

PREFACE

This is a project in contemporary analytic metaphysics. Unlike other similar projects, this project does not assume the existence of substances, natural kinds, or categories. In other words, this project does away with much of metaphysics that originates with the pre-Socratics and was formalized by Aristotle. To adopt the Kuhnian expression, it is this Aristotelian substance framework that has served as the *received view* in much of Western contemporary analytic metaphysics. Rather than assuming the Aristotelian substance framework, this project argues for the further pursuance of a process metaphysics. Although many philosophers who are traditionally thought to be working in the continental tradition, such as Hegel, Bergson, and Deleuze, have made significant contributions to process metaphysics, analytic philosophers have given very little attention to process metaphysics since Whitehead. To speculate, I believe that the little attention given to process metaphysics has resulted from associating Whitehead with Hartshorne's theological and theosophical interpretations of Whitehead. There is not, however, a clear and decisive objection to process metaphysics and it is not necessary to frame processes in theological terms. Notable non-theists who have adopted some form of process metaphysics at some point of their careers include Russell, Ayer, and Carnap. More recently, Rescher, Seibt, and Campbell have done substantive work to move the metaphysical discussion from a substance to process metaphysics, but they have done so without directly engaging the concerns of contemporary analytic philosophers. By squarely situating this current work in the analytic tradition, I argue that

we lack historical, conceptual, and naturalistic reasons for rejecting process metaphysics. In doing so, the work serves as a foundation for understanding how a metaphysics that takes process as primary has the capacity to overcome challenges facing contemporary substance metaphysics.

The main argument can be summarized as follows. In thinking about ontology, as the study of being or what fundamentally exists, we can adopt an ontology that either takes substances or processes as primary. There are, however, both commonsense and naturalistic reasons for not fully adopting a substance ontology, which indicate that we ought to suspend judgment with respect to the acceptance of a substance ontology. Doing so allows room to further explore other ontologies. As it turns out, there are both commonsense and naturalistic reasons for further pursuing a process ontology. Furthermore, adopting a process ontology allows us to overcome many of the difficulties facing a substance ontology while also accommodating many of the phenomena that substance ontologies were appealed to for explanation. Given these reasons, we have both commonsense and naturalistic reasons for pursuing and developing a metaphysics without substance.

In developing this project, I look at intuitions as the starting point for doing metaphysics, but I do not give them the amount of evidentiary support found in many other works provided by armchair metaphysicians. While many other naturalistically inclined metaphysicians are quick to reject armchair methods and their respective theories, my concern in developing an attenuated methodological naturalism is to suspend judgment with regard to those metaphysical theories that are the product of purely rationalistic *a priori* methods or come into conflict with our best contemporary scientific theories. In doing metaphysics, we must be sensitive to the debates that occur in the sciences, including the fact that past scientific theories have gotten many things quite wrong when it comes to ontological issues. Given that science also happens to be our most reliable epistemic filter, we shouldn't reject the ontological implications of scientific developments either. So, the resulting method is an attenuated naturalism—keep developing and exploring those ontological frameworks that come into conflict with sciences but don't celebrate that they're the accurate ones either. Instead, treat those theories as working hypotheses. I acknowledge that this may be too generous of an approach, since we might be inclined to think that any ontology should be explored, but I am making a distinction between exploring, developing, and testing an ontology and accepting the ontology as being true.

My own approach is to suggest that intuitions are insufficient for the acceptance or rejection of a metaphysical theory. There is certainly more work to be done in determining when we ought to, if ever, wholeheartedly endorse or reject a metaphysical theory.

When looking at the substance view, it appears that we don't have anything beyond intuitions and tradition for their acceptance. I acknowledge that substance metaphysics has certainly helped us make many philosophical developments with regard to our understanding of laws, organisms, change, structures, and objects. But if we accept that knowledge is not purely cumulative—that we shouldn't expect to fully incorporate previously held views, even in philosophy—then we should update our metaphysical accounts. It is not immediately clear, though, how we should update a metaphysical theory. The approach I suggest in this discussion is that we should reject a position if we see that it comes into conflict with contemporary scientific developments, is fraught with internal problems, or is only the product of ad hoc refinements. This approach has led to the rejection of alchemy, natural magic, and astrology as bona fide science. While alchemy was once thought to be the best science and account of elemental interactions, it was by looking at those interactions that we were then able to establish the foundations of chemistry. Substance metaphysics has helped us take a closer look at categories, laws, objects, organisms, and properties, but it is likely to be incorrect as a general metaphysical theory. There may still be some epistemic benefits to thinking of things in substance-based terms, but sometimes those epistemic benefits will be secondary to the metaphysical concerns. So, even granting substance metaphysics some epistemic benefits, an account that takes processes as primary will be more internally consistent and supported by naturalistic developments.

The present discussion unfolds as follows: Chapter 1 discusses the historical developments of the ontological priority debate by looking at early Milesians, including Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, and Heraclitus of Ephesus, to illustrate how we can understand the ontological priority debate in terms of either taking substances or processes as primary. Chapter 2 provides a general primer on substance metaphysics, including the similarities and differences between Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian accounts of substances. The chapter then provides a detailed discussion of Lowe's own account of substances as being the most developed of the neo-Aristotelians'. Chapter 3 discusses the problems with a substance account if we follow neo-Aristotelians in giving common

sense a privileged methodological role. In particular, the neo-Aristotelian account of substance appears inadequate in explaining substantial change. Chapter 4 identifies some problems for the substance framework if we take into account developments from the natural sciences, including physics and biology. The second half of the chapter then discusses some potential objections to my argument, which make attempts to understand the extent to which metaphysics should be naturalized and primary to the sciences. Chapter 5 further responds to the objections in Chap. 4 by developing and defending an account of attenuated methodological naturalism, which maintains that we should only suspend judgment of those metaphysical theories that come into conflict with the natural sciences. This view is weaker than Papineau's own formulation of methodological naturalism that has us rejecting those metaphysical theories that are at odds with empirical claims. While I believe that Papineau's view is pragmatically beneficial, I don't believe it is adequate for assessing our metaphysical endeavors. Chapter 6 looks at how the reasons for not further pursuing a process metaphysics within contemporary mainstream analytic metaphysics is likely the result of sociological reasons. The chapter then goes on to show how a process metaphysics can accommodate the naturalistic developments that posed difficulties to the substance framework. Chapter 7 concludes the discussion by considering how future research projects would include looking at various phenomenon that substance metaphysicians have made some progress on and attempting to develop a process metaphysics that does just as well as those substance accounts while not developing additional obstacles.

My hope in developing this discussion is that it will enliven the discussion among ontologists and metaphysicians to determine whether we should give ontological priority to processes or substances. While I believe that advanced students in philosophy will benefit from the discussion as it is presented here, it is intended to engage scientists and philosophers who are interested in understanding how their own work informs each other as they aim to develop a coherent account of reality. More specifically, I hope that both neo-Aristotelians and process metaphysicians will be inclined to engage one another as a result of the arguments I make in the following pages.

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