

Science & Christianity: Worldviews in Conflict?

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Introduction

“The Scientific Worldview” = Naturalism

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Naturalism:

- The physical universe is all that is real.
- Everything can be explained by physical laws.

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Story of Napoleon and Pierre Laplace:

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Napoleon's Question: "Why is there no reference to God?"

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Napoleon's Question: "Why is there no reference to God?"

Laplace's Reply: "I have no need of that hypothesis."

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All aspects of the natural order seem explainable by science.

The conclusion of many:

The natural world is all that exists (naturalism).
Belief in God is a product of former ignorance now dispelled by the light of science.

Problems with Naturalism

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Problem #1

Conscious mind and personhood do not fit in a world where everything ultimately is physical.

Problems with Naturalism

Francis Crick:



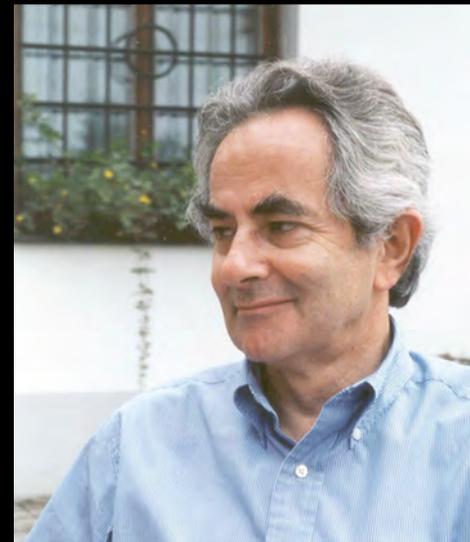
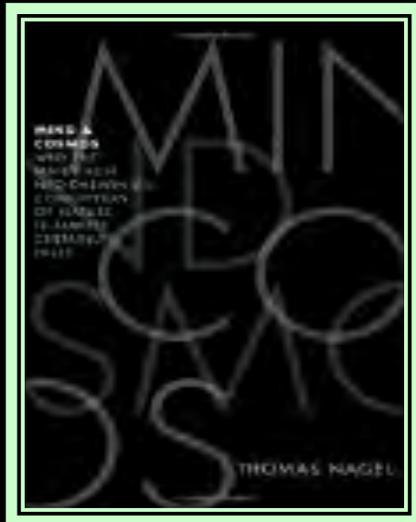
“‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. Who you are is nothing but a pack of neurons.”

Problems with Naturalism

Thomas Nagel (atheist – philosopher)

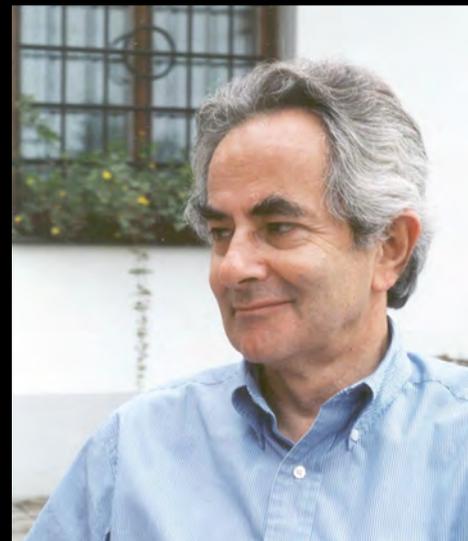
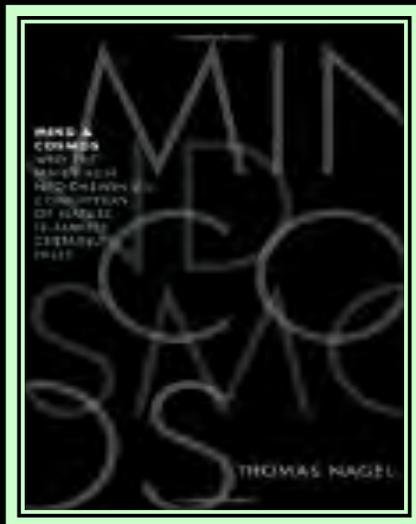
*Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neodarwinian
Concept of Nature is Almost Certainly False*

Oxford U. Press, 2012



Problems with Naturalism

Thomas Nagel — “What Is It Like to be a Bat?”



Problems with Naturalism

Problem #2 (for naturalism):

A “gapless” order of nature accords well with biblical theism.

