
EVALUATING THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THOMAS NAGEL

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Abstract

The age long but irresolvable mind-body problem ever since it was formulated by the French scholar, Renes Descartes, continues to be elusive as it pertains to where they interact. Various proposals have been put forward to surmount this intellectual gridlock but without success. It is from this background that in recent times, Thomas Nagel enters the discourse in order to ferment a viable solution as he seeks to resolve the quandary through an exploration of the nature of human consciousness from a materialistic and Neo-Darwinist shade. In spite of the depth and critical insights of his analysis, this research levels some flaws against Nagel to affirm that the mind-body problem, being a metaphysical issue continues as a persistent issue that may not receive finality.

Keywords: Nagel, Intellectual gridlock Mind-Body Problem, Consciousness, Philosophy of Mind.

Introduction

In this paper, attempt shall be made to take a critical look at the thoughts of Thomas Nagel on the role of the human mind in consciousness. Before we go too far, it is helpful to state from the outset that Thomas Nagel is one of the contemporary scholars that have contributed to the age long scuffle of mind-body interaction. It needs no elaboration to posit that the mind-body discourse found its generative seed in the submission of the French scholar Rene Descartes. Hence, for the purpose of this essay to be served, it is important to give a very brief recapitulation of the history of the mind-body quagmire. There will be the attempt to establish the origin of the problem from Descartes up to the contemporary submissions. This is important because it gives us a grasp or understanding of the subject matter before Nagel entered the discursive fray. After this, we shall make a critical examination of Nagel to reveal why this essay fails to agree with him on the role of mind in human consciousness.

Mind, Body and Consciousness: A Short History of the Debate before Thomas Nagel

Commencing the mind-body problem with Rene Descartes is not to say that Descartes is the first to delve into the discourse. It had been hinted earlier that the problem had always been with man. Perhaps it must have been out of curiosity and wonder – the quest to know everything about

everything. Ancient black Egyptians have pondered over the question and their answer could be one of the themes resonating throughout The Egyptian Book of the Dead. The ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, and many civilizations have looked at this 'mystery'. So, to say that discourse originates with Descartes is to say the opposite of the truth. We think that one of the reasons why a discourse on the mind-body dilemma cannot escape Rene Descartes is due to the fact that he was one of the very few that gave brilliant answers to the question without a recourse to religion as a starting point.

The French man, Rene Descartes is a thorough philosopher as we perceive the philosophic spirit in his attempt to get to the root of the mind-body problem. This philosophic spirit has been described by W. Dilthey that it “leaves no valuations and aspirations unexamined and no piece of knowledge isolated; it seeks the grounds for the validity of whatever is valid”.¹ This is what Rene Descartes attempted during his time and made his contribution to the mind-body problem truly different.

It is Rene Descartes' conviction, having applied the 'methodic doubt' and arrived at the 'ergo sum' that there are two realities; mind and body. He makes a demarcation between both of them by revealing that while the former is private, the latter is public. In other words, Rene Descartes meant to say that the activities of the human mind are private while the body's activities are open to observation. In this connection, Anthony Kenny summarises the Cartesian enterprise as follows:

Indeed, his main ideas can be so concisely expressed that they could be written on the back of a postcard; and yet they were so revolutionary that they changed the course of philosophy for centuries. If you wanted to put Descartes' main ideas on the back of a postcard you would need just two sentences: man is a thinking mind; matter is extension in motion. Everything, in Descartes' system, is to be explained in terms of this dualism of mind and matter. Indeed, we owe to Descartes that we think of mind and matter as the two great, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive, divisions of the universe we inhabit.²

In the Cartesian sense, a human being is a thinking substance and it is this notion that informs his analysis of the body as a material substance and the mind as an immaterial substance. Thomas Hobbes, however is among the earliest critique of Rene Descartes who had provocatively cited Descartes's mental 'immaterial substance' as a paradigm contradiction in terms. In other words, Hobbes sees the words 'immaterial' and 'substance' not to be sensible enough in describing the mental as Rene Descartes had done. Descartes recognizes that the whole essence of man is to think. In our present life, the mind is intimately united with the body, but it is not our bodies that

^{1.} Rickman, H. P. (1979). (ed.) Dilthey: Selected Writings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

^{2.} Kenny, A. (2006). An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy. New York: Blackwell Publishing Co Ltd

make us what really are. It is the mind. It is the mind that 'causes' the body. Hence, there is a causal connection between them. The implication in this mode of thought is that the mind is capable of independent existence and at death, it is the body that perishes, the mind does not. This model has been given serious considerations from the English scholar John Locke in his *Essay on Human Understanding* and his criticisms are still much relevant when we come to latter part of this work that would deal with re-incarnation.

