole point of liberal naturalism is to preserve the normativist claim without appealing to any kind of ontological dualism.

3.1. Bald naturalism vs rampant platonism

In McDowell's view, this puzzlement is the result of a mistaken idea – widespread in modern and contemporary philosophy – which equates the realm of nature with the realm of natural law.[8] In other words, this idea identifies the ontological territory of nature exclusively with the subject matter of empirical-scientific knowledge and leads to an entrapment between two unsatisfactory choices. The first is "bald naturalism" that rejects the idea that the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*. Bald naturalism is just another label for what we have described as anti-normativism. The programmatic aspiration of this philosophical perspective is to eliminate the normative vocabulary by reconstructing the logical space of reasons "in terms that belong in the logical space of natural-scientific understanding" (MW: xxii). The elimination of the normative vocabulary is the result of the conviction that normative explanations are not genuine explanations and have to be reduced to empirical-scientific explanations. The other choice is "rampant platonism" (MW: 78), which preserves the position that the space of reasons is *sui generis* but at the cost of regarding it as something extra-natural. In short, rampant platonism is a form of supernaturalism. The conclusion is that as long as we equate nature with the object of empirical-scientific understanding, we are forced to decide what idea we should sacrifice: the genuineness (authenticity) of normative explanations, and hence, of the space of reasons, or its position within the realm of nature. However, rather than sacrifice one of those two ideas we should reject the equation between the realm of nature and the subject matter of empirical-scientific knowledge. This would enable us to suggest that human rationality is both natural and *sui generis*;[9] it belongs to the realm of nature but cannot be made intelligible with the use of the conceptual tools of the empirical sciences (MW: 88).

[8] In *MW* (1996: 71, fn 2), McDowell follows Russell and identifies the explanatory patterns of science with the formulation of natural laws. The reason McDowell rejects Rorty's term is that he believes that reasons can be causes. Later he changed his mind about this Russellian conception. I will come back to this in the fifth section.

[9] The programmatic goal of this argument is proclaimed in a single footnote at the beginning of *MW*. There McDowell repeats the famous Sellarsian quote: "In characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Sellars 1997: 76); he also adds: "In much of the rest of these lectures, I shall be concerned to cast doubt on Sellars's idea that placing something in the logical space of reasons is, as such, to be contrasted with giving an empirical description of it. But the theme of placing things in the space of reasons is of central importance for me" (5).

3.2. The Aristotelian notion of second nature

McDowell's way of expressing the idea that nature is not identified with the subject matter of scientific knowledge is to suggest that "nature includes second nature" (MW, xx). In other words, he exploits the Aristotelian notion of 'second nature'[10] in order to argue that people are born as mere animals and during the course of their maturation acquire the ability to respond to reasons. According to McDowell's Aristotle, what distinguishes human beings from mere animals is the rationality they acquire through their upbringing, through their *Bildung*.[11] Habit (the Greek ἕξις) and social training in general make individuals capable of acquiring conceptual powers and "[w]hen we acquire conceptual powers, our lives come to embrace not just coping with problems and exploiting opportunities, constituted as such by immediate biological imperatives, but exercising spontaneity, deciding what to think and do" (MW: 115). Therefore, "[o]ur nature is largely second nature, and our second nature is the way it is not just because of the potentialities we were born with, but also because of our upbringing, our *Bildung*" (MW: 84). The process of *Bildung* is characterized by a central element which is the acquisition of a natural language (MW: 125). Human beings are born as mere biological creatures and turn into thinkers and agents, that is, into rational animals, through their initiation of a language. The language does not serve only as a means for communication but also "as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what" (MW: 126). In this sense, rationality has an unambiguous collectivist and historical dimension. Rationality is not a feature of the isolated individual, say the transcendental subject. Rationality distinguishes human beings from mere animals and stems from the acquisition of a language which entails the acquisition of the historical wisdom of a community. This means that rational animals can be this kind of animal only as part of a tradition, viz. as part of a historically shaped community.

To sum up, the notion of second nature can help us create the proper logical space between scientism (bald naturalism), which makes normativity look like an illusion, and ontological dualism (rampant platonism), which makes our capacity to respond to reasons – our freedom[12] – "look like an occult power"

[10] McDowell (1996: 84) admits that the notion is all but explicit in Aristotle's works but he thinks that it can be reconstructed out of the Aristotelian thinking. For a brief history of the notion, see Gubeljic. et al. (2000).

[11] If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one's eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature. I cannot think of a good short English expression for this, but it is what figures in German philosophy as *Bildung* (MW: 84).

[12] McDowell follows Kant and generally the tradition of German idealism in identifying freedom with rationality: "When Kant describes the understanding as a faculty of spontaneity, that reflects his

(MW: 83). The rejection of the assumption that the realm of nature is co-extensive with the subject matter of empirical sciences and the division of nature into first and second leads to a liberal naturalist conception that places normative phenomena into the wider territory of nature. According to this conception, the normative explanations are not reducible to the empirical-scientific explanations, for the former are concerned with phenomena within the second nature while the latter with phenomena of the first nature.

4. *Second nature and the transition problem*

One obvious objection to this conception is that the emergence of the second nature looks mysterious and up to a point *ad hoc*: "If we take law-governedness [i.e. the kind of understanding which is proper to empirical sciences] and spontaneity [space of reasons] to be mutually exclusive, it is difficult to see how lawful goings-on may be transformed into something which is subsequently no longer law-governed" (Gubeljic et al. 2000: 46). This is a familiar anti-normativist objection which we could call the "transition problem" (Turner 2010: 19-20). As Stephen Turner (2010: 2) stresses, the normativists should answer the question whether there is some kind of transformation from causal to normative, and then they should tell a story about the transition from one state to the other. The question could also be formulated like this: In what sense is second nature *nature*? What unifies first and second nature and how are they connected (Halbig 2008)?

