

PhD Theoretical Comprehensive Exam Topic

2009-2010

World

Analytic Reading List and Study Guide

Overview

The analytic tradition has been dominated for several decades by what might be called “philosophical naturalism” (or “metaphysical naturalism”). One important feature of this approach is the conviction that the world is at root physical. Everything that exists is composed entirely of elementary physical particles (or at least what, for convenience, are called “particles”). Thus, naturalism incorporates physicalism; indeed, ‘naturalism’ is sometimes a euphemism for ‘physicalism’. But naturalism is not only this; in its most common manifestations, a commitment to naturalism also brings with it a commitment to metaphysical and/or scientific realism. According to realists, the world described by science is literally as science describes it.

The naturalist’s conviction is not come by frivolously. Natural science (including, physics, biology, chemistry) gives us our best (though not yet perfect) understanding of the way the world is, and the best evidence of current natural science suggests that everything that happens either happens in accordance with natural laws governing elementary particles or is ultimately determined by laws governing elementary particles. The physical world is a causally closed system. From the point of view of many philosophers working today in the analytic theoretical tradition, the commitments to physicalism and realism embodied in a naturalist outlook capture what ought to be the default worldview.

But a commitment to naturalism raises many questions. For instance, are chemical and biological properties real, or is the real exhausted by elementary particles and their properties, with the disciplines of chemistry and biology providing no more than higher-level descriptions of complex patterns of elementary-level phenomena? What is the ontological status of objects (e.g., rocks, tables, animals), persons, properties (e.g., secondary qualities), events (e.g., hiccups, thunderstorms), possibilities, etc.? How are these things related to the material with which they are associated (e.g., the statue and the lump of matter that constitutes it)? And what about the ontological status of mental states, processes, and events? How are these related to the physical states, processes, and events with which they appear to covary? Finally, what is the force of the scientific norms reflected in a commitment to naturalism? These are some of the philosophical questions (and there are many others) generated by a commitment to naturalism.

Readings

Among the classics in this vein of the analytic tradition, Wilfrid Sellars' "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" should certainly be read. A somewhat radical approach may be found in the work of Willard van Orman Quine; see especially the first two chapters *Word and Object*, "Ontological Relativity," "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," and "On What There Is" (the last of which should be read in conjunction with Rudolf Carnap's "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology").

The semantic arguments of Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke might be taken into account in the context of analytic scientific naturalism. Some subsequent philosophers have tried to recruit these arguments in support of the claim that there must be features of the world answering to certain of our concepts.

Not all recent analytic philosophy has been in the physicalistic vein, however. An earlier denial of a "ready-made" world is Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*. Perhaps most notable is the work of Putnam after about 1981. "Why There Isn't a Ready-Made World" signals its anti-realist standpoint in its title, though Putnam has called his view "internal realism" (among other things). (A companion piece, focusing on epistemology, is Putnam's "Why Reason Can't be Naturalized.") The beginnings of this view may be found in *Reason, Truth and History* (1981); perhaps its most sustained exposition may be found in Putnam's 1994 Dewey Lectures, "Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses."

Some recent, non-physicalistic metaphysics derives from more epistemological concerns. A notable example is John McDowell's *Mind and World*, which is heavily influenced by the concerns of Wilfrid Sellars' most widely discussed essay, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind". Donald Davidson argues for a contrary view—most explicitly in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." In this connection, one might also consult Richard Rorty's "The World Well Lost."

Another approach to this topic may be traced back to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which, one might say, begins with the world and ends with its limits. One might consider the *Tractatus* in comparison to its context of origin—especially Bertrand Russell's *Lectures on Logical Atomism* (notably, lectures 1, 2, and 8), perhaps comparing this Russell with the Russell of 1912 in *The Problems of Philosophy*. On the other hand, one might better compare the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* with the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Or one might take the *Philosophical Investigations* as part of one's study without the *Tractatus*. The *Philosophical Investigations* is one of the most influential works in the analytic tradition.

Yet to be mentioned are two major, self-conscious movements in the analytic tradition: logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy. The topic of *World* might be approached profitably within the context of either of these historical movements.

