

A Synthetic, Frankenstein Philosopher Using Analytic Tools to Test Possibilities: An Interview with Daniel D. Hutto

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How did you find philosophy, or was it the other way around, and philosophy found you?

I have always had a natural inclination to ask what might be called deep philosophical questions. For example, even as a very young child, I was genuinely puzzled about the status of fictional characters—though I would not have put it this way at the time. “Is Godzilla real?” I remember asking my father this. He misunderstood the nature of my question, or batted it away, saying “Anything is possible”. “But, is it?”, I thought. As a young child, and into my teenage years, I used to write creative stories, most of which had

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a philosophical bent. I first picked up the study of philosophy, formally, in high school—trading calculus for logic. At my college in the US, I took philosophy as a minor, and slowly cultivated enough interest to pursue it at the level of MPhil study, after having spent a year abroad in St Andrews. I was in the middle of my dissertation work at St Andrews, working on the topic of involuntary belief, when George Graham came along. He gave a lecture that introduced me to the extraordinary fact that some were arguing that there are no such things as beliefs and desires, as per Churchland's eliminativism about the attitudes. I was so struck by the challenge that it formed the focus of my PhD work and set in motion my particular path through the philosophical literature, which has led me to where I am today.



Daniel D. Hutto in Tartu in 2022. Photo by Bruno Mölder.

When you do philosophy, do you have a particular method that you use?

I do not use a singular method. But one method that I do use comes from Wittgenstein—though my understanding of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy is not the same as everyone else's. I seek to clarify my understanding of important phenomena through philosophical investigations of the sort he recommended—namely, giving careful attention to how we ordinarily speak and think about such phenomena and how they figure in the patterns of our life. Some think that all Wittgenstein offered philosophy was pure therapy—attempts to free philosophers from problems of their own making. I think there is a therapeutic element to his philosophical methods, but,

by my lights, the end goal of philosophical work is clarity. Seeking clarity about important topics is my aim and this aim is central to the methods and approaches I adopt in my philosophical work. This is why my work can look a bit negative. Often my aim is to challenge and remove assumptions that prevent us from seeing a topic aright—ways of thinking that prevent us from making things clearer and better understood.

Would you recommend this method to other philosophers too?

All philosophers can benefit from clarifying their thinking in the ways I just described. Of course, philosophers come to their work with various ambitions, background interests, and motivations—some will be quite different than mine. So other methods will be appropriate for them. I adopt a broadly naturalistic stance in my philosophical efforts. Thus, in addition to philosophical clarification, my work is informed by what we can learn from various scientific investigations once their import is carefully understood. Other philosophers do not start with such naturalistic commitments. It is for them to justify, if they can, how and why doing philosophical work in some other preferred way—say, by appeal to only armchair intuitions—is valuable. Today's philosophers are giving robust and healthy attention to questions of philosophical methodology. That is a good thing. We must continue to press the issue and to articulate and test our reasons for preferring certain approaches over others.

You have described yourself as a “Frankenstein philosopher” in the sense that you try to integrate and put together things that, at first sight, do not seem to fit together. Could you elaborate on this—what do you mean by that?

Victor von Frankenstein was steadfastly constructive. He took dead parts and, by putting them together in the right way, brought to life something novel through his synthetic work. I see myself as a philosophical tinkerer with similar ambitions.

To take an example from within philosophy, I have tried to connect the work of two of my favourite philosophers: Donald Davidson and Ruth Millikan. Notably, they disagree on some important issues. Yet, with some adjustment on both sides, it is possible to combine and connect some of their central ideas to provide a strong, alloyed account of how to understand the forms of cognition “for which the question of truth arises” and how that kind of cognition might arise in nature. I regard that sort of synthetic work as an extremely fruitful method of doing philosophy. Looking back at the

history of philosophy—and here I have Aristotle’s work on the four causes in mind—I think I am hardly alone in going this way.

