

4-1-2011

## J. P. Moreland, THE RECALCITRANT IMAGO DEI: HUMAN PERSONS AND THE FAILURE OF NATURALISM

C. Stephen Layman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Layman, C. Stephen (2011) "J. P. Moreland, THE RECALCITRANT IMAGO DEI: HUMAN PERSONS AND THE FAILURE OF NATURALISM," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil20112829

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol28/iss2/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

the source of her actions in a certain way" (p. 12); and third, to develop an argument "that agents have free will only if they are the sources of their choices in a certain way, and being the source of one's actions in this way requires the falsity of causal determinism" (p. 16). Despite the worries outlined above, I think it is clear that Timpe fulfills all three of his goals, and that's an impressive accomplishment for a mere 121 pages of text. I commend his book to you.

*The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism*, by J. P. Moreland. London: SCM Press, 2009. Pp. xiii + 180. £40.00 (paper).

C. STEPHEN LAYMAN, Seattle Pacific University

J. P. Moreland's *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* (hereafter, *Imago Dei*) is a sustained critique of naturalistic views of the human person. Moreland argues that naturalism fails to explain (or provides inferior explanations for) consciousness, free will, rationality, the self, and moral value; theism offers a better explanation in every case. Given the number and complexity of the arguments in *Imago Dei*, the summary which follows is inevitably highly selective.

*Why does naturalism provide an inferior explanation of consciousness?* First, those naturalists who deny property dualism run up against strong arguments, since mental states plausibly have a number of features that physical states lack, including: (1) being directed toward an object, (2) being private, (3) being non-spatial (i.e., neither extended in nor located in space), and (4) having a felt-quality (e.g., what it feels like to be in pain). Second, those naturalists who accept property dualism have difficulty providing adequate explanations of mental states for such reasons as:

1. The "regular correlation between types of mental states and physical states seems radically contingent" (p. 25). Why is pain (rather than a feeling of joy) correlated with C-fiber firing? And how can naturalists explain the apparent possibility of "zombie" worlds and of "inverted qualia" worlds?
2. Given that naturalists accept the causal closure of the physical domain, and given the irreducibility of mental states, naturalists must accept epiphenomenalism; but epiphenomenalism is surely false since mental causation seems undeniable.
3. Evolutionary explanations of the mental don't work because "the functions organisms carry out consciously *could just as well have been done unconsciously.*" And "it is the output [bodily movement], not what caused it, that bears on the struggle for reproductive advantage" (p. 26).

Theism provides better explanations in each case. For example, the connections between the physical and the mental are contingent because they are due to free choices God makes, as Creator. (By contrast, according to many naturalists, if two worlds are physical duplicates, then they must also be psychological duplicates.) Furthermore, unlike naturalists, traditional theists reject the causal closure of the physical domain. Finally, theists are free to supplement evolutionary explanations with appeals to divine purpose.

*Why does naturalism provide an inferior explanation of free will?* In a nutshell, because the libertarian view of free will is far more plausible than the compatibilist view and because naturalism comports poorly with libertarianism. Here Moreland quotes well known naturalists (such as John Searle) who grant the intuitive plausibility of the libertarian view, while admitting that naturalism excludes it. Moreland offers several reasons for thinking that free actions are “virtually impossible to reconcile with the naturalist standpoint” (p. 44), among them: (A) Free action requires a *categorical* ability to do otherwise—a mere conditional ability (i.e., one would refrain from the act *if* one wanted or intended to) is not enough. For naturalists, however, particular events are subsumed under laws of nature, and so “the physical conditions are sufficient to determine or fix the chances of the next event” (p. 48). And there seems to be no room for a categorical power to do otherwise in this law-governed scheme. (B) Libertarian free will involves (irreducibly) mental causation. And Moreland employs Kim’s exclusion argument to show that naturalism apparently rules out causation by (irreducibly) mental factors. (Roughly, every physical event—and hence every brain event—has a physical cause. But brain events do not have two causes, i.e., an irreducibly mental cause in addition to a physical cause.)

*Why does naturalism provide an inferior explanation of rationality?* (A) As noted above, naturalists falter in explaining free will, and there “are several aspects to human reasoning that require free will” (p. 73). “Acts of deliberation presuppose that there is more than one possible conclusion one could reach, but if determinism is true, there is only one outcome possible” (p. 74). Moreover, our logical conclusions are ones we *ought* to draw and ought implies can (p. 74). (B) Naturalists have difficulty accounting for *a priori* knowledge and for knowledge via introspection. For example, naturalism is unable to account for a suitable relation between the epistemic subject and the abstract objects of *a priori* knowledge, which are causally inert (p. 78). Also, introspection requires a relationship between the mental state and the introspecting subject which naturalism has difficulty explaining: Assuming the relationship is causal, it seems to be mental-physical or mental-mental, and naturalism falters in explaining such relations. (C) “Rational deliberation exhibits irreducible teleology” (p. 83) since a conclusion is the *end* for the sake of which one reasons. But how can teleological explanations of deliberation be reconciled with a scheme in which efficient, event-event causation is the

underlying reality? (D) Most if not all mental states are intentional, i.e., of or about something (e.g., a thought *about* triangles). Naturalists often try to reduce intentionality to causal relations of input and output, but Searle's famous Chinese Room argument shows that such attempts fail (p. 93). (E) Assuming that brain-events are governed by laws of nature, "there is no room for the presence of one thought (e.g., if P then Q and P) to be responsible for the occurrence of a later thought (e.g., Q), given the dependence of the mental on the physical and the causal closure of the physical" (p. 95).

