Review of: "Why naturalists must give up deduction, or return to Hume"

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Carin Robinson's paper "Why naturalists must give up deduction, or return to Hume" provides an interesting and plausible argument that many contemporary naturalists are not entitled to use logical deduction. More carefully, her thesis is that either (I) naturalists should forgo logical deduction or (II) naturalists should accept the Humean idea that there are meaningful analytic/synthetic and *a priori*/*a posteriori* distinctions that line up (e.g., all and only propositions expressed by analytic sentences are knowable *a priori*). I restrict my four comments below to more constructive points that I believe may strengthen Robinson's paper.

1. A clear, explicit statement early in the paper of what Robinson takes naturalism to be would be helpful. My sense is that 'naturalism' can be used to refer to a large family of similar but related views. So, some explicit discussion of which naturalists view(s) Robinson is interested in would be very helpful. The clearest explicit statement is when Robinson tells us that "one of the core mandates of naturalism is to reject the possibility of all a priori knowledge and, with it, purely logical truths" (4). As a side note, if naturalism is taken to satisfy this mandate as a matter of definition, it seems to me that Robinson's thesis trivially follows; such a definition seems to entail (I). Relatedly, some discussion of naturalist views that do accept the possibility of *a priori* knowledge would be helpful, even if only to make clear that these views are not Robinson's target.

2. Robinson's claim that "whilst we can legitimately say 'It seems as if the planets Hesperus and Phosphorus are the same planet' we should
   refrain from speaking about this as a necessity" (16) requires more discussion. It is standard to think that 'a = b' are (if true) necessarily true when 'a' and 'b' are rigid designators. Put less linguistically, the point is this: Hesperus, Phosphorus, and Venus are (essentially) the same thing. This is a metaphysical point that must be distinguished from the epistemic point about what whether this identity is knowable *a priori* or only *a posteriori*. As I adhere to this Kripkean orthodoxy, I myself doubt that it's contingent for Hesperus to be Phosphorus (assuming it is actually true). However, I suspect that Robinson does not need to deny this claim for her purposes here. It seems she only needs the following claim: the naturalists she is targeting are not entitled to say that Hesperus is necessarily Phosphorus. I wonder if Robinson thinks there is a special reason why naturalists, in particular, cannot claim that Hesperus is necessarily Phosphorus. Is it because naturalists, on her view, cannot make sense of necessities at all? That, on its own, wouldn't be satisfactory since that's one of the points of dispute between her and her naturalist interlocutors. The gist is that the paper would be strengthened by further explaining and defending the claim that naturalists cannot

appeal to the necessary *a posteriori*.

3. Robinson claims that "[f]or deduction to be necessary, there can be no chance of nasty surprises. Any truths which deal with extralinguistic reality are subject to such surprises" (14). Let's restrict our attention to arguments with only worldly ("extralinguistic") and contingent premises. For example, consider the one-premise argument in (A):

   (A) Socrates and Hyptia were philosophers. Therefore, Hypatia was a philosopher.

   Argument (A) is valid. Even though its premise and conclusion deal with worldly and contingent matters, the argument involves a logically unobjectionable deduction. Again, I think Robinson is, or should, be attributing the claim in question (i.e., that deductive arguments can only involve necessary, non-worldly premises and conclusion) to naturalists. I take it that the main reason to do so is that if--as the naturalists Robinson has in mind claim--all knowledge is *a posteriori*, then knowledge about the validity of deductive inference forms (e.g., conjunction elimination) is *a posteriori*. Presumably, this means that, in principle, naturalists should think that future events could cause us to rationally revise which deductive inference forms we take to be valid; for naturalists, perhaps very dramatic evidence could cause us to even rationally deny that (A) is valid. But if so, her attention to naturalist "characterisation[s] of deduction which takes into account the complexity of extra-linguistic information" (14) seems redundant. I could very well be misunderstanding something here. In that case, I ask only for further clarification on why that stage of the dialectic is necessary.

4. Related to my previous comment: is it possible for naturalists to distinguish metaphysical/logical and epistemic matters here? Why can't naturalists insist that while positing valid inference forms helps us to make sense of the totality of empirical evidence, they are not certain that these inference forms are indeed valid? I take it that this is the picture that results from some naturalists' appeal to Quine's web of beliefs. Robinson replies to an idea in this vein in the last paragraph of part 3, but the reply deserves more discussion. In particular, the claim that "we…have *no reason* to believe that there isn't a serious theory which holds that we treat mathematics differently to other parts of science" (16, emphasis added) seems to weak for Robinson's purposes. To refute naturalism by appeal to mathematics, it would have to be shown that mathematics *should* be treated differently to other parts of science--in particular, that mathematical claims can be known *a priori*. Admittedly, that claim merits whole papers within the philosophy of mathematics. But saying a least a little more on why we should take mathematics to be *a priori* would help bolster Robinson's case against the empiricist naturalism she has in mind.

I hope that at least some of these comments will be helpful to Robinson as she revises this paper further. Finally, I would like to thank Robinson for this paper, which I enjoyed thinking about, and which I think will be of interest to many philosophers.