4.1. McDowell's reply to the transition problem

McDowell's (2000: 97) reply is twofold. On the one hand, he stresses that second nature is the actualization of the potentialities that already belong to human beings' first nature. *Bildung* only actualizes the potential abilities that are part of the normal human organism. "[…] The innate endowment [i.e. the first nature] of human beings must put limits on the shaping of second nature that are possible for them" (McDowell 1998a: 190). In this sense, first and second nature are parts of a 'larger nature', for the latter cannot transgress the limitations of the former. On the other hand, he points out that the notion of second nature serves only the purpose of rejecting the idea that rationality is a supernatural power; it is not part of an evolutionary story about emergent

view of the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it. In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom" (MW: 5). Kant, although, lacked a "pregnant notion of second nature and this kept him from forming a completely right conception of experience even if he 'c[a]me so close" (MW: 97).

qualities. Thus, what we "need [is] only the bare invocation of *Bildung* not […] a detailed story about how what happens in *Bildung* connects with phenomena characterisable in terms of conformity to natural law" (McDowell 2000: 99). The aim of the argument is not to provide a straight answer to the transformation problem. McDowell (2008: 220) claims "that the only unity [he] need[s], to answer the question why the first-natural and the second-natural are both modes of the natural, is captured by the contrast with the supernatural, the spooky, the occult".

McDowell's argumentation takes a distinctively quietist course when he is asked to give a detailed reply on the relation between first and second nature,[13] for he declines to provide a positive or constructive answer. His sole concern is to show that no philosophical problem arises if we "accept that a distinctively human life is characterized by a freedom that exempts its distinctive phenomena from natural-scientific intelligibility, without thereby being required to push it back into the region of darkness, the region supposedly occupied by phenomena that resist the light cast by natural science because they are occult or supernatural" (McDowell 2008: 217).

4.2. Explanatory levels in first nature: a reply to the anti-normativist argument from the transition problem

Regardless of McDowell's quietism, I would like to suggest that his argumentation makes clear at least one thing: the so-called "transition problem" is a problem only as long as the distinction between first and second nature is interpreted in traditional ontological terms. However, the distinction between first and second nature does not aim to install a separation between two different ontological territories. On the contrary, it aims to dissolve every putative ontological schism. The distinction concerns two different "modes of intelligibility" (McDowell 2009: 262), namely two different ways of making things intelligible in nature (MW: 78, fn 8).[14] It has nothing to do with a claim about

[13] Note, for example, the following quote: "I do not need a knockdown argument that spontaneity is sui generis. All I need is to show how taking spontaneity to be sui generis does not pose the philosophical threats it can seem to pose" (McDowell 2002: 270)

[14] Elsewhere he defines the difference in the styles of explanation. He suggests that propositional attitudes "figure in a kind of explanation that is *sui generis*" in contrast to a pattern of explanation in which we make things intelligible "by representing their coming into being as a particular instance of how things generally tend to happen" (McDowell 1998b: 332 and 328 respectively). Other times, though, he expresses himself in a way that may give the wrong impression that the distinction between first and second nature has an ontological dimension: "I am quite happy to suppose there are two kinds of happenings in nature: those that are subsumable under natural law, and those that are not subsumable under natural law, because freedom is operative in them" (McDowell 2006: 238). I suggest we should resist this wrong impression exactly for the reasons I am unfolding in the present section.

the emergence of some ontologically distinct qualities. Thus, the only question that remains to be answered is whether the mode of intelligibility (or the mode of explanation) which is proper to second nature is a genuine one. The answer to this question does not necessarily involve any sort of evolutionary story concerning the transition from the non-normative to the normative state.

One way to elucidate this thought is to leave aside, for a moment, the second nature and the normative facts and take a closer look at the realm of first nature. In this realm, sciences make things intelligible by employing significantly different modes of explanation so that the same phenomenon can be cognitively captured in different scientific ways. For instance, physics, chemistry, and biology can treat the same phenomenon in different ways by explaining different aspects of it. A single human brain, for example, could be a system of electrons, protons, and neutrons according to a particle physicist; a system of chemical compounds that contains carbon (organic compounds) according to a chemist; a system of neurons for a biologist, or the centre of the nervous system for an anatomist. Each specialist cuts off a specific aspect of the same piece of reality and treats it by employing the conceptual tools proper to their domain.[15] What we get as a result are different answers to different questions which are based on significantly different patterns of explanation. In short, "Science explains the world at more than one 'level'" (Gibbard 2012: 2). In these cases, no one demands that, for instance, the biologist first tell an evolutionary story about how something biological emerges from something non-biological and then provide a biological explanation of a phenomenon. The problem for the biologist is whether her conceptual system can adequately capture the phenomena she studies, which is true of all the other disciplines as well.

Thus, the transition problem, if someone takes it to be a problem, may also concern the different scientific perspectives within the domain of first nature. It is not exclusively a problem of the emergence of the normative. The transition becomes problematic only from the standpoint which takes for granted that different modes of intelligibility should correspond to different ontological territories. This standpoint takes for granted that the existence of two kinds of intelligibility should correspond to two distinct ontological territories of

[15] One could object that I take for granted two ideas that I shouldn't without further ado: a) that all these scientists refer to the one and same reality and b) that the concepts of chemistry, biology and anatomy cannot be reduced to the conceptual system of physics. I am not ignorant of neither the radical idealist position that would reject the first idea nor the reductionist-physicalist one that would reject the second. However, this is not the place to argue against these two extremes. Therefore, I will take for granted the minimal realist position (i.e. the above-mentioned scientists refer to the same reality) and the minimal anti-reductionist position (the conceptual system of physics is not the only conceptual system that can cognitively capture objective reality).

the cosmos. Then the misleading question is raised: How does one produce the other? In this case, how does second nature emerge from the first? But the point of the argument for second nature is to exorcise the idea that different modes of intelligibility correspond to different ontological realms. Just as in the example above, the different ways available for scientifically treating a phenomenon do not entail the ontological diversity of this very phenomenon. There is no need to assume that, for example, the descriptions of physics and the descriptions of biology correspond to different ontological territories in order to accept that physics and biology employ different modes of explanation. The diversity of the explanatory patterns of the sciences can teach us that different modes of intelligibility can unproblematically be applied to the same ontological region. In fact, the anti-normativist demand for giving an account of the transition implicitly entails that there can be only one kind of intelligibility. If one *should* explain the transition from first to second nature that would mean that one *could* make both first and second nature intelligible by employing solely one explanatory pattern. This thought presupposes one ultimate way of making things intelligible. But in this case the anti-normativist begs the question. For as I already said, the argument in favor of second nature is an argument that suggests that there can be more than one kind of intelligibility of nature. Therefore, McDowell is correct in saying that he doesn't need "a detailed story about how what happens in *Bildung* connects with phenomena characterisable in terms of conformity to natural law".

