

Craig, William Lane and Moreland, J. P. (eds.) *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*,
London: Routledge, 2000, xv+286, £60.00

Craig and Moreland claim a threefold purpose for the essays and the book. First, the contributors want to show that “naturalism” should be rejected. Second, they want to establish that a consistent “naturalist” must be a “reductive physicalist”. And, third, they aim to provide a “sample” of work by contemporary theistic philosophers of religion which makes a substantial contribution to the project of criticising “naturalism”. The contributors to the book are all theists; and they are united in their opposition to “naturalism”.

In the opening essay, Paul Moser and David Yandell argue that “naturalism” is incoherent. The remaining essays contain arguments for the conclusion that “naturalism” cannot deal adequately with some particular topic or domain of enquiry: knowledge (Dallas Willard); scientific realism (Robert Koons); realism about universals (Moreland); material objects (Michael Rea); mind (Charles Taliaferro); libertarian agency (Stewart Goetz); morality (John E. Hare); cosmology (Craig); and biological design (William Dembski).

The characterisation of “naturalism” varies widely from one essay to the next; and, in some cases, the doctrine characterised is so strong that its defeat could hardly be thought to lend any assistance to the promotion of theism. If I were asked to characterise “naturalism” I would say something like this: that “naturalists” suppose that there are no non-abstract objects which are causally related to things hereabouts but not spatially related to things hereabouts; and that “naturalists” also suppose that legitimate methods for finding out about (causal laws governing the behaviour of) particular non-abstract objects which are causally related to things hereabouts must include some component of empirical investigation. Of course, many “naturalists” hold further, and stronger, beliefs: but what I have given seems to me to be a plausible “common core” for “naturalism”. On this characterisation, the ontological component of “naturalism” is not justified by the methodological component of “naturalism”—as it is on many of the characterisations in the essays under review; rather, the justification for the ontological component is the—admittedly contestable—case-by-case claim that “non-natural” objects—gods, souls and entelechies—do not earn their theoretical keep. Clearly, it is plausible to suppose that the defeat of “naturalism” as I have characterised it would lend assistance to the promotion of theism.

Some of the essays bear directly on the kind of naturalism which I have just outlined. For example, Taliaferro argues that facts about our experience support the conclusion that we have, or are, non-spatially-located souls; Hare argues that his ‘moral gap’ conception of morality supports the conclusion that there is a god who makes it possible for us to meet the demands of morality; Dembski argues that the presence of what Michael Behe calls “irreducible complexity” in the natural world is evidence for a god who designed the natural world; Craig argues that Big Bang cosmology establishes the existence of god who created the natural world; and Goetz argues that the fact that we have libertarian freedom entails that we have, or are, non-spatially-located souls. All of these arguments are of a familiar kind; and I expect that few naturalists will be made to feel less secure in their abilities to meet these kinds of arguments by these new presentations. (Having said this, it should be noted that these essays are all valuable and well-presented summaries of much larger bodies of work.

Moreover, some of them do contain surprises. For example, at p.232, Craig effectively concedes that his beloved *kalam* cosmological argument is powerless against B-theorists: in his view, it is not true according to B-theorists that the universe began to exist! I think that Craig is wrong about what is true according to the B-theory; so there is no good news for opponents of the *kalam* cosmological argument here. However, there may be good news for those who defend “the Gott–Li–Xin hypothesis”—i.e. the hypothesis that the universe is self-created—since Craig’s attack on it relies on this mistake about what is true according to the B-theory.)

Koons essay also seems to me to bear on the kind of naturalism outlined above. He argues that the following five theses are inconsistent: (SR) Our scientific theories and models are theories and models of the real world, including its laws, as it is objectively, independent of our preferences and practices; and scientific methods tend in the long run to increase our stock of real knowledge; (OR) The world of space and time is causally closed; (RN) There exists a correct naturalistic account of knowledge and intentionality; (PS) A preference for simplicity is a pervasive feature of scientific practice; and (ER) Reliability is an essential component of knowledge and intentionality on any naturalistic account of these. Taking (SR), (RN), (PS) and (ER) to be true, Koons draws the conclusion that (OR) is false. This seems to me to be an interesting argument. Plainly, there are various points at which it might be challenged; but I doubt that all naturalists will agree on the location of the major weaknesses.

The remaining essays appear to have no bearing on the kind of naturalism outlined above. Moreland supposes that naturalism is “the view that the spatiotemporal universe of entities postulated by our best (or ideal) theories in the physical sciences is all there is”; and then goes on to argue for a transcendental realism about universals which is clearly inconsistent with naturalism as thus characterised. Rea supposes that naturalism is “a plan to use the methods of the natural sciences, and those methods alone, in the development of philosophical theories”; and then goes on to argue that those methods are unable to tell us when certain kinds of modal properties are possessed by occupants of regions of spacetime. Moser and Yandell suppose that naturalism is the view that (1) “every real entity consists of or is somehow ontically grounded in the objects countenanced by the hypothetically completed empirical sciences”, and (2) “every legitimate method of acquiring knowledge consists of or is grounded in the hypothetically completed methods of the empirical sciences”; and then go on to argue that this naturalism is self-defeating since it is not itself warranted by the hypothetically completed methods of the empirical sciences. Willard claims that “honest naturalism” must be “unqualified [reductive] physicalism”; and then argues that each of truth, entailment, noetic unity, and intentionality is both non-physical and yet required in order for there to be knowledge. Again, the basic strategies of the arguments presented here are not new. It is well-known that radical empiricism faces difficulties in accounting for the epistemology of mathematics, logic, modality, and much else besides; and it is also well-known that radical physicalism faces difficulties in accounting for the ontology of mathematics, logic, modality, and much else besides. However, it should be clear that the kind of naturalism outlined above requires no commitment to either radical empiricism or radical physicalism.

The editors—and several of the contributors—argue against the separation of naturalism from radical physicalism and radical empiricism which I have endorsed

here. The editors claim that this separation is “*ad hoc*”; that it “gives up the claim that science and science alone is adequate to explain everything in one’s ontology”; that it “weakens or trivialises what it means to ‘locate’ problematic entities in one’s ontology”. However, it seems to me that it requires further argument to establish that positions which are committed to core naturalism as I characterised it above are *ad hoc* if, e.g., they refuse to go on to accept that all properties which are instantiated in the world can be explicitly defined in terms of some canonical list of physical properties (mass, charge, spin and the like). Moreover, it is worth emphasising that the most problematic domains here—logic, mathematics, modality, basic categorial structures, and so forth—are equally problematic for theists. On any sensible theistic view, logic, mathematics, modality, basic categorial structures, and so forth are prior to God: consequently, these disciplines are no more comfortably integrated into a theistic world view than into a naturalistic one. Furthermore, the postulation of souls provides no advance at all in understanding how knowledge of logic, or mathematics, or modality, or basic categorial structures is possible. (Many of the essays make references to an uncharacterised “first philosophy”; almost without fail, they seem to suppose that “first philosophy” must lead to God and immaterial souls. But that assumption seems to me to be utterly gratuitous. There is nothing in the least “*ad hoc*” about the idea, e.g., that “first philosophy” leads straight to a global supervenience of the actual and contingent upon the microphysical.)

This book provides a good introduction to work by some contemporary American theistic philosophers of religion. Moreover, it gives clear expression to the recent resurgence in polemical Christian philosophy of religion in American academic philosophy. As I have indicated with the very sketchy comments above, there is plenty of room for critical engagement with the presented material.

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