I do a lot of connecting across disciplines, too. For example, I work to link philosophical analyses of various topics with scientific findings, testing how well they can fit together. When I do that kind of work, I think of myself more as a synthetic philosopher who uses analytic tools than as an analytic philosopher per se. I also think that being a synthetic philosopher in this respect is perfectly consistent with using Wittgenstein’s methods to clarify important topics. I have combined both approaches, for example, when exploring and motivating the possibility that folk psychology may be based in narrative practices.

Some days ago, you also compared your work to sculpting. You take the stuff away until a figure comes out.

I did make that comparison. Of course, when sculpting, one might also add to a piece. That can be important too, depending upon what is needed. One must be sensitive to what is required and what works best together. But the point I was trying to make when drawing that comparison is that the art of subtracting things is not always negative, though it is often described as such. In some cases removing things from one’s thinking, just like taking away from a sculpture, can be wholly positive: it can make one’s final product clearer, more precise—and even more beautiful, more elegant.

Davidson was also a very synthetic thinker who constructed his system from a few basic ideas.

That is true, Davidson—like most philosophers—borrowed from others, in his case—quite heavily from Quine, up to a point. I think this is hardly unusual in philosophy. There are plenty of cases, if not most, in which good philosophy depends on reworking and expanding on the work of others. Though this is clearly known, we do not always emphasise how central this synthetic tinkering is to our practice. Some people might describe it as a kind of dialectical philosophy, but that term has other, more particular meanings and connotations. For that reason, I am happier to simply to call this kind of philosophical activity synthetic for the purposes of characterising it.

Some people expect philosophers to be original, to have totally new ideas, etc.

They do, but I do not think that they should. Indeed, I think that even when a creative outcome is something new and novel, the process in much art, literature, and other domains is a matter of borrowing from and responding

to previous sources—challenging them, adding, or subtracting from them, playing with them, incorporating them, and adjusting them in various ways. This happens a great deal in philosophy too. By this measure, not everything of value is novel. Often what is novel is just brining things together and making linkages that have not been made before. But this need not be a matter of creating something that is wholly original from a blank slate, springing into being as legend tells us Athena did, fully formed, out of Zeus's head.

Do you think that there is progress in philosophy? Are we doing better now than before?

I am an optimist. One of the problems we have in talking about philosophical progress, however cautiously, is that we are never sure when we have got ourselves on a firm footing. As I said, a good part of my philosophical work involves cutting things away or showing that some commitments are not tenable given certain others. I count such clarifications as a kind of progress. Even if such work is slow-going, we advance our understanding by learning and articulating what does not hang together. Deciding that something needs to be left aside and that we need to change our existing ways of thinking about some subject matter can be counted as a form of philosophical progress, even if we lack final and full answers about the topic in question. Looked at in this light, we need not reject the very idea that there can be advances in philosophy. And, to borrow the words of Gandalf, "that is an encouraging thought".

The worry is that we still have the same questions as 2500 years ago: What is truth? What is knowledge?

Those questions are still with us. Indeed. But we also have new resources and different ways of coming at them and thinking about them than we did 2500 years ago. And, we also know that at least some ways of thinking about such topics are not likely to pay off, and that some are internally incoherent dead ends. Still, after all this time, we are making some headway in evaluating the full set of possible answers. Add to this that coming to understand such things is not something that anyone else can do for you and it is simply nonsensical to try to measure what we have achieved against the clock when it comes to clarifying what we ought to think about such important phenomena. Philosophy also deserves credit for having helped to birth today's universities and its curiosity-driven disciplines—mathematics, the natural sciences (once natural philosophy), and the human and social sciences are all its children. With the advent of their new methods, new findings, and

new technologies, we are always facing an ever-expanding horizon of things to make sense of and to integrate into our thinking.

In your Frege lectures, you have approached many issues from the viewpoint of enactivism. This view urges us to understand the mind through the interaction between the organism and the environment. At the same time, the overall title of your lectures is “Why I am not an enactivist?” Could you clarify your seemingly complicated relationship with enactivism?