McDowell's response to the anti-normativist argument from the "transition problem" makes clear a few things about the distinction between first and second nature: 1) The distinction is not ontological at all. It refers to two different ways of making things in nature intelligible, that is, two different kinds of explanation (normative and empirical-scientific). 2) Both kinds of intelligibility refer to one ontological territory, that is, nature. 3) There is no philosophical need for presenting a philosophical evolutionary story in order to explicate how phenomena explained normatively emerged from phenomena explained scientifically. I attempted to make this position stronger by examining the relation between different levels of explanation within the general framework of empirical-scientific understanding.

5. *Science-informed philosophy*

The questions which arise now are these: can the law-governedness be the essential feature of the mode of intelligibility which is proper to first nature and contrasts the kind of intelligibility which is proper to the normative facts? Is second nature the necessary and sufficient condition of the kind of intelli-

gibility that is proper to reason? As we will see, McDowell's post-*MW* reply is negative to both questions.

In *MW* (109) McDowell suggests that the scientific revolution of the 17th century brought about the conception of nature as the realm of law, which was not available in the ancient and medieval era. Furthermore, he stresses that defending the genuineness of the kind of intelligibility which is proper to the space of reasons does not imply a rejection of the conception of nature as the realm of law. In short, he attempts to adjust his philosophical perspective to the evolution of the sciences and especially to the conceptual breakthrough that took place during the scientific revolution. His conception of nature takes into serious consideration the developments of empirical sciences and in this sense, he provides a science-informed philosophical outlook.

5.1. Second nature and biology

The fact that McDowell's philosophy is or attempts to be science-informed is shown also in his later writings where he acknowledges that in *MW* he works "with an unsatisfactorily monolithic conception of what is to be contrasted with the distinctive kind of intelligibility for which responsiveness to reasons constitutes the framework" (McDowell 2000: 98). The main problem with this monolithic Russellian[16] conception is that it suits only to a small part of the natural sciences, that is, mathematical physics. It does not do justice to the explanatory patterns of other sciences and especially biology which is more relevant to functions and processes that are related to human beings (McDowell 2008: 220). Furthermore, when the discussion comes to biology it is revealed that non-human biological creatures – like a trained dog – can and do have a second nature (McDowell 2000: 99; 2006: 236; 2008: 220). Thus, the set of all second-natural phenomena is not coextensive with the set of phenomena that should be made intelligible by employing the kind of intelligibility which is proper to the space of reasons. For instance, the phenomena of Pavlovian conditioning are second-natural phenomena (related both to humans and to other animals) but they do not require an intelligibility of the space of reasons variety. In short, what needs to be revised in *MW*-conception of nature is a) the idea that first nature can be equated to the realm of law; and b) that all second-natural phenomena could be understood by employing the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason.

[16] This conception about scientific explanation is central to the so-called 'received view' in the philosophy of science and it finds its paradigmatic form in Hempel's and Oppenheim's (1948) Deductive-Nomological model. For a historical presentation on the issue of scientific explanation, see Cartwright (2004).

McDowell revises his account by taking into consideration a richer conception of natural sciences which does not include solely mathematical physics and the explanation that is based on law-governedness. Bringing biology into his philosophical picture helps him realize that second nature is not a distinctive feature of human beings and that second nature is only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for rationality. The acquisition of rationality presupposes the second nature, but the second-natural phenomena does not necessarily entail the existence of rationality. There are second-natural phenomena that require a kind of intelligibility which is not substantially different from the intelligibility required to capture the first-natural phenomena (McDowell 2008: 220). Only a subset of the second-natural phenomena is made intelligible by the placement to the space of reasons.

This revision makes McDowell's account more refined and even more science-informed. It incorporates a richer and more accurate conception of the explanatory patterns that the natural sciences employ, but it does not change its principal thought: the kind of intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons is *sui generis*, that is, "beyond the reach of the natural-scientific understanding" (McDowell 2008: 217). And still it is concerned with phenomena that belong to nature: they are not spooky, occult or supernatural. In the *MW*-version of the account these phenomena were identified with the second-natural phenomena whereas in the later version they are only are identified with a subset of the second-natural phenomena.

5.2. The naturalistic threat of human sciences

So far, so good--it seems that taking lessons from the sciences does not pose any threat to the liberal naturalist account of McDowell. However, I would like to argue that McDowell's account stops taking into consideration the lessons from the empirical sciences exactly at the point where the threat is less acute, although it is not entitled to stop at this 'convenient' point. My question is this: what happens if after biology we try to insert human sciences into our philosophical image? Biology clearly[17] leaves room in the set of second-natural phenomena for a kind of intelligibility that is not proper to the biological explanatory patterns. If we add human sciences in our picture though, no such room is left. The subject matter of the human sciences covers the entire range of human actions and beliefs. Besides the part of the second-natural phenomena that are cognitively captured by biology,[18] no other section of second nature

[17] Clearly for everyone who is not some kind of radical biological reductionist.

[18] These by definition don't belong to what can be made intelligible by placement in the space of reasons.

can – at least in principle – be ruled out by the reach of human-scientific understanding. It seems that the emergence of human sciences brings with them a much more acute philosophical anxiety than this one of natural sciences in directing straight forward to threaten the autonomy of the space of reasons, by trying to make human's second nature fully intelligible through modes of explanation which are alien to the placement in the space of reasons.[19] Bald or neo-Humean (McDowell 1998) naturalists could argue that the scientific revolution and the corresponding emergence of mathematical physics saved us from the ancient and medieval superstition that first nature is the realm of final ends; furthermore, the emergence of biology and modern medicine exempted a part of the second nature from the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason; and now the human sciences exempted the rest of second nature from this peculiar or supposedly *sui generis* kind of understanding. The more we examine reality the more we realize that the only legitimate kind of intelligibility is the perspective of empirical science. After all, the scientistic naturalist could conclude, the only science-informed philosophy is this kind of naturalism which equates nature with the subject matter of the empirical sciences.

