

A Plea for Antinaturalism

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One sentence:

The explanation of the natural relies upon and promotes the development of the artificial and so invites the elaboration of an antinaturalist philosophy.

Abstract

Contemporary science seems to be caught in a strange predicament. On the one hand, it holds a firm and reasonable commitment to a healthy naturalistic methodology, according to which explanations of natural phenomena should not overstep the limits of the natural itself. This “closure” applies also to social and human phenomena, from economics and sociology to neuroscience and psychology. On the other hand, contemporary science is also inextricably dependent on technologies, especially Information and Communication Technologies, which it exploits and fosters. Yet such technologies are increasingly “artificializing” or “denaturalising” the world, human experiences and interactions, as well as what qualifies as real. So the search for the ultimate explanation of the natural seems to rely upon and promote the development of the artificial. In this paper, I try to find a way out of this apparently strange predicament. I argue that the naturalisation of our knowledge of the world is either trivial (naturalism as anti-supernaturalism), or mistaken (naturalism as anti-constructionism). I do so through the following steps. First, I distinguish between different kinds of naturalism. Second, I show that the kinds that are justified are no longer very interesting, whereas the kind of naturalism that is still interesting today is now in need of revision in order to remain acceptable. Third, I argue that such a kind of naturalism may be revised on the basis of a realistic philosophy of information, according to which knowing is a constructive activity through which we do not represent the phenomena we investigate, but build more or less correct informational models (semantic artefacts) of them. Finally, I defend the view that the natural is in itself artefactual (an epistemic construction), and that the information revolution is disclosing a tension not between the natural and the non-natural, but between a user’s

and a producer's interpretation of knowledge. The outcome is a philosophical view of knowledge and science in the information age that may be called constructionist.