I will try. Note the title of the lecture series is not a straightforward announcement. I added the question mark to the title in order to make it deliberately ungrammatical. And I did that to highlight to the audience that something might be rotten in Denmark with respect to the possibility that I am not an enactivist. The insider joke, for those who have listened to the lectures, is that there are many core ideas of enactivism to which I am fully committed. Indeed, the very idea that I might not be an enactivist is likely, not unreasonably, to strike many as ironic or strange. After all, I have been a such stalwart champion of enactivism for many years, working to show it is a better way of conceiving the mind and cognition than that of its representational and computational rivals. In my work with Erik Myin, one of our most original contributions to the field has been to articulate a serious challenge—the Hard Problem of Content—that anyone must address who is seeking to naturalise content using only the resources of the natural sciences.

Why, then, am I apparently cagey about being an enactivist nowadays? It is partly because other enactivists, notably Thompson and Noë, claim that the radical enactivism which Erik Myin and I have been propounding does not really or fully qualify as kind of enactivism by their lights.¹ The lectures play with the idea that our position might not qualify as a kind of enactivism—but it uses this conceit as a foil to dig in to ask some deeper questions about what the core commitments of enactivism should be—and, in doing so, whether we might want to be cautious about embracing the full set of commitments that other forms of enactivism recommend embracing. So, I come at the question of whether radical enactivism is really any kind of enactivism with an open mind. I am comfortable not being an enactivist, in the end. That would be fine with me, so long as I have hit on the right account of the mind and cognition: call it what you will. A big part of the Frege lectures is an attempt to get clearer about what any tenable enactivism

¹ Hutto, D. D. and Myin, E. (2013). *Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds without Content*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Hutto, D. D. and Myin, E. (2017). *Evolving Enactivism: Basic Minds meets Content*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

should be committed to. It is also a cautionary reminder to philosophers that they should not get hung up on names, brands, and labels. We should stick to focusing on substantive questions. I think Frege would have approved of that.

I think the name is rather broad. You could say that you are sort of an enactivist.

Well, we certainly could still qualify as enactivists, even by the two main criteria that were officially supplied by Evan Thompson, for example.² Those criteria require anyone wishing to be part of the enactivist club to embrace a conception of the mind that is both anti-representationalist and rooted in biological autonomy. However, there are other tenets that other enactivists also take to be foundational. One is that all forms of mindedness must involve sense-making and the bringing forth worlds. I question whether enactivists should embrace those commitments—at least in certain formulations. As such, if it is assumed that one must embrace those ideas if one is to count as a *bona fide* enactivist, then I do not count as an enactivist, after all.

It helps here to make a comparison with functionalism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on “Functionalism” tells us:

Functionalism in the philosophy of mind is the doctrine that what makes something a mental state of a particular type does not depend on its internal constitution, but rather on the way it functions, or the role it plays, in the system of which it is a part. ...

Given this history, it is helpful to think of functionalist theories as belonging to one of three major strains—“machine functionalism”, “psychofunctionalism” and “analytic functionalism”—and to see them as emerging, respectively, from early AI theories, empirical behaviorism, and logical behaviorism. It is important to recognize, however, that there is at least some overlap in the bloodlines of these different strains of functionalism, and also that there are functionalist theories, both earlier and more recent, that fall somewhere in between.³

What if someone were to claim that the only true functionalists are “machine” functionalists? If that rule were accepted, then all other functionalists, say those of the more psycho-functional stripe, would be functionalists in “name alone”—their position would be importantly misnamed. My Frege

² Thompson, E. (2018). Review of *Evolving Enactivism: Basic Minds Meet Content* by Daniel D. Hutto and Erik Myin. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2018.01.11. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/evolving-enactivism-basic-minds-meet-content/>

³ Levin, J. (2021). Functionalism. Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition). URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/functionalism/>>

lectures address the question of whether the kind of enactivism I advance is really a just a so-called, non-enactivism after all. There can be considerable philosophical gains to be had by getting clear on such issues—by articulating and evaluating the possible reasons that might provide warrant or fail to provide warrant for such claims.

