



Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False

By Thomas Nagel

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The modern materialist approach to life has conspicuously failed to explain such central mind-related features of our world as consciousness, intentionality, meaning, and value. This failure to account for something so integral to nature as mind, argues philosopher Thomas Nagel, is a major problem, threatening to unravel the entire naturalistic world picture, extending to biology, evolutionary theory, and cosmology.

Since minds are features of biological systems that have developed through evolution, the standard materialist version of evolutionary biology is fundamentally incomplete. And the cosmological history that led to the origin of life and the coming into existence of the conditions for evolution cannot be a merely materialist history, either. An adequate conception of nature would have to explain the appearance in the universe of materially irreducible conscious minds, as such.

Nagel's skepticism is not based on religious belief or on a belief in any definite alternative. In *Mind and Cosmos*, he does suggest that if the materialist account is wrong, then principles of a different kind may also be at work in the history of nature, principles of the growth of order that are in their logical form teleological rather than mechanistic.

In spite of the great achievements of the physical sciences, reductive materialism is a world view ripe for displacement. Nagel shows that to recognize its limits is the first step in looking for alternatives, or at least in being open to their possibility.

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Editorial Review

Review

"If evolutionary biology redraws its boundaries as this book says it must, then the dialogue between theology and science will be considerably altered." --*Anglican Theological Review*

"[This] troublemaking book has sparked the most exciting disputation in many years... I like Nagel's mind and I like Nagel's cosmos. He thinks strictly but not imperiously, and in grateful view of the full tremendousness of existence." -- Leon Wieseltier, *The New Republic*

"A sharp, lucidly argued challenge to today's scientific worldview." -- Jim Holt, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Starts with a boldly discerning look at that strange creature, mankind, and comes to some remarkable speculations about who we are and what our place is in the universe... The very beauty of Nagel's theory - its power to inspire imagination - counts in its favor." -- Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*

"An intense philosophical takedown of Neo-Darwinism and scientific materialism. It's a brave and contrarian book. Reminds me of Wittgenstein's remark: 'Even if all our scientific questions are answered, our problem is still not touched at all.'" -- E.L. Doctorow, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Nagel's arguments against reductionism should give those who are in search of a reductionist physical 'theory of everything' pause for thought... The book serves as a challenging invitation to ponder the limits of science and as a reminder of the astonishing puzzle of consciousness." -- *Science*

"*Mind and Cosmos*, weighing in at 128 closely argued pages, is hardly a barn-burning polemic. But in his cool style Mr. Nagel extends his ideas about consciousness into a sweeping critique of the modern scientific worldview." -- *The New York Times*

"His important new book is a brief but powerful assault on materialist naturalism... [Nagel has] performed an important service with his withering critical examination of some of the most common and oppressive dogmas of our age." -- *The New Republic*

"[This] short, tightly argued, exacting new book is a work of considerable courage and importance." --
National Review

"Provocative... Reflects the efforts of a fiercely independent mind." -- H. Allen Orr, *The New York Review of Books*

"[Nagel] is an avowed nonbeliever, but regularly enrages the New Atheist crowd because he is determined to leave open a space... for the incomprehensible, for the numinous... and writes very honestly about that." --
James Wood

"This short book is packed like a neutron star. I found myself underlining so much that I had to highlight some underlining with further underlining and flag up this underlining in turn. *Mind and Cosmos* is a brave intervention." -- Raymond Tallis, *The New Atlantis*

"Challenging and intentionally disruptive... Unless one is a scientific Whig, one must strongly suspect that something someday will indeed succeed [contemporary science]. Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos* does not build a road to that destination, but it is much to have gestured toward a gap in the hills through which a road might someday run." -- *The Los Angeles Review of Books*

"A model of carefulness, sobriety and reason... Reading Nagel feels like opening the door on to a tidy, sunny room that you didn't know existed." -- *The Guardian*

"Fascinating... [A] call for revolution." -- Alva Noe, NPR's 13.7

"The book's wider questions -- its awe-inspiring questions -- turn outward to address the uncanny cognizability of the universe around us.... He's simply doing the old-fashioned Socratic work of gadfly, probing for gaps in what science thinks it knows." -- Louis B. Jones, *The Threepenny Review*

"[Attacks] the hidden hypocrisies of many reductionists, secularists, and those who wish to have it both ways on religious modes of thinking ... Fully recognizes the absurdities (my word, not his) of dualism, and thinks them through carefully and honestly."--Tyler Cowen, *Marginal Revolution*

"*Mind and Cosmos* is a mind-provoking, challenging, and enjoying read which carries the mark of Nagel's unique blend of originality, elegance, and intellectual honesty." --*Philosophical Psychology*

"*Mind and Cosmos* is...extraordinarily ambitious. Nagel proposes not merely a new explanation for the origin of life and consciousness, but a new type of explanation: 'natural teleology.'" -- *Inference: International Review of Science*

About the Author

Thomas Nagel is University Professor in the Department of Philosophy and the School of Law at New York University. His books include *The Possibility of Altruism*, *The View from Nowhere*, and *What Does It All Mean?: A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. In 2008, he was awarded the Rolf Schock Prize in Logic and Philosophy and the Balzan Prize in Moral Philosophy.

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