A. Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion & Naturalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011. Pp. 376.

«My overall claim in this book: *there is superficial conflict, but deep concord between science and theistic religion, but superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism*» (p. ix). When I read the incipit of Alvin Plantinga's new book, I got surprised by the strenght of this thesis. In particular, I got surprised by the second half of this claim: Plantinga does not only want to show that there is a deep concord between science and theism, but he also wants to demonstrate that there is a deep conflict between science and naturalism. In other words, he does not only want to defend theism from the apparent attacks of science (a task which has been already performed by many philosophers and theologians), but he also wants to attack naturalism by showing that theism is nearer than naturalism to some relevant scientific theories and to the grounds and aims of science. This latter conclusion seems to be really challenging. Many historians have already demonstrated that modern science arose from the Christian *Weltanschauung* and that many important modern scientists were Christian too. Furthermore, many philosophers and theologians have already demonstrated that scientific method is not the only way to know the world and that there are other valid methods to reach the truth about reality and our own existence. Yet there remains a question: can we believe that theism is true, even accepting all the contemporary scientific theories about the origins of life and the deep structure of the universe? Can we reasonably believe that theism is true and that it is better than naturalism in order to provide a metaphysical foundation for science and for scientific theses? Plantinga's answer is: yes, we can reasonably believe this.

At first, it is important to clarify the notions of "theism" and "naturalism". Following Plantinga, "naturalism" has to be identified with the thought that there is no God, nor anything like God. Naturalism is deeper than atheism, because it tries to interpret reality by denying the possibility that there exists something like God (and perhaps something like soul): all the things which truly exist are physical. This definition is very broad, because it seems to identify naturalism with physicalism and materialism, even though it would be possible to weaken this thesis, e.g. by affirming that every natural fact has to be explained by natural causes and only by natural causes, leaving open the possibility that there are non-natural facts which have non-natural causes. Yet, if we want to establish if naturalism is better than theism in order to explain the constitution of reality, this weaker version of naturalism seems to be irrelevant. In fact, if "theism" is the thought that there is

a God who has the features of a person, theism does not only want to affirm that there non-natural facts with non-natural causes, but it also wants to affirm that God creates and substains the universe and that He can intervene in it.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part concerns the "alleged conflict" between science and theism. In the first two chapters of this part, Plantinga tries to refute the theses of two of the "Four Horsemen" (*sic*) of contemporary atheism: Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins (the other two horsemen are Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris). According to the author, the theory of evolution does not deny the possibility that there is a God, i.e. the possibility that theism is true, because this scientific theory cannot be identified with naturalism, nor can it be faithfully expressed by naturalism. Plantinga argues that, even accepting the theory of evolution, this theory does not demonstrate that God does not exist. It is true that unguided evolution (evolution by chance) does not request the existence of God. Yet modern biologists do not have sound scientific reasons to accept unguided evolution, nor philosophers have to accept naturalism if they accept the truth of the theory of evolution. In the remaining chapters, Plantinga deals with the problem of God's intervention in the world. It is possible that God intervenes in the physical reality if we accept the Newtonian interpretation of natural laws (a natural law is a law which is valid when the universe is causally closed), as well as if we accept the new picture of reality provided by quantum mechanics. Those philosophers and theologians who think that modern science excludes God's intervention seem to be thinking of the Laplacean picture, which consists of the Newtonian interpretation *plus* the assumption that God cannot intervene in the universe. Yet modern scientists did not and do not have to accept this picture, which provides a circular explanation for the absence of God's intervention: God cannot intervene in the universe just because we have already assumed that He cannot do this.

In the second part of the book, Plantinga examines some problems concerning the superficial conflict between science and theism. In particular, he examines the apparent atheistic conclusions of evolutionary psychology and of the historical biblical criticism, which assume a methodological naturalism in order to deal with their objects of study. These sciences do not provide strong defeaters for theistic beliefs: one can accept the truth of theism, even accepting, for example, that religion arose when people needed to organise their social lives. Once more, given these conclusions, one can deny that theism is true just if s/he has previously assumed that it is not true.

The third part of the book deals with some aspects of the concord between science and theism. In the first two chapters of this part, Plantinga examines some proofs of God's existence grounded on the order of nature: the fine-tuning and the design arguments. The fine-tuning arguments are grounded on the evidence that the physical constants of this universe seem to be exactly fixed in order to permit the existence of intelligent life. On the other hand, the design arguments try to demonstrate the existence of God by considering the fact that our universe seem to be designed by an intelligent mind. According to the author, both kinds of arguments must be improved. Yet it seems that there are no decisive objections provided by the contemporary scientific picture of reality against them. In the

third chapter, Plantinga shows that there is a deep concord between the theses of theism and the grounds of science. In fact, according to the theistic vision of reality: human beings are created in God's image and they can know the universe; our universe is governed by constant laws that we can know; these laws can be expressed by an accessible language, which is, according to the modern science, the language of mathematics; we can reliably learn by our experience (except for some extraordinary cases); our world is relevantly simple and contingent (natural laws could have been different and the existence of our universe is not logically necessary), so that we can learn laws by observations, suppositions and experiments.