In your lectures, you have tried to tame some of the more extravagant pronouncements of enactivists and embodied mind theorists, such as “sense-making” and “bringing forth the world”. Where do they cross the red line, and why is it important to devote so much time and energy to criticize them?

Analysing the merits and drawbacks of specific proposals is bread and butter to philosophers. That is our day job. Getting clear about whether a position is internally coherent or whether it has external commitments that are problematic is important for refining our thinking about frameworks and theories: it is how we assess our live options. I devote a lot of time to thinking about enactivism because I think, as a framework, it holds promise. It is a mark of respect—if enactivism did not have anything to offer, then it would hardly be worth troubling over the question about which, if any, version of it is best for thinking about minds and cognition. I still think that as a broad framework enactivism has much to offer to the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. For that very reason it is worth investing our time in clearing away any unnecessary or problematic commitments so we can articulate its strongest formulation.

For example, some enactivists hold that the notion of sense-making is a pivotal theoretical construct that provides what is, in effect, an enactivist “mark of the mental”. Sense-making, they hold, is the hallmark of all cognition, where cognition is understood broadly such that it includes sensorimotor perceiving-acting cycles, emoting, as well as thinking. Motivated by concerns about continuity, some enactivists hold that what unifies all minded living creatures, including very simple organisms, is that they are sense-makers of some sort. Wherever we find cognition we find sense-making. There is a set of attributes that all sense-makers exhibit. For example, all sense-makers have meaningful perspectives of care and concern from which they evaluate situations, at least to some degree. In the Frege lectures, I called the full set of these attributes the “sense-making package”. I am sceptical about the above claims, and I have reason to think that the talk of “sense-making” obscures rather than helps us to better understand minds as we find them in nature. In tune with my more Wittgenstein-inspired approach to philosophy, I am disinclined to assume that there is a clean-cut set of properties that is always present, even to some minimal extent, in cogni-

tion of all varieties. I am happy to leave ragged what is ragged. There are ways of accounting for the continuity we find in nature without having to assume that all living, thinking beings must share a common set of psychological properties in the form of the sense-making package.

The claim that organisms “enact” or “bring forth” their worlds also needs careful attention. It can be understood in stronger and weaker ways. Read weakly enough, I believe it can be shown to be anodyne. Yet, stronger readings of this claim imply a commitment to a metaphysics of idealist or transcendentalist varieties of the sort we have positive reasons to avoid. As I see it, the stronger versions of this idea are in tension with attempts to motivate acceptance of enactivism by appealing to facts about the biological character of cognition.

You have claimed that enactivism also has wider cultural relevance. That is, enactivism is not just a view within the philosophy of mind and cognition but has implications for the methodology of philosophy and other disciplines. Could you elaborate on this point—what implications does it have?

The lyrics of *Dem Bones* remind us that “The knee bone is connected to the thigh bone”. I assume philosophy and other domains and disciplines are similarly connected. Thinking differently about the philosophy of mind has implications for the sort of metaphysics and epistemology one can coherently endorse. In the final Frege lecture, I spoke about the implications different enactivist proposals have for how we conceive of ethics. It seems evident that adopting enactivism will have important consequences for one’s general philosophy. Adopting enactivism as a way of thinking about minds has wider cultural relevance too because taking up its philosophical framework has the potential to reshape what we do in practice beyond the academy in various domains.

Could you give an example of such implications?