In short, if the notion of second nature is not beyond the reach of empirical-scientific explanations, what is the argument against the bald naturalization of every single aspect of human acting and thinking? Second nature as introduced by McDowell, in order to demarcate the phenomena which should be made intelligible by placing them into the space of reasons. If part of the second-natural phenomena can be reached by biological understanding, what prevents us from thinking that the rest of them can be reached by human-scientific understanding?

6. *Normativist strategies for dealing with human sciences*

In general, the normativist strategies against the bald naturalist threat posed by the emergence of human sciences can take three different routes. The first choice is to argue that human science does not exclude normative explanations and hence they do not employ the same explanatory patterns as the natural sciences. I will call this choice 'hermeneutic conception of human sciences'. The second choice is to provide a demarcation criterion for singling out the cases which should be made intelligible by empirical-scientific understanding and the cases which should be made intelligible by placing them in the space of reasons. I will call this choice 'traditional demarcationism'. The third choice is to argue that while there is no pre-existing criterion for demarcating cases of

[19] By placing things into the "ordinary stream of explanation" (Turner 2010: 11).

genuine expression of rationality, the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason is ineliminable. I will call this choice 'normative fallibilism'. In the rest of the present section I will attempt to show why the first two options are not viable and why we should endorse the third.

6.1. The hermeneutic conception of human science

One way to neutralize the bald naturalist threat that comes with the human sciences is to argue that the latter employ by definition the kind of intelligibility that is proper to reason. This line of thought has its roots in the Hermeneutic tradition of the 19th century German-speaking world which took a mature form in Wilhelm Dilthey's work (Harrington 2001: 43) but is also central to a particular trend in contemporary philosophy of social sciences (see Risjord 1998: 224, Babich 2017). Hermeneutics imply a division between *Naturwissenschaften* (sciences of nature) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (sciences of spirit) not only on the level of the scientific object but also on the level of the characteristic modes of explanation. The difference is often expressed by using another two German terms: Sciences of nature "involve *Erklären* (explanation by way of laws) while [sciences of spirit] involve *Verstehen* (hermeneutic understanding from the "inside")" (Macarthur 2010: 134). This means that human sciences make things intelligible by employing some kind of "empathetic understanding" (Stueber 2012), that is, by taking into consideration the reasons that brought about a specific situation. This is the *sui generis* style of understanding things in the meaningful territory of human actions and beliefs. Thus, according to this conception, the emergence of human sciences does not pose a naturalist threat at all. Normative explanations are found at the very heart of human-scientific understanding and hence the latter is not a threat for the former.

However, this choice suffers two major problems. First, the evolution of the human and social sciences does not seem to vindicate this sharp distinction between natural and human sciences. The unity of natural and human sciences can be revealed by appealing to the differences within the two categories: "[t]here is as much reason to think that there are significant differences *within* the category of natural science, and *within* the category of human science, as there are *between* the natural and the human sciences. This vitally important point is gradually gaining credence" (Macarthur 2010: 134, emphasis in original). The rejection of the monolithic nomological model of natural-scientific explanation created a wider conception about scientific explanations. Within this wider conception there is no sharp distinction between the explanatory patterns employed by the natural and the human sciences. From the standpoint of this wider conception we can point out, for instance, that the "[t]he types

of knowledge gained of the social world are much like the types of knowledge we can claim of the biological world" (Mitchell 2009: 131). Second and most important for my argumentation, the hermeneutic choice does not avoid the philosophical problem of the relation between nature and reason, it just pushes it into another philosophical territory. Instead of explaining why normative explanations are genuine and cannot be altogether reduced to the empirical explanations provided by the human sciences, the normativist has to explain why normative explanations within the domain of human sciences are genuine and cannot be reduced to explanations of another type. The philosophical need for providing an argument against the eliminability of normative explanations remains.

6.2. Traditional demarcationism

The second option accepts that human sciences do not provide normative explanations and that they may pose a naturalistic threat for the philosophical image of our intellectual and practical freedom. However, this option presupposes that the genuine expression of rationality cannot be made intelligible by empirical sciences and proposes a criterion (or a set of criteria) for demarcating between cases of genuine expression of rationality and other cases. This option is characteristic of a Kantian line of thought. This is, for instance, the position that Sebastian Rödl (2007) and Christine Korsgaard (1996; 2009) have recently defended.

Rödl follows Kant in considering that the idea of freedom is the idea of a certain kind of determination, namely a certain kind of causality: a causality of thought. He also follows the principal thought of German idealism that reason, self-consciousness, and freedom are one (Rödl 2007: 105). Thus, expressions of freedom are also expressions of rationality and can be understood only by employing the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason. "Being free is being subject to a causality of thought and, hence, is placing oneself under an order of reason" (Rödl 2007: 112). As Kant teaches, free will is autonomous in being subject to the laws that are its own, which are the laws of reason. According to Rödl, this does not mean, as some contemporary interpretations[20] of Kant suggest, that free will legislates lawlessly the laws that are its own, which would be a paradox. It means that 'one's own' [does] not signify the origin of the law. It […] signify its logical form, the kind of law that it is' (Rödl 2007: 117). The logical form of a law of autonomy is determined in distinction to the logical form of a law of heteronomy: while "a law of autonomy explains acts that exemplify it by the nature of the subject of this act and by it alone"

[20] See Pinkard (2002) and Pippin (2008).

(Rödl 2007: 119), "a law of heteronomy is one according to which one thing is determined to act by another thing" (Rödl 2007: 118). Thus, in this view, we can demarcate the cases of genuine expression of rationality by appealing to the logical form of the law that explains what is going on in every case.