In the fourth part, which is perhaps the most interesting one, Plantinga argues that naturalism is in deep conflict with science by defending an argument against naturalism which is partly grounded on the theory of evolution and that I will briefly examine. Plantinga discusses and develops the same argument already defended in his well-known article *Naturalism defeated* (1994).

In what follows, I will focus on three arguments of Plantinga's which seem to be particularly interesting, at least according to my perspective. The first argument that I shall consider is used by Plantinga to show that determinism is false and that we do not have to accept a Laplacean picture of laws of nature. Given the Newtonian picture, a law of nature *p* is true if the universe is causally closed. Let me express this conditional in this way:

(1) if the universe is causally closed, then *p*

The determinist adds to (1) other elements. In particular, s/he claims that, given a past event PAST and a future event F,

(2) it is necessary that, if (1) and PAST, then F

namely

(2') it is necessary that, if PAST *and* (if the universe is causally closed then *p*), then F

This claim is logically equivalent to

(3) it is necessary that, if PAST *and* (*either* the universe is *not* causally closed *or* *p*), then F

which is logically equivalent to

(4) it is necessary that, if (PAST *and p*) *or* (PAST *and* the universe is *not* causally closed), then F

which is in turn logically equivalent to

(5) it is necessary that, if (PAST *and p*), then F and it is necessary that, if (PAST *and* the universe is *not* causally closed), then F

Yet the second conjunct of (5) is false, because there could be a world which is not causally closed and which shares PAST with our world, but which does not have F. Thus, determinism is false. This argument is formally correct. Yet a determinist could deny that there are other possible worlds and can affirm that we do not have to consider them when we want to establish the necessity of a law of nature. However, arguing in this way, the determinist should provide us with a new account of necessity and possibility which does not mention possible worlds. Nevertheless, I think that a determinist would have to deny the category of mere possibility, by accepting that the actual world is the only possible world, that

whatever happens in our world is necessary and that our accounts of non-actual worlds are mere abstractions. We certainly bear some intuitions about possibility and necessity which seem to falsify this latter deterministic picture of the world. Yet, if this latter form of determinism is the strongest and most coherent one, we cannot use possible worlds in order to argue against it.

The second argument I wish to consider concerns the "many-universes" objection against the "fine-tuning" arguments. According to the "fine-tuning" arguments, if we did not admit that there is an omniscient mind which wanted to create *this* universe with *these* physical parameters which are designed for intelligent life, it would have been highly implausible that such a universe would have existed. Yet this universe exists and it hosts intelligent life. Thus, it is highly plausible that there is an omniscient mind which wanted to create this universe with these physical parameters. Yet, if there were many co-existing universes *or* if there were a cycle of many succeding and different universes, the probability of the existence of such a universe would arise. According to Plantinga, the answer to this objection lies in the evidence that it is *this* universe which hosts intelligent life and which is *thus* "fine-tuned". If we accept both atheism and this objection, the probability of the existence of a universe thus "fine-tuned" does not change. Yet, if we accept both theism and this objection, this probability is higher than in the former case. In order to prove this thesis, Plantinga uses an analogy: studying our universe, which is immense, and accepting theism, it is highly probable that there exists intelligent life not only in our planet, but also in other planets; thus, accepting theism and the possibility that there are many universes, we have to conclude that it is highly probable that there exists intelligent life in other universes too *and* that this probability is higher than in the former case (the case in which we both accepted atheism and many universes). Yet, even if we accepted this analogy, I do not see how the acceptance of theism would be relevant to prove the conclusion that, given the truth of theism rather than of atheism, many more universes would host intelligent life. Cannot God choose whatever He wants? Namely: cannot He choose that intelligent life only exists in our universe? It seems not to be necessary that the probability of the existence of intelligent life arises when we accept theism.

The third argument I shall mention is Plantinga's argument against the concord between science and naturalism. According to the author, if both naturalism and the theory of evolution are true, then the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable is low. Thus I have a defeater for the reliability of my cognitive faculties and for any belief produced by them. Thus the belief according to which both naturalism and the theory of evolution are true has a defeater. Thus the thesis according to which both naturalism and the theory of evolution are true is self-refuting. The first thesis is the most important part of the argument and Plantinga tries to defend it by discussing naturalistic and materialistic interpretations of the theory of evolution. I cannot summarize this discussion. However, Plantinga's claim is that, following materialism, one does not have to bear true beliefs in order to survive. It is true that many organisms have to "know" the environment in order to survive. Yet this does not amount to state that an organism can survive only by knowing the truth: it can survive, even without bearing true beliefs, namely it is

not necessary that the contents of its beliefs are true in order to produce the right biological answers. Thus naturalism seems to make the probability that we have true beliefs low. Is this sufficient to refute the truth of the conjunction between naturalism and the theory of evolution? Perhaps it is. Yet I have to remark that many philosophers (e.g. Nietzsche), accepting both naturalism and something like the theory of evolution, thought that human beings, in order to survive or to increase their strenght, must bear false beliefs. Yet how can we justify this thesis? How can we be sure that this is not a false belief too? In any case, it seems that naturalism is self-refuting because it cuts the ground out from under its feet.

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