Finally, important work on these topics has been done by current and recent members of our own department. See, for example, the recent book by Terence Horgan

and Matjaž Potrč, *Austere Realism* as well as John Tienson's "A Conception of Metaphysics."

Analytic Reading List

- Carnap, Rudolf, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4: 20-40; reprinted in Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).
- Chisholm, Roderick, *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1976).
- Davidson, Donald, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,"
- Goodman, Nelson, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1978).
- Horgan, Terence and Matjaž Potrč, *Austere Realism: Contextual Semantics Meets Minimal Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
- Kripke, Saul, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
- Lewis, David, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
- McDowell, John, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Quine, Willard van Orman, "On What There Is" and "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," both reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953).
- *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).
- "Ontological Relativity," reprinted in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977)
- Putnam, Hilary, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," in K. Gunderson, ed., *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press); repr. in Putnam, *Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
- *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- "Why There Isn't a Ready-Made World" and "Why Reason Can't Be Naturalized," in Putnam, in Putnam, *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- "Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry Into the Powers of the Human Mind," *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994): 445-517.
- Rea, Michael C., ed., *Material Constitution: A Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).
- Rorty, Richard, "The World Well Lost," *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972): 649-65; reprinted in Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 3-18.
- *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- Russell, Bertrand, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912).
- "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," reprinted in Russell, *Logic and Knowledge* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956): 177-281.
- Sellars, Wilfrid, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Robert Brandom, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); originally published in 1956.

- “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, Robert Colodny, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962); reprinted in Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963): 1–40.
- Tienson, John, “A Conception of Metaphysics,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1989): 63-71.
- Van Inwagen, Peter, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C. K. Ogden, trans. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922).
- *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, eds., G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

Continental Reading List

Overview

Heidegger introduced a new, phenomenological concept of the world [*die Welt*], wishing to radically distinguish Dasein’s being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-sein*] from all the previous conceptions of the world. What does Continental philosophy and, in particular phenomenology, contribute to the conception of the world? What is “the world” and what is to be “in” it?

The Continental philosophical tradition inherits at least three notions of “the world” from the Ancients. From references to “earth and sky (*ouranos*)” in Archaic Greece, “the order of all things” (*kosmos*) in Homer, “the totality of all that is (*holon, panta, ta panta*)” in Hesiod and Heraclitus to the use of all three terms *holon, ouranos, kosmos* in Plato, these meanings have determined the conception of what later became known as “the world” (*mundus*). With the advent of Christianity, the world came to be viewed as the terrestrial “globe” or regarded as synonymous with the entire “universe” (*universum*). Leibniz went as far as claiming there are many worlds. Further, the English word “world” can refer to a milieu (e.g., Tolkein’s “world”), as well as to a physical reality. In what way is the phenomenological notion of the world different from all these previous conceptions?

A serious engagement with Husserl’s and Heidegger’s notions of the world is expected.

Continental Reading List

Please note: We supply the publication data for the German texts since some students will want to read the original versions. However, consulting these is NOT required for success on this exam.

Husserl, Edmund.

“Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move” known as “The Earth Does Not Move” (*Umsturz* fragment, 1934) in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology: Including Texts by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, trans. Fred Kersten, revised by Leonard Lawler, eds. and trans. Leonard Lawler and Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), pp. 117-131. “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation. Die Ur-Arche Erde bewegt sich nicht. Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Körperlichkeit der Raumlichkeit der Natur im ersten naturwissenschaftlichen Sinne. Alles notwendiges Anfangsuntersuchungen” originally published in Marvin Farber, *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl* (Evesham: Greenwood Press, 1968)

-----. *Ideas I (Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy)*. First Book. Trans. Fred Kersten. (The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1980) §§27-32, §§47-50. *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Erstes Buch. Vol. 3 *Husserliana in Gesammelte Werke* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950).

Heidegger, Martin.

Being and Time (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) §§ 12-27. *Sein und Zeit*. 7th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960).

-----. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) §20, §39-41, §§42-48, §64. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit* (GA 1929/30) (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983, 1992).

-----. “On the Essence of Ground” in *Pathmarks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967, rev., exp. 1976).