Korsgaard proceeds in a different but analogous way, appealing directly to the Kantian imperatives (both hypothetical and categorical) as the constitutive principles of an intentional action (Korsgaard 2009: 92), that is, as the constitutive principles of the expression of rationality at the level of action. According to Korsgaard, the reflective structure of the human mind and the consequent "reflective distance from our impulses makes it both possible and necessary to decide which ones we will act on: it forces us to act for reasons" (Korsgaard 1996: 113). When we succeed in acting according to the categorical imperative, we can consider ourselves autonomous and placed in the realm of normativity. The categorical imperative governs our (free) actions through the mediation of the various practical identities we endorse (Korsgaard 1996: 101). The details of Korsgaard's account are not the point here. The point is the general philosophical aspiration which is common to Rödl's account and which seeks the demarcation between cases of genuine expression of rationality and cases of mere causal events.

This demarcatonist option though is vulnerable to the sceptical anti-normativist arguments. Anti-normativists like Turner take into consideration the diversity of normative contexts in the world and in history in order to cast doubt on the genuineness of the normative explanations. The argument goes as follows: since "most of the people in history and in the present were and are living in normative error" (Turner 2010: 181), the appeal to some binding rules of reason is at stake. The argument shares the structure of the pessimistic meta-induction against scientific realism. In this well-known argument it is recalled that most of the scientific theories that were once successful in the past are now considered false: "Therefore, the pessimist concludes, current successful theories will turn out to be false as well" (Mizrahi 2013: 3210). Correspondingly, Turner concludes that the appeal to some genuine normative force that obliges human beings and the relevant demarcation of the cases of authentic expression of rationality is chimerical, since most people have lived in normative error. The error is revealed since we are in a position to explain people's actions and beliefs not by appealing to the truth or goodness of their beliefs and actions, respectively, but by appealing to various biological, psychological, or sociological causal factors. People in history change their minds about what counts as true or good, and this jeopardizes the normativist effort to demarcate between genuine expressions of rationality and mere causal events. In short, since every proposed normative explanation has been reduced

to various empirical-scientific explanations we have good reasons to believe that also in the future the normative explanations are going to be reduced to scientific explanations. Therefore, as the history of human thought shows, no demarcation criterion is able to single out the cases of genuine expression of rationality and consequently to secure the ineliminability of the domain of normative explanations.

6.3. Normative fallibilism

Despite its plausibility, we have to note that the sceptical argument from the normative error threatens only some versions of normativism, and not normativism *per se*. The argument is valid only against the versions of normativism which suggest that the genuine expressions of rationality can be demarcated infallibly. Other versions of normativism, like McDowell's liberal naturalism, are not threatened by the argument from normative error. In contrast to a Kantian line of thought, McDowell does not seek for a demarcation criterion for singling out the cases of genuine expression of rationality, i.e. the genuine cases of autonomy. In this sense, his account is not vulnerable to the skeptical argument from normative error. He stresses that while autonomy is a capacity[21] which can fail, this does not prove that it doesn't exist at all. Sometimes a rational subject acts or thinks not by responding to genuine reasons but only to what seems to it to be a reason. This point is well taken by the anti-normativist argument from the normative error. And, of course, this entails that we need to distinguish between two kinds of facts: a) the genuinely normative facts and b) the seemingly normative facts. But on this issue "there is no criterion, if by that we mean some general formula that it might be possible to apply to mark off genuine reasons from impostors", on the contrary

> the only thing one can do is to ask oneself whether it coheres with one's view of other regions of the space of reasons, which one must simply trust for the duration of one's reflection about the region that is under reflective scrutiny. In a familiar image, one's possibilities for reflection are those of Neurath's mariner, repairing his vessel, or at least inspecting it for seaworthiness, while it is afloat. One can be confident only that if one has the space of reasons in view at all one cannot be completely wrong about it' (McDowell 2010: 12).

Even if we don't agree with McDowell that this is "the only thing one can do", we can agree that it is not necessary to be committed to the formulation of an infallible criterion for demarcating the genuinely from the seemingly

[21] The capacity "to subject oneself to the normative force of reasons" (McDowell 2010: 9).

normative facts in order to accept that genuinely normative facts exist. The sceptical argument from the normative error is only effective against the normativist accounts which aim to provide a demarcation criterion for singling out the cases of authentic expression of rationality.

Normative foundationalism (i.e. the determination of an infallible criterion for demarcating the cases that need to be explained normatively) and normative scepticism (i.e. the rejection of the genuineness of the normative explanation on the basis of their fallibility) are not our only options. We can argue that human beings do possess the capacity to respond to reasons and therefore to determine themselves, even if sometimes they fail to do that. Hence, even if we acknowledge that each and every normative explanation can be reduced to an empirical-scientific explanation, we can reject the idea that the domain of the normative explanations is altogether eliminable. Another way to express the middle way between normative foundationalism and normative scepticism is to say "that the epistemology of values or duties is Neurathian, meaning that there is no one-way, axiomatic structure to such normative reasonings" (Blackburn 2001: 150). This is the perspective I call 'normative fallibilism' and for the reasons I attempted to show is the only viable strategy for defending a normativist perspective.

7. *Reduction and Eliminability: a constructive reply to scientific naturalism.*

Let me now recapitulate the philosophical image that I have already sketched by following some central tenets of McDowell's liberal naturalism. 1) The notion of second nature leaves room for normative explanations without appealing to any kind of supernatural entities, cognitive powers, or phenomena. 2) Second-natural phenomena are not co-extensive with phenomena explained normatively, for second-natural phenomena also includes phenomena that need to be explained by biology and human sciences. 3) There is no *a priori* criterion for demarcating second-natural phenomena which should be explained normatively and second-natural phenomena which should be made intelligible by empirical-scientific understanding.

At this point the scientific naturalist can insist: maybe normative fallibilism is a less vulnerable position than traditional demarcationism but it does not provide any argument in favor of the idea that some phenomena in nature rest outside the reach of the empirical-scientific understanding and hence that they should be made intelligible by exclusively employing normative explanations. Given the argumentation I have already provided, we cannot defend the genuineness of normative explanations by appealing solely to the notion of second

nature and we also cannot do that by proposing a demarcation criterion for singling out the case of genuine expression of rationality. If we further rule out the obsolete choice of the hermeneutic division between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, then our defence against scientific naturalism looks weak. McDowell's quietist strategy consists in repeating that no philosophical worries arise if we place rationality into the realm of nature and that the naturalism of natural science should not be taken as a default position. The default view should be that "human beings are unique among living things – *outside the reach* of the sort of understanding achievable by a scientific biology – in virtue of the freedom that belongs with our responsiveness to reasons as such, […] unless it can be shown to be wrong" (McDowell 2006: 237, emphasis is mine). But taking into account the human sciences, I think, makes McDowell's "naturalism of second nature" more vulnerable to the bald naturalistic threats and his quietist strategy less convincing. I don't see why it is self-evident that human beings are unique among living things. In this sense, I can't see how it can be convincing that there is something outside the reach of understanding which is proper to the empirical sciences.