Rene Descartes faces the ultimate question of how these distinct 'personalities' relate. Put otherwise, Rene Descartes has difficulty informing us of where the mind and the body interact. How can the non-physical relate with the physical and still maintain a single identity? Is it the case that when we say 'I', it is the mind that is actually using the body to utter such propositions (such as those used to commence this work)? Do animals have minds in the same way that humans do? Can their minds also live before and after their unities with their bodies? Is it true that when we say "...My leg...!" it is the mind that is actually laying ownership to the body? If a Cartesian is willing to affirm this question, then what do we mean when we say "...My God..."? If we are willing to grant the existence of a God, do we own that God in the same way we lay ownership to our body? These questions are very tricky and it would require much care examining them. Nevertheless, the Cartesian answer to the question: what do we mean when we say 'I'? is as follows:

I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks that is to say a mind or a soul or an understanding, or a reason which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks.³

Where is the connection between the mind and the body? How can a mental process such as willing, thinking, influence spatial corollaries such as movement? Rene Descartes informs us that the point of connection between the mind and the body is the pineal gland. Is the pineal gland a non-material substance or a material substance? The pineal gland is located in an area of the human brain and this evinces it as a material substance. The logical implication in the Cartesian answer is this: the place of interaction between the material substance and the immaterial substance is in a part of the material substance. This is far from an answer in the logical domain but in the fields of mysticism, it could be plausible.

Attempts to improve upon the ideas of Rene Descartes have caused scholars such as Benedict Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, Nicolas Malebranche, and Maurice Marleau Ponty et al. to come up with different theories in order to address the mind and body problem. It has birthed theories such

³ Vesey, G.N.A (1964). (ed.) *Body and Mind*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd

as occassionalism, epiphenomenalism, psycho-physical parallelism etc. The common denominator in the view of these scholars is dualism. Even before they laced their boots, they started with the assumption that mind and body are distinct entities and a reconciliation has been evasive but this is about to change.

However, in the 20th century and with the advancements recorded by science and technology, some strictly materialistic conception of the human mind and consciousness started gaining acceptance. Two notable scholars that lend support to this outlook are Gilbert Ryle and John Searle. However, because the latter's work has more to do with consciousness than the former's we shall focus on the former. More so, Searle's position and situation of the discourse has semblance with that of Thomas Nagel whose ideas we intend to put to critical assessment in the latter part of this work.

In his 1984 work, *Minds, Brain and Science*, John Searle gives us a thorough materialistic resolution to the mind-body problem. His view is very similar with that of Gilbert Ryle but he does not concern himself with Rene Descartes directly as Gilbert Ryle had done. He recognizes that contemporaneously, the mind-body discourse has evolved into the relation between the mind and the brain. John Searle is convinced that:

I believe that the mind-body problem has a rather simple solution, one that is consistent both with what we know about neurophysiology and with our commonsense conception of the nature of mental states – pains, beliefs, desires and so on.⁴

Searle is convinced that there are four features of the mental phenomena. They are: consciousness, intentionality, subjectivity of mental states and the problem of mental causation. Consciousness for John Searle is the “central fact of specifically human existence because without it, all of the other specifically human aspects of our existence – language, love, humour and so on would be impossible”.⁵ He defines intentionality as the “feature by which our mental states are directed at, or about, or refer to, or are of objects and state of affairs in the world other than themselves”.⁶ Subjectivity for John Searle has to do with personalism or as Rene Descartes calls it 'ergo'. Mental causation has to do with our belief, that is, our thoughts and cogitations have some measures of causal effects on the physical world. These four put together are impossible to be admitted in our scientific framework according to John Searle. These four features for John Searle are what made answers to the mind-body problem so elusive. In his proposed solution to the mind-body problem, John Searle advances that:

