

## Editorial preface

**Ronald L. Hall**

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Despite the efforts of many to reconcile religion and science, the conflict rages. These days, the term “naturalism,”—a term that at one time had a wide currency among philosophers, especially within discussions of ethics—has again risen to the forefront within the philosophy of religion as a trope for one form or another of materialism, or more generally, but less accurately, for science. While defenders of religion are often not quite ready to embrace any form of “super-naturalism” or even any form of “non-naturalism,” they are also not ready to capitulate to any form of naturalism that commits religion to the flames.

This issue of our Journal registers some important dimensions of this ongoing debate. Since naturalism is usually considered the conceptual companion of atheism, it is no wonder that there is urgency amongst theists to defeat it. Alvin Plantinga has been a leading figure in this effort. This defense of theism via the defeat of naturalism has met with resistance. We see this in our first article where Feng Ye challenges Plantinga’s evolutionary argument against naturalism.

In the second article, Gregory Dawes questions whether religious thinkers can any longer sensibly defeat what he calls the procedural assumptions of naturalism. As he reckons, the basic methodological assumption of naturalism is that the best explanation for any phenomenon is one that appeals to publically accessible bodies of evidence. While he admits that in our day the results of following the naturalistic method have favored metaphysical naturalism (that position that most directly challenges theism) he concedes that there is no necessity in this. Indeed, if religious thinkers want to defeat metaphysical naturalism they do not need to abandon methodological naturalism; indeed, there is some question as to whether this is even possible in a world in which this method of inquiry has become increasingly non-negotiable. As Dawes

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R. L. Hall (✉)  
Stetson University, DeLand, FL, USA  
e-mail: ronhalljournal@stetson.edu

argues, all that religious thinkers need to do to trump metaphysical naturalism is to follow methodological naturalism's procedure (by appealing to publically accessible bodies of evidence) and come up with explanations for a range of phenomena that favor metaphysical theism. But he concludes that his has not yet been done, and until it is, metaphysical naturalism remains defensible.

In our third essay, Lynne Rudder Baker argues that one can be a materialist and a naturalist of sorts (taking human persons to be fully constituted within the natural world) without being a metaphysical naturalist. Indeed, being a "constitutional" materialist, she argues is more in keeping with Christian affirmations of the human body (the Incarnation and the Resurrection, for example) than dualism. On this view, a qualified naturalistic materialism is perfectly compatible with the religious commitments of Christianity, indeed, even implied by them.

Finally, there are those who take comfort in thinking that even in the most hardened naturalist we can always find a hesitation or doubt that may concede something to the plausibility of theism. In our fourth essay, this is what Benjamin S. Cordry takes up in his consideration of the so-called confession (via Philo) of David Hume to the effect that there might be some design in nature and hence some plausibility to theism. Some have even called Hume a "closet" theist, or at least an agnostic. But Cordry argues that Hume is not a theist or an agnostic but rather a "soft atheist". By this he does not mean that he is not an atheist, but only that he is not a dogmatic one. Hume's incipient pluralism would not allow this.

Our book reviews take us down similar paths in this complicated debate.

Summer greetings to you all.