7.1. Reducibility and eliminability

It is exactly at this point where my argumentation diverges gravely from McDowell's defence of normativism, for in my view there is need for a constructive (as opposed to quietist) argument against the naturalist threat of eliminating the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason. I think that this argument can be found in distinguishing between the concept of explanatory reducibility and the concept of the eliminability of the domain of normative explanations. I suggest that scientific naturalism seems plausible only because we think that the former notion necessarily entails the latter and I want to provide an argument against this idea.

Let me start by giving an example. Let's suppose that someone, say X, believes in creationism and also, she does the housekeeping. Thus, 'X believes in creationism' is an example of a belief and 'X does the housekeeping' is an example of an intentional action, both of which need to be explained. If X is asked why she believes in creationism and why she does the housekeeping, she can give a normative explanation of both the belief and the action. She can say, for instance, that the theory of evolution has many gaps and thus it is more plausible to think that we have been created by God. Also, she can say that she does the housekeeping because she is a woman and this is what women do. Women do the housekeeping and men provide financially for the family. Those are examples of normative explanations of the above-mentioned belief and intentional action. Believing in creationism is explained by conforming

to the epistemic norms of consistency and theoretical completeness while doing the housekeeping is explained by conforming to the practical norm of the gender-based division of labor. Consider now the case where the normative explanations in question are reduced to empirical-scientific explanations. For instance, a sociologist can assert that X believes in creationism because she grew up in a community which attempts to preserve its cohesion through religion. Correspondingly, a psychologist may assert that X has this gender-based behavior because of her dominating father figure. These are the paradigmatic cases for scientific naturalists. They argue that since the human sciences have managed to reduce some of the normative explanations to empirical-scientific explanations there is nothing that cannot be reduced to the empirical-scientific understanding. In other words, they assume that since at least some of the normative explanations have been proved mistaken and reduced to scientific explanations, then gradually all normative explanations are going to be reduced to scientific explanations. Thus, they assume that the reducibility of normative explanations entails the eliminability of normative vocabulary. But I think that this entailment is mistaken.

First of all, in order to reduce the normative explanations to the scientific explanations we need the normative vocabulary at our disposal. Reducing X's normative explanations about believing in creationism to the sociological explanation about her community we have to think that it is correct that her community sought for cohesion through religion, and that this situation caused her beliefin creationism. In an analogous way, reducing X's normative explanation about gender roles to the psychological explanation involving her father figure we have to think that it is true that the dominating father figure is causally connected with the sexist conception about the division of labour. But thinking that the psychological or the sociological explanations are true presupposes that they conform to some kind of epistemic norms. Therefore, the idea that we can eliminate the normative vocabulary is incoherent. The point here is that the reduction of the explanations which are proper to the space of reasons to something alien to them is always the work of reason, for each instantiation of reduction also consists of justifying and being able to justify this very act of reduction. Thus, the image of the reduction of the normative explanations which gradually leads to the elimination of the normative vocabulary is misleading.

7.2. God's point of view

What makes this image plausible relies on the presumption that the cognitive act of the reduction is undertaken from a standpoint external to the bearer of actions or beliefs of which normative explanations have been reduced to scientific ones. In one sense, it presupposes that the object of reduction is neces-

sarily different from the subject of reduction. In our examples, it presupposes that X never embraces the content of the explanatory reduction. But again, this presumption is misleading. Of course, sometimes this turns out to be the case. For instance, I can take advantage of my knowledge of empirical sociology and psychology and arrive at the conclusion that X's beliefs and actions are the result of a specific social milieu and a particular psychological condition. And maybe X never draws this conclusion herself. In this case, I don't have to take into account X's space of reasons, and consequently X's space of reasons vanishes from my picture. However, whether or not the actual person X has access to the content of the scientific explanation is a mere contingency which has no philosophical interest. What matters from a philosophical point of view is that the act of reduction is at X's disposal. This means that the paradigmatic case for our philosophical conception of the issue should not be when someone other than X realizes that X believes or does something because of some sociological or psychological factors but when X herself realizes that. In this latter case, X's space of reasons does not disappear from our philosophical picture, it is just modified. After the realization (i.e. after embracing the content of reduction), X will still adopt a normative attitude about both the roots of human life and the division of labor, and she will do so by subsuming herself to the dictates of her reason. The difference is that now her space of reasons is modified. And it is not simply modified; it is *enriched* in an important sense. If the acts of reduction are correct, X's new space of reasons contains a few more justifications that prevent her from making a mistake. During her reflective scrutiny about what is a reason for believing something or acting in a particular way, taking into consideration the sociological or the psychological knowledge about her condition can prevent X from believing uncritically that we are God's creatures or that women are supposed to do the housekeeping.

Therefore, the reduction of a normative explanation to a scientific explanation is not an episode toward the gradual shrinking of the space of reasons, but an episode toward its expansion. Equating reduction with elimination presupposes that the subject of reduction is necessarily different from the object of reduction, and this entails that there is something like a super-reason that accomplishes the task of reduction, a super-reason that is not and could not be affected by this very cognitive act of reduction. Envisaging the space of reasons as shrinking after every act of reduction requires the putative standpoint of a reason that is not affected by this cognitive act. However, this standpoint would be something like God's point of view: an external vantage point overarching thought and world. Only from this standpoint can the normative vocabulary be considered eliminable. But the presupposition of this sort of vantage point is very problematic, especially for accounts which aim to be naturalistic.