⁴. Searle, J. (2003). *Minds, Brains and Science*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

⁵. Ibid, 14

⁶. Ibid, 16

Mental phenomena, all mental phenomena whether conscious or unconscious, visual or auditory, pains, tickles, itches, thoughts, indeed, all of our mental life, are caused by processes going on in the brain.⁷

John Searle describes the structure of the human mental life as a connection of neurons to the brain. He hints that “our sensations of pains are caused by a series of events that begin at free nerve and end in the thalamus, and in other regions of the brain”.⁸ It is when the brain begins to process these sensations that the mental aspect becomes evidential. This implies, on the other hand that “if the events outside the central nervous system occurred, but nothing happened in the brain, there would be no mental events”.⁹

At this point, one comes to a crucial point in the analysis of John Searle on the mind-body solution. He claims that all what Rene Descartes calls mental activities and private are merely brain processes. This means that the Cartesian division between the mental and the observable is erroneous. It also denies the possibility of an immortal soul that can outlive the body. But wait a minute! John Searle has made two statements that do not seem to go hand in hand. In his arguments to evince the solution to the mind-body problem, these two statements would need a marriage:

All mental phenomena are caused by brain processes

All mental phenomena such as pain, thoughts etc are just features of the brain.

The statements above do not appear to be so easy to merge. For how can it be conceived that brains cause mind and yet minds are just features of the brain? John Searle believes that it is the impossibility to see a merger to both propositions that has blocked a solution to the mind-body problem all along. In his resolution, John Searle uses the analogy of the formation of some material substances. He expounds:

In the case of liquidity, solidity, and transparency, we have no difficulty at all in supposing that the surface features are caused by the behaviour of elements at the micro-level, and at the same time we accept that the surface phenomena just are features of the very systems in question. I think the clearest way of stating this point is to say that the surface feature is both caused by the behaviour of microelements, and at the same time is realized in the system that is made up of the micro-elements. There is a cause-and-effect relationship, but at the same time the surface features are just higher-level features of the very system whose

^{7.} Ibid, 16

^{8.} Ibid, 16

^{9.} Ibid, 17

behaviour at the micro-level causes those features.¹⁰

Now, when he returns to the brain-mind problem (otherwise construed as mind-body problem), Searle informs us that the four features of mental phenomena mentioned earlier are actually the causes of mental activities as well as the features in association with the brain and the entire nervous system. With this, he claims to have given a satisfactory answer to the mind-body problem. He states that: “To summarise, in my view, the mind and the body interact, but they are not two different things, since mental phenomena are just features of the brain”.¹¹ With the various submissions on the mind-body problem as well as how this affects consciousness has been given critical attention, we shall now focus on the contribution of Thomas Nagel on the subject matter.

Thomas Nagel on Mind and Consciousness: An Exposition

In his own words, Nagel explains that: “The scientific revolution of the 17th century, which has given rise to such extraordinary progress in the understanding of nature, depended on a crucial limiting step at the start: It depended on subtracting from the physical world as an object of study everything mental – consciousness, meaning, intention or purpose. The physical sciences as they have developed since then describe, with the aid of mathematics, the elements of which the material universe is composed, and the laws governing their behavior in space and time”¹²

There is no doubt that he bases his thoughts on mind and consciousness over the breakthroughs in Biology and other related sphere of knowledge in the 21st century. This is well captured in his words that:

We ourselves, as physical organisms, are part of that universe, composed of the same basic elements as everything else, and recent advances in molecular biology have greatly increased our understanding of the physical and chemical basis of life. Since our mental lives evidently depend on our existence as physical organisms, especially on the functioning of our central nervous systems, it seems natural to think that the physical sciences can in principle provide the basis for an explanation of the mental aspects of reality as well — that physics can aspire finally to be a theory of everything.¹³

Furthermore, Nagel holds that the foregoing “possibility is ruled out by the conditions that have defined the physical sciences from the beginning. The physical sciences can describe organisms like ourselves as parts of the objective spatio-temporal order – our structure and behavior in space

