

Public Abstract

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Ph.D.

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A Defense of Alvin Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism

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Graduation Term: Spring 2005

Naturalism is a philosophical worldview which denies the existence of non-physical entities, and hence is typically understood to exclude the existence of God. This creates a difficulty which has been often exploited by opponents of naturalism. For if there is no God, it seems to follow that our species developed its brain and cognitive powers in virtue of an unsupervised course of evolution. Should such brains be regarded as reliable? If not, then we should call into question the convictions of such brains when those brains happen to form beliefs. And specifically, we ought to question the conviction of such a brain when it opts to believe in the philosophical doctrine of naturalism. So, naturalism is alleged to be a self-defeating doctrine.

This line of argumentation has been developed in many ways and has a long history. But recently Alvin Plantinga has presented the most developed presentation of it, largely in virtue of employing the formal rigor of contemporary analytic philosophy. Consequently, the argument has generated a large number of attacks in the literature; many of these attacks confuse Plantinga's formulation of the argument with less sophisticated forms. My research demonstrates that Plantinga's form of this argument survives these attacks when correctly understood. Whether this argument will change the mind of a naturalist, it will continue to constitute a challenge to the still very popular hope of building a thoroughly naturalistic theory of knowledge.