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Stream A: Consciousness and Naturalism

Title: The Transcendental Ghost in the Evolved Machine: Dennett and Malabou on navigating Naturalism through the Fog of Post-Kantian Epistemology

Abstract: An interesting aspect in current debates over the relation between philosophy and science is the reevaluation of naturalism alongside socio-biology. This paper wants to investigate some issues around the intellectual history that has led into the “naturalist turn” as it has been shaped through post-Kantian legacy of the “transcendental turn” and resulting “analytic-continental divide”. In this paper, I will discuss how this legacy plays out in relation to two contemporary thinkers reflective of this divide; yet both of whom closely engage with naturalism, evolution, and rationality. Firstly, Daniel Dennett’s philosophical project of theorising a naturalist and evolutionary model of consciousness as it culminates in his recent book, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back Again* (2017 Norton) and its efforts to reconcile evolutionary biology with information theory without sacrificing teleology, rationality, or intentionality. The paper will compare then the path taken by Dennett’s naturalism to Catherine Malabou’s interpretation of evolutionary theory in terms of an epigenetic model of rationality in her book *Before Tomorrow* (2016). I will explore in conclusion why the problem of explaining consciousness strictly in terms of naturalism and evolutionary psychology for the purposes of a singular or eliminativist model of explanation creates its own set of epistemological obstacles and ask whether possible alternatives like the neurobiological accounts of rationality pose ways to dialectically balance out the pendulum between transcendental philosophy and the empirical (life) sciences – and further, whether evolutionary theory itself is adaptable to such reversals away from its mechanistic origins.

Bio: Rory Jeffs is completing a PhD at Deakin University on a critique of the systematic philosophico-political project of the Russian-French Hegelian philosopher Alexandre Kojève and its implications as a philosophical discourse of modernity. He is the co-editor of *100 Years of European Philosophy: Crises and Reconfigurations* (2017 Springer), and has published articles in journals such as *Parrhesia and Critical Research in Religion*. His research interests pertain to political and social philosophy, critical theory, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, philosophy of science, as well as the history of ideas.