^{10.} Searle, J. (2003). *Minds, Brains and Science*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

^{11.} *Ibid*, 24

^{12.} Nagel, T. (2012). *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

^{13.} *Ibid*,

and time – but they cannot describe the subjective experiences of such organisms or how the world appears to their different particular points of view”.¹⁴ He therefore reveals that “There can be a purely physical description of the neurophysiological processes that give rise to an experience, and also of the physical behavior that is typically associated with it, but such a description, however complete, will leave out the subjective essence of the experience – how it is from the point of view of its subject — without which it would not be a conscious experience at all”.¹⁵

So, the physical sciences, in spite of their extraordinary success in their own domain, for Nagel, necessarily leave an important aspect of nature unexplained. Further, since the mental arises through the development of animal organisms, the nature of those organisms cannot be fully understood through the physical sciences alone. Finally, since the long process of biological evolution is responsible for the existence of conscious organisms, and since a purely physical process cannot explain their existence, it follows that biological evolution must be more than just a physical process, and the theory of evolution, if it is to explain the existence of conscious life, must become more than just a physical theory.¹⁶

This means that the scientific outlook, if it aspires to be a more complete understanding of nature, must expand to include theories capable of explaining the appearance in the universe of mental phenomena and the subjective points of view in which they occur – theories of a different type from any we have seen so far. There is no doubt that Nagel seems to be very wary of the possibility of modern science to be able to capture the *modus operandi* of the human mind. But in his arguments, he also finds that there are two ways of resisting his conclusion. For Nagel:

The first way is to deny that the mental is an irreducible aspect of reality, either (a) by holding that the mental can be identified with some aspect of the physical, such as patterns of behavior or patterns of neural activity, or (b) by denying that the mental is part of reality at all, being some kind of illusion (but then, illusion to whom?). The second way is to deny that the mental requires a scientific explanation through some new conception of the natural order, because either (c) we can regard it as a mere fluke or accident, an unexplained extra property of certain physical organisms – or else (d) we can believe that it has an explanation, but one that belongs not to science but to theology, in other words that mind has been added to the physical world in the course of evolution by divine intervention.¹⁷

^{14.} Ibid,

^{15.} Ibid,

^{16.} Nagel, T. (2013). *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

^{17.} Ibid

Nagel also observes that these four positions, each have their adherents. He subscribes to the outlook that the wide popularity among philosophers and scientists of (a), the outlook of psychophysical reductionism, is due not only to the great prestige of the physical sciences but to the feeling that this is the best defense against the dreaded (d), the theistic interventionist outlook. But someone who finds (a) and (b) self-evidently false and (c) completely implausible need not accept (d), because a scientific understanding of nature need not be limited to a physical theory of the objective spatio-temporal order. It makes sense to seek an expanded form of understanding that includes the mental but that is still scientific — i.e. still a theory of the immanent order of nature.¹⁸ He thereby submits in his words that:

That seems to me the most likely solution. Even though the theistic outlook, in some versions, is consistent with the available scientific evidence, I don't believe it, and am drawn instead to a naturalistic, though non-materialist, alternative. Mind, I suspect, is not an inexplicable accident or a divine and anomalous gift but a basic aspect of nature that we will not understand until we transcend the built-in limits of contemporary scientific orthodoxy. I would add that even some theists might find this acceptable; since they could maintain that God is ultimately responsible for such an expanded natural order, as they believe he is for the laws of physics.¹⁹

From the above showing, it is the case that Nagel does not believe that the strictly materialistic approach through molecular Biology and neo-Darwinism are incapable of explaining well enough the undeniable reality of consciousness. It is precisely from this line of thinking that he writes that mind is a basic aspect of nature, and that any philosophy of nature that cannot account for it is fundamentally misguided.²⁰ He argues that the standard physico-chemical reductionist account of the emergence of life – that it emerged from a series of accidents, acted upon by the mechanism of natural selection – flies in the face of common sense.²¹ We shall now make a critical examination of his position and reasoning.

