

Guest Editors' Preface
Is It Natural to be Naturalist?

Carola Barbero
Università di Torino
Dipartimento di filosofia
carola.barbero@gmail.com

Mario De Caro
Università di Roma Tre
Dipartimento di Filosofia
mario.decaro@gmail.com

Alberto Voltolini
Università di Torino
Dipartimento di Filosofia
alberto.voltolini@unito.it

It is possible to speak about “naturalism” in many different ways – perhaps as many as the ways in which nature has been conceived by philosophy and common sense over the centuries. Nowadays, the theme of philosophical naturalism – as well as the connected issue of how far the naturalization of the controversial entities can go – is back at the center of the philosophical debate, particularly in the wake of the big success achieved by cognitive sciences.

In this light, the first issue one should deal with is how exactly the concept of “naturalism” should be meant. Among the different forms of naturalism that are at stake nowadays in the philosophical debate, two are the most relevant. These are scientific naturalism and liberal naturalism; they are respectively connected to two very different research programs. The main differences between these two forms of naturalism lie in their different ontological, epistemological and methodological conceptions. From the ontological point of view, the first kind of naturalism relies on the ontology of natural sciences as the benchmark of what there is, whereas the second kind accepts a wider ontology – which includes evaluative, modal, phenomenological, intentional and abstract entities –, which only requires the compatibility (but not the reducibility) of those entities to the entities accepted by the natural sciences. From the methodological point of view, scientific naturalism requires the continuity between science and philosophy, whereas liberal naturalism does not. From the epistemological point of view, while scientific naturalism claims that in principle every case of genuine

knowledge is reducible to scientific knowledge, liberal naturalism is not committed to this view, and it may also accept other forms of knowledge (such as a priori knowledge or intuition), as long as they are not incompatible with the scientific view of the world.

In this volume, the discussion concerns both general metaphilosophical issues (what are, in general, the prerogatives of naturalism? Which is the best version of philosophical naturalism?) and the viability of several projects of naturalization in different domains of philosophical research. Francesco Ferretti discusses the issue of whether the development of human language is a natural phenomenon, i.e. if it is a phenomenon explainable in evolutionary terms. In this light, he advocates the hypothesis according to which brain and language developed together. On the background of a framework in which writing is both a means to record and to communicate, so that thought itself is outlined as a form of writing, Maurizio Ferraris defends a conception of language seen as a non-biological invention, as one of the constitutive elements of the so-called “second nature”. Paolo Tripodi discusses whether Wittgenstein should be considered a naturalist philosopher. He argues that we should give a positive answer to this question, if the term “naturalism” is also meant to cover a liberal view that sees our “natural history” (in a broad sense that covers both biology and culture) as natural. Alfredo Paternoster discusses which are the mental phenomena that can be naturalized. Against the received view on the matter, he defends the possibility of naturalizing the qualitative states but not the intentional states. Nicola Vassallo defends a feminist naturalized epistemology of a non-normative kind (i.e. an epistemology that does not explain how we should know, but rather how it happens that we know) that takes into account the biological and cultural factors of sex and gender, and asks how such a conception could stay on the same level of a reliabilist conception of knowledge. Finally, Mario De Caro and Alberto Voltolini outline the criteria of a good explanatory theory – namely a theory that is explanatorily adequate with respect to its data – and conclude that only liberal naturalism, but not scientific naturalism, can meet these criteria.