

**Jack Ritchie**

*Understanding Naturalism.*

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Naturalism is a ubiquitous feature of contemporary discussions in philosophy. Yet the motivations and assumptions that shape and sustain this perspective are rarely clarified. Too often we are left with a series of slogans such as ‘philosophy is continuous with science’, or ‘there is no first philosophy’, and an overwhelming emphasis on the need to naturalize mind, meaning and knowledge. This volume seeks to help clarify this situation by providing an introductory overview of the issues, positions, and motivations that comprise this naturalist turn in philosophy. With the exception of ethics, all the major areas are discussed, with Ritchie surveying recent work in naturalized epistemology, philosophy of science, metaphysics and the philosophy of language. The result is a comprehensive and insightful introduction to the main issues discussed in contemporary naturalism. It includes a brief guide to additional reading and some study questions for further discussion. The book is ideal, then, for those first approaching the study of philosophical naturalism, and it makes a useful resource for students and instructors alike.

Ritchie begins by examining possible meanings of the word ‘natural’. We learn that contemporary philosophical naturalism is not concerned with the supernatural, but with entities such as universals, meanings, and numbers that may seem hard to locate in the world described by natural science. Other naturalists favor a sense of ‘natural’ that means ‘not mucked about with; nothing is added’ (3). On this view, science is taken on its own terms with the naturalist philosopher then seeking to better understand scientific practice and its varied successes. Lastly, we face the normative-natural distinction, leading to what Ritchie thinks is the most difficult challenge for the naturalist—making sense of the normative, evaluative features of human life (6-7).

Naturalism often emphasizes the rejection of any independent philosophical perspective from which to ground the results of science, that is, the rejection of first philosophy. Ritchie devotes a chapter to explaining this so-called first philosophy as it appears in the work of such luminaries as Descartes, Kant and Rudolf Carnap. Consider the skeptical challenge posed by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Taking our ideas as representations that stand between us and the external world, we can further wonder what justifies our confidence that they accurately reflect the world beyond (10). This challenge is depicted as one that philosophy must answer, since any scientific account of how, for example, perception works, would be as susceptible to the skeptical challenge as our beliefs more generally. It would appear we need to address this philosophical worry *first*, independently of science, hence the idea of first philosophy

(11).

Chapter 2 turns to Quine's influential rejection of this view of philosophy, and his alternative conception of naturalistic philosophy and naturalized epistemology. This view famously recommends the pursuit of philosophical questions from within the available resources found in empirical science. Ritchie provides a useful overview of Quine's naturalized epistemology as an account of the causal connections between sensory stimulation and our advanced scientific pronouncements (45-8). Quine's understanding of the skeptical challenge illustrates his basic philosophical stance. For him, skeptical doubts arise from within science itself. We are then, as naturalists, justified in using scientific resources to respond to such challenges. The radical skeptical challenge of Cartesian first philosophy becomes a local scientific doubt addressed by doing more science (39-40).

Further departures from traditional epistemology are seen in Chapter 3, where Ritchie discusses the epistemological view known as reliabilism. This view replaces a concern over the justification of beliefs with an emphasis on the reliability of the mechanisms that causally generate such beliefs. What is then important for knowing is not whether one can give explicit justification for a belief, but whether it is generated by a reliable mechanism, where reliability is understood as more likely to produce true beliefs (55). As a normative, evaluative notion, justification may appear difficult to explain using the descriptive resources of empirical science. The emphasis on the reliability of belief mechanisms thus represents an attractive alternative for the naturalist, one that can be examined empirically and form a central part of a naturalized view of knowledge (56-7).

In Chapter 4 Ritchie discusses two important reasons why naturalists are interested in science. The first concerns the attempt to explain the methodological norms that govern scientific practice, and to do so only from within the resources of empirical science. The second issue focuses on the possibility of science serving as a model for philosophical inquiry (93). He illustrates this latter possibility by examining how some philosophers have argued for realist positions in science. In addressing ontological questions concerning the existence of numbers, or universals, philosophers often appeal to a method of inference known as 'inference to the best explanation'. In contrast to this more 'constructive' naturalism, Ritchie offers deflationary naturalism, which seeks to take science at face value and then construct an account of methods more in tune with actual scientific practice (106-8).

The next two chapters focus more exclusively on a number of ontological issues presenting some further varieties of metaphysical naturalism. The discussion focuses on physicalism—the view that everything is material—and on the issue of accounting for the mental realm within this strict physicalist view (110). Ritchie notes how an interesting feature of these discussions is their abstract character, as they are largely driven by philosophical assumptions distinct from empirical scientific work (132). Moreover, we

find other naturalists pursuing metaphysical speculations that recommend an apparent discontinuity of methods between philosophy and science. Ritchie's own view is a form of deflationary naturalism, and leads to his rejection of physicalism on the grounds that science itself remains inconclusive on this metaphysical issue (158).

The last substantive chapter focuses on topics of meaning and truth. Not surprisingly, naturalism offers a variety of ways of handling such topics. Two general approaches are distinguished. The first begins with a naturalistic view of mental representation or content, and then explains truth in terms of a relation between such representations and the world. Other naturalists start with a deflationary view of truth and then proceed to construct a view of meaning where truth plays no substantive role (159).

Given Ritchie's emphasis on the presence of abstract philosophical speculation within naturalism, it seems a little odd to find Quine guilty of such armchair speculation (52-3). Perhaps this is something even naturalism can't naturalize. It is probably unfair to mention sins of omission, especially given the detailed treatment of issues found in the text (and which I have only been able to hint at here), but the naturalizers in moral philosophy might have had a voice, especially given Ritchie's claim that the normative, evaluative features of human life are the hardest outstanding problem for the naturalist. But none of this detracts from the value of this impressive overview of contemporary naturalism.

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