7.3. Genuine normative explanations and the scope of empirical-scientific understanding

Hence, in one very essential sense, scientific explanations are constitutive for our freedom rather than a threat to it. They help us become freer. They prevent us from normative error and consequently from being mere slaves of the various causal goings-on. Scientific explanations can decisively contribute to the reflective scrutiny which determines what is a genuine reason for a belief or action and what is merely an impostor. In each case empirical-scientific understanding can be part of the process of determining what is a genuine (as opposed to seemingly) normative explanation. We can consider as genuine the explanations which resist their plausible reduction to empirical-scientific understanding. Of course, our estimation of which normative explanations resist such a reduction is clearly fallible and depends on various historical factors (the maturity of empirical-scientific understanding, the political institution of our society, etc.). But the concept of resistance to the reduction to empirical-scientific explanations is the only concept we need in order to arrive at the concept of the genuine normative explanation.

By saying that the concept of the genuine normative explanation needs only the concept of resistance to the reduction to the empirical-scientific understanding I imply that the concept of the genuine normative explanation does not presuppose any sort of "super-added normative element that cannot be accounted for naturalistically or by social science", nor does it entail that the genuineness "of the reasons, have some sort of explanatory force beyond the mere 'natural' fact of people's beliefs and desires" (Turner 2016: 10 and 9 respectively). We can admit that nothing is beyond, outside, or above the reach of empirical-scientific understanding without endorsing any version of anti-normativism. When we say that a phenomenon is genuinely normatively explained we do not have to mean that the phenomenon is beyond the reach of empirical-scientific understanding. Take, for instance, the case that I believe that there is a computer in front of me. I can normatively explain the belief 'there is a computer in front me' by showing how it is conformed to an epistemic norm, say the norm that dictates to 'endorse the impression you perceive under normal lighting conditions'. This phenomenon is not beyond the reach of biology, psychology, sociology, or physics. Several things can be said about light's wavelength, my retina, my psychological condition, or the social milieu of my upbringing. All are certainly connected with my belief that there is a computer in front of me. But if I have followed the epistemic rules correctly and there is indeed a computer in front of me then my belief that there is a computer in front of me cannot be explained without showing how this belief conforms to some epistemic rules. That is a genuine normative explanation.

If this is the case, we don't need to adopt the idea that there is a peculiar super-added normative element in the phenomena which needs to be explained normatively, and we don't need to admit that there is something beyond the reach of empirical-scientific understanding in order to defend normativism. The conceptual distinction between the reducibility and the eliminability of the normative explanations may prevent us from seeking something that is outside the reach of scientific understanding. I think that this sort of talk is misleading and even suspect of supernaturalism. Something that is beyond empirical-scientific understanding as such, and by that we should include both present and future[22] sciences, looks horrifyingly indistinguishable from something that is beyond nature itself. By disassociating the concept of explanatory reducibility from the concept of the eliminability of normativity there is no need to invoke something beyond the reach of empirical-scientific understanding. We can appeal to just another equally legitimate way of making a phenomenon intelligible. Maybe even the use of the word 'space' in the famous Sellarsian terminology of 'space of reason' is not the more appropriate term, for it creates a picture of a bounded territory which is exactly outside or beyond another territory which is occupied by empirical-scientific understanding. Maybe the vocabulary of relation could be more instructive here. Freedom consists in a special relation of rational subjects with themselves and with others. The more those subjects realize the causal goings-on that govern these relations the more the subjects find themselves in the normative realm of freedom.[23] This terminology can avoid the misleading spatial metaphor about normativity.

8. *Integrating first and second nature*

My main argument is that by rejecting the idea that explanatory reducibility entails the eliminability of the domain of normative explanations, we can create the suitable logical space between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism. The interchange between the two modes of intelligibility – one proper to reason and the other proper to mere causal events – protect us from either depicting our rationality as an occult power or presenting it as

[22] This aspect of the problem has been revealed by the famous Hempel's dilemma. See a variation of it which is closer to my discussion in Macdonald 2008.

[23] This sort of vocabulary is absolutely related to German idealism and especially to Hegel. As Pippin (2008: 4) stresses, Hegel's perspective "has two basic components: that for Hegel freedom consists in being in a certain reflective and deliberative relation to oneself (which he describes as being able to give my inclinations and incentives a "rational form"), which itself is possible, so it is argued, only if one is also already in certain (ultimately institutional, norm-governed) relations to others, if one is a participant in certain practices".

an illusion, and leads us to a proper liberal naturalist perspective. The perspective I am proposing is naturalistic insofar as it leaves nothing 'beyond the reach' of scientific understanding and presents scientific explanations as constitutive of the space of reasons. It is also liberal in the sense that it rejects the eliminability of normative vocabulary. Rationality is not a mysterious power outside of nature but a capacity to take control of our lives by understanding how the causal goings-on work, that is, by gradually knowing more about the cases in which we do not have control of our lives. Furthermore, it is impossible to get rid of the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason without appealing to the extremely questionable idea of God's point of view. Therefore, we can say that the essential feature of second nature – or more correctly of the part of second nature that is made intelligible normatively – is human ability to grasp cognitively the causal goings-on that is part of both first and second nature. In this sense, there is absolutely no philosophical gap between first and second nature and there is absolutely no philosophical need to explain how causal goings-on may be transformed into something which is subsequently no longer causally ordered. Second nature is the purely natural ability to adjust our beliefs and actions to the knowledge of the causal-goings on that dictates our lives.

The perspective I have tried to defend has two main philosophical consequences that are not entailed, at least immediately, by McDowell's liberal naturalist account. The first is that freedom is a concept that allows for degrees (Pippin 2008). The second is that the layout of the space of reasons is historically changeable. In what follows, I can give only a sketchy account of these two consequences.

8.1. The degrees of freedom

If the expressions of our freedom are identified with the expressions of our rationality and if the expressions of rationality are proportional to our knowledge of the causal order that dictates our lives, it follows that we can only determine various degrees of freedom instead of absolute states of freedom. These various degrees of freedom depend on our knowledge of the causal goings-on that affect us. The more we know the various physical, biological, psychological, or sociological factors that affect our lives the more we can endorse beliefs and undertake actions of which endorsement or undertaking cannot be explained by appealing to empirical-scientific explanation and hence, can be considered as an expression of our rationality and consequently of our freedom. This is largely the philosophical 'cost' we have to pay for rejecting the idea that we can formulate an infallible criterion for demarcating the cases of genuine expressions of rationality and adopting

normative fallibilism. Only if such a criterion were feasible could we refer to the expression of rationality and hence to our freedom as an "'either you have it or you don't' capacity" (Pippin 2018: 214).

