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Process Ontology as a Paradigm for Scientifically Grounded Metaphysics?

I shall begin this talk with some reflections on what scientific metaphysics could be, and how it should aim to steer between the Scylla of analytic metaphysics and the Charybdis of metaphysical scepticism. My proposal is that analytic metaphysics may be able to articulate different and very general possible ways for the world to be, but this is an idle exercise unless there is some way, at least in principle, of deciding empirically which possibility obtains. I shall argue that the question whether the world consists of things or of processes can serve as a paradigm for scientific, or naturalistic, metaphysics. There is work for a traditional analytic metaphysics in exploring the differences between a process world and a thing world. And in fact the biological science of the last 150 years or more has made it increasingly clear that we live in a process world. Or so I argue. Perhaps more important still, there remain many widely held beliefs about the living world that cannot be true if we live in a process world. Scientific metaphysics is not merely the conclusion of a line of argument, but has important implications of its own.