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“A gap”: Something that science will never explain

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Order of Nature — Order-of-nature Miracle (gap)

Specific Events — Specific-point Miracle (gap)

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Example? (cellular differentiation)

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Example? (cellular differentiation)

Specific Events — Specific-point Miracle (gap)

Example: Virgin birth of Jesus

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Christian Perspective:

God is (a) all-powerful and (b) all-knowing

(a) can create any possible world

(b) knows all the possibilities

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(a) can create any possible world

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Engineering analogy: (a) periodic adjusting

(b) self-adjusting

Problems with Naturalism

A Christian Thesis:

God has created an exquisitely ordered universe, and at no point does he need to do periodic miracles to sustain that order.

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Key Point:

The success of science provides support for a gapless order of nature but is silent about whether specific-point miracles ever occur.

Problems with Naturalism

An Objection:

Science is able to investigate individual events, and for many miracle claims, it has been able to show either that the event never happened or that there is a plausible scientific explanation.

Problems with Naturalism

Reply:

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Reply:

- *False reports of miracles are expected, whether or not there are any actual miracles.*
- *Many reports cannot be confirmed or shown to have a plausible natural explanation.*
- *A scientific investigation into an actual miracle would not reveal an actual miracle. It would get recorded simply as “unsolved”.*

Miracle

Unsolved

No Miracle

|

X

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X

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X

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X

|

X

|

Conclusion

There is good reason for thinking that naturalism is false. It seems that the nature of reality is not just physical.

The success of science, far from conflicting with the Christian faith, accords well with it.

Whether God has performed miracles at specific points in history is a question that must be examined historically. The success of science is neutral with respect to this question.

Addendum

Additional Objections Considered:

1. If miracles occur at all, shouldn't one expect them to be common enough to be evident to nearly everyone?
2. Wouldn't an all-good and all-powerful God frequently do obvious miracles to reveal himself and to reduce suffering and evil?
3. The natural world contains much suffering and death. It seems part of the natural order. Isn't this strong evidence against God being the author of the order of nature?
4. Christians believe God answers prayer, is able to guide, and is regularly at work in the world. But how does this fit with a "gapless" order of nature?

Addendum

Objection 1:

If miracles occur at all, shouldn't one expect them to be common enough to be evident to nearly everyone?

Response:

- If miracles are performed by the will of an agent, the agent can choose to do them frequently, rarely or not at all.

Addendum

Objection 1:

If miracles occur at all, shouldn't one expect them to be common enough to be evident to nearly everyone?

Response:

- If miracles are performed by the will of an agent, the agent can choose to do them frequently, rarely or not at all.
- The biblical record: Obvious miracles happen only occasionally in biblical history (usually associated with particular people and particular times).

Addendum

Objection 2:

Wouldn't an all-good and all-powerful God frequently do obvious miracles to reveal himself and to reduce suffering and evil?

Response:

- “The problem of evil” & “the problem of divine hiddenness” are important questions, but do not arise out of science.
- If we have good evidence for certain miracles, this evidence is not negated by our not understanding God's reasons for not doing obvious miracles more frequently.

(There is more to be said on this. Feel free to contact me:
peter@crediblechristianity.org)

Addendum

Objection 3:

The natural world contains much suffering and death. It seems part of the natural order. Isn't this strong evidence against God being the author of the order of nature?

Response:

- The Bible teaches that death (for humans) is a result of the fall, but it doesn't clearly teach that *all* death is from the fall.
- Death in our current world is a crucial part of sustaining life, and allowing for adaptation to changing environments.
- Pain, even intense pain, is important for avoiding injury.
- Pain is normally short in duration

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The natural world contains much suffering and death. It seems part of the natural order. Isn't this strong evidence against God being the author of the order of nature?

Response:

- This still leaves the problem of pain that is prolonged e.g. an animal suffering from the effects of cancer. There is still the question whether God could have created a natural order without this, or could regularly have intervened to eliminate such suffering. There is no clear answer, but one possibility is that the fall of Satan occurred prior to life on earth and this affects God's actions in this world even prior to the effects after the fall of Adam and Eve.

Addendum

Objection 4:

Christians believe God answers prayer, is able to guide, and is regularly at work in the world. But how does this fit with a “gapless” order of nature?

Response:

- God can act in several ways other than obvious miracles:
 - natural processes
 - “macro-miracles” (where it is not obvious that the cause is a miracle)
 - “micro-miracles”
 - guiding of quantum events

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Christians believe God answers prayer, is able to guide, and is regularly at work in the world. But how does this fit with a “gapless” order of nature?

Response:

- God can act in several ways other than obvious miracles:

Objection: Isn't it intellectual cheating to claim God acts, but in ways that cannot be proven to have been done by God?

Reply: If one has good reason to believe that God in various situations has acted (e.g. more than coincidence will explain), one does not need to know how God has acted. It is sufficient to recognize that there ways he could have acted in these cases.