

Review of: "On the ongoing need for naturalistic philosophy to interpret what occupational science is doing"

Heath Williams

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This article suffers from some problems with the very basic conceptual framework it employs. Let's look at its key terms. Firstly, 'naturalistic.' I've never really heard this term used to describe a philosophical approach before. I notice that this term is taken up by the authors from an article from this journal; self-referentiality is a dangerous practice. There is of course the movement of 'naturalism' in philosophy, of the type that began with the Logical Positivists and gained real momentum with Quine. This approach basically means that philosophy ought to assist natural science and that it should also be free to draw on natural science in order to conduct its business. I think this is perhaps what the authors mean to mean, but it is ill defined. They say: 'naturalistic philosophy' (NP) "performs the tasks of conceptual clarification and innovation, in relation to the interpretation of scientific discourse." I don't actually know what this means and without an example it's hard to imagine. Is NP some sort of commentator and communicator of science? It's certainly not a very good description of naturalism in philosophy. This lack of definition causes problems all the way down.

To wit: there are two forms of naturalism commonly recognised in philosophy: methodological and ontological. The former: only natural scientific methods count as sources for knowledge. Ontological: only those things posited by scientific theories are real. The key thing to keep in mind is that, as a movement in philosophy, what 'naturalists' mean by 'science' is hard sciences. At base, physics really, but we can include things like biology and astronomy. But naturalism is generally a form of physics-alism. As a result, the things that are *in question* for naturalists are, firstly, the status of the arts, like history or cultural studies. But, secondly and importantly as far as this article is concerned, any form of psychology other than neurology or neurologically informed and integrated cognitive science. Naturalists are quite dubious about these other forms of academic study and knowledge, and think that, if they count, they can be reduced or at least made continuous with one of the harder disciplines eventually.

Why is this important? Well, there's two related reasons. Firstly, because *phenomenology* as a philosophical movement is quite heavily opposed to naturalism as I have described it above. Secondly, because naturalism in philosophy would be quite dubious of the methods and results of qualitative psychology. And, the qualitative phenomenological approach seems to be grouped by the authors of this article as part of natural science, as part of 'naturalistic philosophy.' Naturalists and philosophical phenomenologists (PP) alike would deny this grouping.

The authors seem to base their claim that phenomenology is a naturalistic philosophy on the article by Aspers. There's a few problems with this. Firstly, again, that article just isn't very well-known, and most people wouldn't count on it to provide a good definition of phenomenology. Two, this article defines a version of qualitative phenomenology (QP). QP is a

subdiscipline of phenomenology, and its relation to the broader movement of, say, PP is a matter of great debate (see Zahavi; Smith; Van Manen). Overlooking this fact will turn most people engaged in PP off immediately. Third, the authors along with Apsers think of phenomenology as empirical. This could only ever be true if one greatly expands our definition of 'empirical.' Phenomenologists certainly contend that their approach is empirical, but only because they have a much wider definition of what constitutes 'experience' than do natural scientists, the latter of which define experience in sensory terms. Natural scientists would deny that phenomenology or qualitative science for that matter are 'empirical' in the way they use that term. So, by counting the qualitative psychological approach, let alone the phenomenological qualitative psychological approach, amongst the natural sciences, the authors already belie a misunderstanding of their key concept. Any naturalistic philosopher would be dubious of this claim, because the methods and the things posited by qualitative science don't match up with what STEM science says. The problem, therefore, is that referring to both phenomenology and hard science as 'empirical' presents, therefore, a dangerous equivocation. Going on to lump phenomenology in with naturalistic philosophy on that basis is equally problematic, especially given the former's doubts about naturalism.

This can all be corrected by merely saying that the authors think philosophy can help OT. Saying that naturalistic philosophy can is a misstep.