*Why does naturalism provide an inferior explanation of the self?* (A) Our direct awareness of ourselves indicates that "body switch cases are perfectly possible" (p. 111) and so is disembodied survival. Physicalist views of mind appear unable to account for such possibilities. (B) Even if we set aside the possibility of disembodied existence, it remains possible that I exist but my body does not. For example, the following scenario is metaphysically possible:

I continue to read the paper throughout a process during which each macropart of my body is replaced by others in a microsecond and the original parts are annihilated. If the process occurs rapidly, my body will not continue to exist but I do since I continue to read the paper (p. 116).

So, possibly I exist when my body does not, and hence I am not identical to my body.

(C) Moreland is in sympathy with an argument advanced by Stewart Goetz: While every physical body is essentially a complex entity (i.e., one having separable parts), I am essentially a simple entity (i.e., one having no separable parts). So, I am not identical with my (or any) physical body (p. 118). Moreland grants that this argument leaves open the possibility that a person "is identical with a proper part of his body that is an atomic simple" (p. 118), but ultimately concludes that this possibility is not very plausible.

*Why does naturalism provide an inferior explanation of moral value?* Of course, many naturalists deny that there are objective moral values. But even naturalists who accept "a sort of moral Platonism such that various value properties are universals and, as such, simply part of the furniture of the world, [have] . . . no explanation whatever as to why these properties were ever exemplified" (p. 147). For example, how is it that evolutionary mechanisms have produced animals that have a high, intrinsic, and equal value? To claim that such "intrinsic value properties supervene upon human biology is just an assertion that names the problem to be solved, it is not a solution" (p. 148).

As regards the content of morality, it "would seem that naturalism most naturally implies a consequentialist evolutionary ethical understanding of moral action; specifically, a view of moral action as a means to reproductive success" (p. 151). But this understanding of morality is highly problematic. For one thing, it would seem to be open to the "publicity

objection," i.e., ironically, teaching it "would not promote reproductive advantage" (p. 152).

Naturalism gives an inadequate response to the question, "Why be moral?" Ultimately, the best answer the naturalist can give is egoistic: one should be moral "just in case it is in one's best interests to be so" (p. 156). Theists have a better answer: One should be moral "because the moral law is true and is constituted by the non-arbitrary commands of a good, just, wise, loving God, or because the moral law is grounded in the way we were designed by such a God to function properly" (p. 156).

Finally, evolutionary naturalism apparently removes any ground for believing that humans have a high, intrinsic, and equal value, for, from this perspective, there is no sharp distinction between humans and other animals, and whatever grounds human dignity (e.g., intelligence) apparently comes in degrees, thus undermining equality.

*Imago Dei* is a bold philosophical exploration of the theological claim that humans are created in the image of God. It is impressive in its range and in its synthesis of philosophical difficulties for naturalism. I am, however, inclined to think that the author overestimates the force of his arguments on a few points. Let me offer two illustrations. First, consider the claim that naturalists cannot explain why certain brain states (e.g., C-fiber firings) are correlated with certain mental states (pains). Assuming this is so, what explanation can theists offer? The appeal to free divine creative activity would explain the contingency of such correlations (assuming they *are* contingent), but it does not tell us *why* God chose to link C-fiber firings with pains, rather than, say, with the taste of chocolate. So, it's not clear to me that such correlations are something theists can explain better than naturalists can.

Second, are the proffered theistic answers to "Why be moral?" clearly superior to possible naturalistic answers? For example, consider the claim that one should be moral because "the moral law is true and is constituted by the non-arbitrary commands of a good, just, wise, loving God" (p. 156). Why couldn't a naturalist, with about equal plausibility, claim that one should be moral simply because the moral law is true? Of course, many naturalists would not give this answer, because they deny that there is any objective moral truth. But many naturalists affirm that there is objective moral truth, and they *could* give this answer. (Moreland does raise important questions about naturalistic attempts to explain the presence of objective moral truth, but I take it that the "Why be moral?" issue is supposed to be a problem independently of the question of moral truth.)

In conclusion, *Imago Dei* makes a helpful contribution to the dialogue between theism and naturalism by providing a comprehensive theory of the human person that highlights difficulties for naturalism. While *Imago Dei* may not always be convincing, it takes the reader on a very thought-provoking excursion through complex territory in the philosophy of mind.