8.2. Reason's historicity

The second consequence of the conception I have attempted to defend, which is closely related to the first, is that the content of reason or in McDowell's (2018) terms the layout of the space of reasons is historically changeable. If I am correct, an indispensable part of the reflective scrutiny which determines what is a genuine reason (as opposed to an impostor) is the examination of what normative explanations can be reduced to empirical-scientific ones. The acts of reduction modify (enrich) our conception of what is a reason for what. In this sense, the empirical-scientific knowledge concerning the biological, psychological, or sociological factors that affect our beliefs and actions shapes drastically the layout of the space of reasons. These acts of reduction are historically determined, for they are subject to the maturity of the empirical-scientific understanding and to the various institutions that can make empirical-scientific knowledge available to people. Therefore, the layout of the space of reasons is also historically determined.

McDowell, in a recent debate with Pippin, rejects explicitly this idea both as a plausible interpretation of Hegel's philosophy and as truth. Commenting on a specific example, the rejection of the gender-based division of labor after the 1970's, Pippin (2018: 217) argues that it doesn't seem plausible that we rejected this kind of division just because we suddenly "had our eyes wider opened". Pippin's point is that we should not think that the moral truth about the wrongness of gender-based division of labor was always there and we just discovered it at some historical point. We have to think that the layout of the space of reasons has historically changed. On the contrary, McDowell (2018: 254) argues that it would be absurd to consider that the layout of the space of reasons has changed because this would mean that before the 1970's there was a moral basis in this kind of division of labor. "It [just] used to be thought that there was a moral basis". McDowell's point is that we can't think that something used to be morally (or epistemically, I could add) right and now is morally (or epistemically) wrong. We have to think that up to a point we used to believe that it is right and then we discovered that it is wrong.

I think that McDowell's view on this particular issue is mistaken, for he conflates the historical changeability of the layout of the space of reasons with the changeability of the truth-value or the moral-value of epistemic or moral judgements. In short, McDowell believes that if we accept that the layout of the space of reasons is changeable, we are led to the idea that the moral-value

or the truth-value of some judgements can historically change from right to wrong and *vice versa*. And he believes that this idea is incoherent. But I would like to argue that the idea of the historicity of reason has no such implications. It is not the case, for instance, that slavery was indeed morally right and then became morally wrong or that it used to be true that the aether exists but now it is not true. The reason we have to accept the historical changeability of the layout of the space of reasons is not that there can be a genuine change in the truth-value or the moral-value of some judgements. The reason is that some judgements, up to a historical point, are not even candidates for truth-value or moral-value.[24] In Pippin's and McDowell's example, we don't have to think that the gender-based division of labor was morally right before the 1970's and became morally wrong since then. We just have to think that the judgement concerning the gender-based division of labor, up to a historical point, was not even candidate for receiving moral value (right or wrong). It is only after this judgement became a candidate for receiving a moral-value that we can say that this kind of division was always wrong. Becoming a candidate for moral-value is the result of a specific historical course which, as I argued, includes the maturity of empirical-scientific understanding and the evolution of the social institutions. Thus, judging that gender-based division of labor was always morally wrong is possible only *ex post facto*, only after this particular judgement became a candidate for moral-value. But it is exactly on this ex-post-facto-ness that the historicity of reason relies.

In short, it should be not considered that the idea of the historical changeability of the layout of the space of reasons entails the idea that moral or epistemic judgements can genuinely change truth-value or moral value. It just entails the idea that the space of reasons is reorganized when new judgements become candidates for truth-value or moral-value. As I attempted to show, this is part of a historical process which includes the ongoing expansion of our empirical-scientific knowledge of the causal factors that dictate our lives.

9. *Conclusions*

McDowell's liberal naturalism provides the fundamental conceptual tools needed in order to make logical room between a philosophical stance which legitimizes only the kind of intelligibility which is proper to the empirical sciences and the philosophical stance which presents human rationality as

[24] As Joseph Rouse (2016: 30) stresses, "people can now tell and talk about mitochondria, the Precambrian Era, subatomic particles, tectonic plates, retroviruses, spiral galaxies, and chemical kinetics. One need not go back very far historically to find not error but silence on these and so many more scientific topics".

supernatural power. The most valuable of these tools is a) the disassociation of the idea of nature from the idea of the subject matter of the natural sciences and b) the rejection of the idea that there can be a criterion for demarcating the genuine from the seemingly normative facts (what I called normative fallibilism).

Based on McDowell's account I attempted to show that a viable liberal naturalist account should endorse three additional interconnected assumptions: a) the disassociation of the concept of the reducibility of the normative explanations from the concept of the eliminability of the domain of normative explanations, b) the untenability of God's point of view, and c) the rejection of the view that normativism presupposes the idea that there is a super-added normative element which is beyond the reach of empirical-scientific understanding. I also argued that the above-mentioned assumptions have two philosophical consequences that diverge from McDowell's point of view. The first is that freedom as the expression of rationality is a concept that allows degrees depending on the historical context. The second but related to the first is that the layout of the space of reasons is historically changeable.

Let me now provide one brief final remark. In the beginning of the present text I suggested that the account I propose attempts to understand normativity in a collectivistic and historical way in contrast to ahistorical and individualistic philosophical accounts. I think that the historical character of my approach should be already clear. On the contrary, the collectivist dimension may be not so obvious. Thus, I should stress that a presupposition of what I have already said is that the unit of my philosophical analysis is not the individual subject. If it were the individual subject we would continue to be trapped in the oscillation between a version of normativism which seeks for a space beyond the reach of scientific understanding and the scientistic rejection of this sort of space and of normativity altogether. If we take the problem of rationality to be a problem of whether or not there exists some sort of capacity at the level of individuals, then we can easily imagine an external standpoint. Given the external standpoint the distinction between reducibility and eliminability cannot be made. But if we focus at the level of tradition (historical community), the external standpoint vanishes and the distinction between reducibility and eliminability becomes possible.

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