Enactivism challenges us not to think of the mind in essentially computational, representational, and brain-bound terms. As such, it directs us to think differently about thinking. Not surprisingly, education and mental health services are two prominent areas in which enactivism is already starting to transform standard thinking and practice. Philosophical conceptions influence our background thinking about particular domains, even when the conceptions in question are not directly sourced from philosophy. For this reason, having a background philosophy, whether it is articulated or not, can make a big difference to what we do in practice. It can influence

how we prioritise and organise our activities; where and how we devote our resources; and what conclusions we draw about important topics. Consider education. Background views about the nature of cognition ought to influence how we think about learning—and how we think about learning, in turn, should influence how we organize classrooms, how we teach, and so on. There are, thus, straightforward consequences, both philosophical and practical, that ought to flow from opting for enactivism over, say, cognitivism as a framework for thinking about thinking. Which of these rival frameworks we choose to adopt matters, in the end, to how we teach and which tools and techniques we will regard as likely to improve educational practice. Thinking of cognition as fully embodied and enactive can challenge us to think differently about what learning might look like in the classroom. I have collaborated on this topic for many years with Dor Abrahamson who leads the Embodied Design Research Laboratory located in the University of California Berkeley. For more detail about this, I recommend having a look at the exciting new MIT Press collection on this very topic, which was published in 2022.⁴

And, of course, the general logic of what I just said holds for many other domains too. Certainly, it applies to any domain in which our views of the nature of minds ought to matter to the shape of our practices. In general, changing our minds about the nature of minds has implications, not just for philosophical thinking, but also for many practical domains beyond the academy, whether this is immediately noticed by those involved in structuring those practices or not.

How do you conceive of the relationship between philosophy and science? Are they continuous with each other? Is there anything distinctive about philosophy?

It is a Quinean mantra that “philosophy is continuous with natural science”. It is not wholly clear what “continuous” means in this context, but I strongly resist thinking of philosophy and science as operating with the same methods. So, in my book, the most I would say is that philosophy is continuous with science in the sense that it is connected to it yet distinct from it. Philosophy and science should inform each other and they should complement one another in productive ways. All that can be the case, even if—as I think is the case—philosophy and science are distinct from one another in their methodologies. Science can act as a constraint on philosophy, but equally, philosophy can act as a constraint on science. Some of the thinking in philos-

⁴ Macrine, S. L. and Fugate, J. M.B. (eds.) (2022). *Movement Matters: How Embodied Cognition Informs Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

ophy might help to clarify issues in science or change the direction of work there as, say, I think happens in psychology, cognitive science, and the neurosciences. These are areas where certain background assumptions coming from philosophy can drive activity in the sciences because those assumptions influence how we think about specific phenomena and, in turn, how we think we should best study them. So, bringing philosophy and science into fruitful conversation can be significant.

I certainly do not think of philosophy as just a silent partner in such arrangements, and even less so as a mere Lockean underlabourer. Philosophy can make an important difference to science through its clarificatory work. At the same time, philosophy must give careful attention to what scientists say and discover. So, I do not think philosophy has a free lunch to do whatever metaphysical work it wants in its enquiries without paying close attention to what goes on in the sciences.

By “science” here, do you mean natural and experimental sciences, not arts and humanities?

I did have the natural and experimental sciences in mind when answering the previous question. But my answer can easily be extended to disciplines like mathematics, which, as Timothy Williamson argues, ought also to be counted amongst the sciences. The arts and humanities are equally important, but there are reasons not to call them sciences. It is crucial to note that because they are unlike the sciences, their way of conversing with philosophy is also different. Many of our philosophical ideas and assumptions are sourced from, preserved through, and conveyed by means of art, poetry, and literature. Metaphysical, moral, and political assumptions are deeply woven into the artefacts and institutions that give shape to dominant tendencies that are ambient in our diverse cultures. The humanities and social sciences, more broadly, give us the means to understand such differences and domains that are of great importance to us, but which are invisible to the purer and harder sciences.

You mentioned neuroscience before. Let us talk more about this. Should philosophy of mind impact the research in cognitive science, and could it have this impact? Do cognitive scientists even listen to philosophers?