A Critical Evaluation of Nagel's Conception of the Mind and Body Problem

Before giving a critical appraisal of the position of Nagel, it is very important that I first of all restate the inner core of his arguments for recapitulation. Nagel thinks there is a wide consensus among philosophers and scientists around a certain view of nature, the 'materialist neo-Darwinian' conception, but that this view has proved radically inadequate. It has failed, Nagel argues, to provide adequate explanations for mind and for value, and these things are so central to an adequate picture of the cosmos that such failures constitute a fatal flaw. Of course, it is not just

¹⁸. Nagel, T. (2013). *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

¹⁹. Ibid

²⁰. Ibid

²¹. Ibid

that no adequate explanation has yet been given, but rather, in Nagel's view, that there are systematic reasons for suspecting that none could be given. Nagel does not develop this argument from a religious perspective.²² Nagel makes it clear that theistic assumptions have no appeal for him. Instead, insofar as he has a positive alternative to offer, it is that we should add a measure of naturalistic teleology to our stock of explanations, a bias of nature. With the position of Nagel briefly rephrased and represented in clearer perspective, we are now better placed to put his ideas to critical evaluation.

Thomas Nagel is a contemporary analytic philosopher best known for his influential essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”.²³ in which he argues that subjective consciousness — the “what it is like” aspect of experience — cannot be fully captured by objective, physical descriptions. This directly engages the mind–body problem, the question of how mental phenomena relate to physical processes. Nagel's central claim is that physicalist theories, as presently formulated, are epistemically incomplete because they cannot account for the first-person perspective. Nagel avers that an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism”.²⁴

Nagel extends this critique in *Mind and Cosmos* (2012), arguing that materialist neo-Darwinian naturalism fails to explain the existence of mind, reason, and moral value. While he accepts the reality of evolution, he rejects the idea that random mutation and natural selection alone can account for the emergence of consciousness. He proposes that nature may have teleological principles — inherent tendencies toward the development of conscious beings. This is significant because Nagel is not a theist; his critique is internal to secular philosophy. He resists both Cartesian dualism and reductive physicalism, suggesting instead that we need a radically expanded naturalistic framework.

Materialism is something quite different. In Nagel's mind, at least, it is almost synonymous with reductionism, the term with which he most commonly refers to the views he opposes. He writes, for instance, “I will use the terms “materialism” or “materialist naturalism” to refer to one side of this conflict, and “antireductionism” to refer to the other side”.²⁵ This reflects an earlier statement that ‘among the scientists and philosophers who do express views about the natural order as a whole, reductive materialism is widely assumed to be the only serious possibility’. The only citation in favour of this is to Steven Weinberg's *Dreams of a Final Theory*, a somewhat ironic

²². Dupre, J. (2012). Thomas Nagel: *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Published online on the 29th of October.

²³. Nagel, T. (1974). “What is it Like to be a Bat”? *The Philosophical Review*.

²⁴. Ibid, 436

²⁵. Nagel, T. (2012). *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

choice given the open disdain for philosophy Weinberg expresses in that book.²⁶ However, it is hard to think of an appropriate citation from a philosopher. Nagel expresses a view that was popular among philosophers of science half a century ago, and has been in decline ever since. It is a view that is perhaps still common among philosophers of mind. One of the most prominent representatives of this outlook is David Chalmers²⁷ who bases his argument for dualism on a similar view of materialism, but reductionism has been almost entirely rejected by philosophers actually engaged with the physical and biological sciences: it simply has no interesting relation to the diversity of things that scientists actually do. Now we arrive at one of the major problems we find against Nagel.

So here is the first problem. Reductionism can be understood as a metaphysical thesis, typically based on an argument that if there is only material stuff in the world (no spooky stuff), then the properties of stuff must ultimately explain everything. This is a controversial thesis, much debated by philosophers. But what “the last 50 years of work in the philosophy of science has established is that this kind of reductionism has little relevance to science. Even if it turned out that most scientists believed something like this this would be a psychological oddity, not a deep insight about science”.²⁸ Why does Nagel believe that materialism has to have this reductive character? It appears to be because he believes that “everything about the world can . . . be understood”.²⁹ and that “rational intelligibility is at the root of the natural order”.³⁰ It would not be an exaggeration to say that for Nagel, if science can't come up with a theory of everything it has, in some deep sense, failed. Nagel is thus, in effect, committed a priori to reductionism; the failure of reductionism is therefore the failure of science. Perhaps the most charitable reading of the position is that Nagel is trying to revive rationalism for an atheistic age. He doesn't, however, make it look like an encouraging project.

