This dissertation concerns the question whether naturalism and the subjectivity of experience are compatible. It is often assumed, as well as argued for, that subjectivity is a problem for naturalism; it is nevertheless not clear what the phenomenon of subjectivity is, or what the thesis of naturalism exactly amounts to. I devote a large part of my dissertation to analyzing these notions before concluding that the subjectivity of experience and the version of naturalism that I have found to be tenable, methodological naturalism, are in fact incompatible.

In the first chapter, I analyze the notion ‘subjectivity’. I discuss a number of definitions of the subjectivity of experience that are given in the literature, and some further definitions suggested by the discussion of those. After giving a list of five definitions of the concept ‘subjectivity’, I go on to argue that experience is subjective in all these senses. I also argue that self-consciousness and intentionality are subjective in the same ways.

Subjectivity is a problem for naturalism only if there are such things as experiences. In the second chapter, I address the question if there are such things. After considering arguments against it, I present a strong argument for the conclusion that there are such things as experiences. This argument is an adaptation of Van Inwagen’s argument for the existence of properties which turns on Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment. I continue with a discussion of eliminativism and behaviorism, which can be seen as replies to this argument. I show that behaviorism and eliminativism face many problems and ought to be rejected. It follows that we are committed to the existence of experience.

In the third chapter, I go on to clarify the concept of naturalism. I argue
that ‘materialism’ and ‘physicalism’ are versions of naturalism, which can be divided into two different kinds: ‘metaphysical’ and ‘methodological’. There are a number of versions of metaphysical naturalism: ‘classical materialism’, ‘spatiotemporal materialism’, ‘causal materialism’ and ‘anti-supernaturalism’. Since none of these versions of naturalism are tenable we have to reject metaphysical naturalism. The question of this dissertation then becomes if the subjectivity of experience is compatible with methodological naturalism.

In the fourth chapter, I go on to consider what methodological naturalism is. After considering a number of possible definitions, I conclude that it is best understood as the view that science tells us which things exist. Although a number of problems can be raised against this form of naturalism, none of them are fatal. Given the fact that the things that science tells us that exist are public or intersubjectively available, it follows that methodological naturalism is committed to an ontology of public and intersubjectively available entities.

Finally, armed with the analyses of these terms, the fifth chapter addresses the main question of this dissertation. I conclude that three of the five senses in which experience is subjective are incompatible with methodological naturalism as we have defined it. I then discuss objections the naturalist might have to these arguments and conclude that they fail. I also consider three alternative approaches, which could possibly avoid the problem; however, I show that the methodological naturalist could not adopt these for a number of different reasons. I conclude that naturalism and the subjectivity of experience, at least in some senses, are incompatible.