I do not think there is any serious question of whether cognitive scientist should take stock of what philosophers have to say—for all the reasons I give above. If certain accounts of mind are right, they will make certain neuroscientific projects and activities live or die. Some might rest on wholly

confused assumptions. The value of searching for the neural correlates of consciousness, for example, hinges on some contentious philosophical assumptions. If enactivists are right that consciousness does not only happen in the brain, then this raises serious questions about what one might learn by discovering such correlations. Whether such a project is worthwhile depends on what you expect to learn from that kind of research. So, I think the normative question is easily answered. But as you intimate and as Hume taught us, there is what ought to be the case, on the one hand, and there is what is the case, on the other. There can be practical problems in getting fruitful conversations going between philosophers and neuroscientists. Today much research is funded based on initial pitches which can make big promises about hopeful outcomes. Some of those pitches would benefit from close philosophical scrutiny—if only to make their background framework assumptions fully explicit.

One problem is that the philosophical theories are general, but to make tangible progress, you need specific claims that can either be proved or disproved by experiments. That sort of translation between the very general and the particular is difficult.

Trading in generalities, as some philosophers do, need not impede philosophy's tangible progress. Certainly, a well-defined hypothesis is needed to construct useful experiments, but there can be compelling, non-empirical reasons to alter one's background framework assumptions. A change therein can make quite a big and palpable splash. It is not only what happens at the coalface of empirical activity, where evidence is collected, that shifts our thinking on important matters. We might discover reasons to change the way we frame whole classes of experiment. A change in our background framework assumptions could lead to rethinking the significance of a great many individual experiments. For these reasons, philosophers can have quite a lot to say about the significance of experimental findings.

You have mentioned disciplines such as “teleosemiotics” and “bio-semiotics” in your works. Do you think that cooperation with semi-otics could be fruitful for philosophers?

Yes, it could be. I have not yet worked with semioticians myself directly. I have had some nice conversations with some semioticians while I have been here in Tartu. I think that such cooperation would work in much the same way as it does between philosophy and other sciences. A back and forth between philosophers and semioticians could help to clarify what current best thinking looks like in the special sciences while also helping clarify and

test assumptions. For example, thanks to one of your colleagues working on biosemiotics, I discovered that viruses are not living things on this trip. That was useful for adjusting the scope of my arguments. Other conversations I have had with biosemioticians during my visit revealed that they think about aspects of their subject matter in ways that may not be familiar to most philosophers. So there is much to learn on all sides.

There is also the worry that philosophers and semioticians seem to use the same terms but have entirely different concepts behind them.

That is always a problem when communicating across disciplines. But the same problem can arise between philosophers and other philosophers. We might outwardly be using the same terms while operating, all the while, with often different assumptions about their meaning and extension. That is a familiar conversational problem. Frege, of course, knew all about it. Getting terminology locked in place for the practical purpose of discussion is never a simple business. One can stipulate what the terminology picks out, and agree about this, but it takes time and effort to keep background assumptions about what such terms mean under control, even after agreed referents of terms are pinned down.

As you said, it also applies to philosophy. The next question is about that. How much attention should we (as analytic philosophers) pay to philosophy done within other traditions?

That is a practical question. Our days have only so many hours in them, and we have so many projects. That said, I think it is beneficial for those working on a relevant topic to make space to read broadly. Looking at what other traditions have to say about a topic, even if one then decides that there is nothing there that one wants to endorse, is the only way to review the full range of possibilities. A parochial policy of not looking at what other traditions of thought have to offer is hard to justify, and it makes little sense to me. We can draw sources of philosophical inspiration from many places. Looking at what other traditions have to say about a topic helps to loosen up our philosophical imaginations in ways that are certainly beneficial. So, even recognising that we have limited time and energy, I think it is valuable to learn what other traditions have to say on topics of philosophical interest. This approach has served me well.

You also mentioned that by engaging with other traditions, we could make our own background assumptions explicit and recognize them.⁵

That is right. I am impressed with the idea that broadening our philosophical diet increases our chances of discovering and questioning the limits of our thinking. When we encounter something that we think we cannot understand, a red flag should go up. We should not be quick to dismiss possibilities because they can be hard to imagine. We should not move too quickly from an inference from “lack of imagination” to the conclusion that a given idea or position is incoherent. Philosophers can be rather dismissive of unfamiliar possibilities. When Erik Myin and I wrote our first book, *Radicalizing Enactivism*, together we stressed that our aim was to promote a possibility which others were inclined to dismiss out of hand. Getting out and about, philosophically speaking, can help us to expand our imaginations, make us more receptive to entertaining a fuller range of possibilities that we might otherwise be prepared or able to entertain.