Given the special status and mystery (even spookiness) attributed to consciousness within this movement, it is not surprising that it has given rise to some curious metaphysical views, most famously David Chalmers's dualism alluded to above. There are increasing stirrings of doubt about this project and even a few, like this reviewer, who doubt whether there is anything it is like

²⁶. Dupre, J. (2012). Thomas Nagel: Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Published online on the 29th of October.

²⁷. Chalmers, D. (1996). The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory. New York; Oxford University Press.

²⁸. Dupre, J. (2012). Thomas Nagel: Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Published online on the 29th of October.

²⁹. Nagel, T. (2012). Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False. Oxford: Oxford University Press

³⁰. Ibid, 17

to be a bat. This analogy is very striking especially in Hacker³¹ and Dupré³² However, this is not the place to pursue that argument due to space-time limitation.

The starting point of Nagel's framework is that if the general reductionist project is to be successful, then it must be shown how consciousness/cognition/value can be integrated into the materialist worldview. Prima facie these things are not material. The materialist story about how material came to possess these entities or qualities is evolution. So, if evolution cannot account for consciousness/cognition/value, it is fatally injured. When it comes to cognition in consciousness; we again find that Nagel is flawed. In other words, the case of cognition, finally, brings out most strikingly Nagel's rationalism. Nagel thinks that reason gives us insights into reality that evolution cannot account for.

Furthermore, it is very clear that Nagel does not want to appeal to God. He finds current evolutionary thinking in principle inadequate to account for central features of human existence. Yet he is committed to the intelligibility of the world we find ourselves in. So where can we go to provide more satisfactory explanations? The only positive suggestion that Nagel offers to solve the pseudo-problems he has devised is that there may be teleological laws, laws that “bias towards the marvelous”.³³ What is the evidence for these strange bits of legislation? Only that they would make the appearance of complex creatures such as ourselves, marvels that we are, more likely. I have never felt prouder to be an empiricist.³⁴

A final point which needs to be stated is that it is “a serious mistake to allow fear of creationists and other obscurantists to discourage discussion of the weaknesses and unanswered questions in evolutionary theory”.³⁵ Nagel has no fear of such people and expresses a considerable sympathy with intelligent design. On the basis of his understanding of evolution, he considers that the rejection of their criticisms of evolution is “manifestly unfair”.³⁶

Conclusion

From the critical appraisal of Nagel which was the concern in the preceding section, this paper finds that Nagel was more reductionistic than materialistic. He places more weight on assumptions about the key terms of what he uses to show why a materialistic and evolutionary

³¹. Hacker, P.M.S.(2002). “Is There Anything it is like to be a Bat”? Philosophical Review.

³². Dupre, J. (2012). Thomas Nagel: Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Published online on the 29th of October.

³³. Dupre, J. (2012). Thomas Nagel: Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. Published online on the 29th of October.

³⁴. Ibid

³⁵. Ibid

³⁶. Nagel, T. (2012). Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False. Oxford: Oxford University Press

approach to the study of consciousness is inadequate. It is therefore for this reason why this research maintain that Nagel succeeded in trying to bring the attention of the world to the reality that Neo-Darwinism and a materialistic philosophy of nature is not capable of explaining consciousness. However, the arguments upon which he tended to provide his reasoning are implausible. This paper agrees with the thoughts of Goff³⁷ who avers that Nagel's work remains important because it forces materialist theories to confront consciousness directly rather than treating it as a secondary byproduct. His clear articulation of the first-person problem influenced the rise of contemporary non-reductive physicalism and panpsychism. However, his move toward teleology without a robust naturalistic account risks being seen as a philosophical placeholder rather than a solution. As a result, while Nagel convincingly diagnoses a weakness in current physicalist approaches, his positive alternative is underdeveloped and thus vulnerable to dismissal by both scientists and philosophers.

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