You have defended a view called “relaxed naturalism”.⁶ What distinguishes it from other kinds of naturalism, and why should we be relaxed naturalists?

There are well-known forms of scientific naturalism, which tend to embrace some or other kind of physicalism, which look to the hard sciences as guides to their methodology and metaphysics. I hold that such varieties of naturalism are overly restrictive and fail to recognise natural phenomena of importance. It is well known that fitting minds, morality and mathematics into the world is a problem if one adopts a hardcore scientific naturalism. Quite a few philosophers with naturalistic sensibilities have chosen to reject overly restrictive versions of scientific naturalism in favour of something looser—a kind of liberal naturalism that admits the non-scientific-yet-non-supernatural into its picture of nature. Liberal naturalism is often formulated in quite a broad-church fashion. Although I agree with much that liberal naturalists have to say, I believe liberal naturalism is under-developed in important respects, especially when it comes to helping us sift the non-scientific-yet-natural from the supernatural. Here we need an approach to

⁵ Hutto, D. D. (2020). From Radical Enactivism to Folk Philosophy. *The Philosophers' Magazine*, 88: 75–82.

⁶ Hutto, D. D. (2022). Relaxed Naturalism: A Liberating Philosophy of Nature. M. De Caro and D. Macarthur (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 165–176

nature that is relaxed, but as I put it in a forthcoming paper, yet not too liberal. Relaxed naturalism seeks to strike the right balance in this regard.

So you could say that relaxed naturalism is relaxed with respect to scientific naturalism, but not relaxed with respect to liberal naturalism.

Well, relaxed naturalism disagrees with scientific naturalism. It is closer to liberal naturalism, but it is not as relaxed as the most liberal of liberal naturalisms. Or, to put that last point another way, liberal naturalists have not told us enough about how and where to draw the boundaries of the natural. So, compared to scientific naturalism, we need to be more relaxed; but, compared to liberal naturalists, we need to be less relaxed.

The next question will be rather general. Do we need philosophy at all in the contemporary world, and if we do, then what consolation could philosophy offer in the midst of wars, pandemics, climate change and other global problems facing humankind?

It would be the height of hubris to think that philosophy could, in any direct way, solve wars, pandemics or climate change. That is a high bar. I am not sure I know of anyone who has workable answers ready about how to solve these sorts of issues. One likes to think that if more world leaders took up a properly philosophical stance, then there would be fewer wars and a better response to climate change. But it is not as if philosophy itself is at fault here. And, after all, we have seen that decision-makers in today's world do not always take scientists as seriously as they ought either. No one would conclude from that fact that we do not need science in the contemporary world. In any case, we can see the value of philosophy better if we focus on what it does to educate and improve the thinking capacities of future generations. In the long run, by continuing to promote reasoned discussion and inculcate intellectual and social virtues philosophers continue to make a positive contribution to the contemporary world despite being unable to prevent its more grievous crises.

People who decide where to allocate funds might say: There are much more burning issues like war and pandemics, so let us put all the funds there. Why should they fund philosophers?

Until the world stops spinning, we will continue to need philosophy—for the very reasons I just outlined. Even in the face of great world-threatening evils, it is important to keep in mind what we need to thrive, not only survive—to recall what makes life worth living. Good questions to ask are: What

would you want in your world should the threats pass? What goes in the lifeboat? I find it hard to imagine that our world would be better off without philosophy, even if philosophy is unable to address the devastatingly serious problems facing the world today. More to the point, it would be surprising if re-directing the limited funding that goes to philosophers would make much difference to addressing these global problems. What could we spend it on to achieve that? One wonders. That is a wicked philosophical question for you.

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