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January 30, 2013: Mind and Cosmos

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Title: Mind and Cosmos

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1/30/2013—There is a new book out by Thomas Nagel, University Professor of Law and Philosophy at NYU, that is supportive of the general thrust of *Hallowed Secularism*. The book is entitled *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*. I have not yet read the book, as usual in these posts, but I have read H. Allen Orr's review of the book in the *New York Review of Books*, in the February 7, 2013 issue (and I will be reading the book). Nagel's book seems to have three thrusts. First, that the Neo-Darwinian account of evolution fails to account for some or much of process of evolution. Second, that the laws of natural teleology in the universe may account for the rest of the process. And third, that any form of materialist reductionism cannot account for consciousness and therefore is seriously incomplete as a theory of the universe. These three claims are related but I cannot quite see the structure of the book simply from the review. The book *Hallowed Secularism* begins with the notion of a telos for human beings. The Introduction quotes Sarah Blumenthal, a character in E.L. Doctorow's novel, *City of God*, speaking about God as evolving. We human beings pursue a teleology, an ultimate purpose that we do not know but one that "has given us only one substantive indication of itself—that we...live in moral consequence." As for consciousness, *Hallowed Secularism* argues that materialism cannot account for it from a simple material explanation. There is something uncanny about any physical arrangement giving birth to self-consciousness. And materialism will never be able to explain it. There is no direct physical explanation. Unlike Nagel, I don't claim in the book, because I don't know enough to say, that Neo-Darwinism has actually failed as an enterprise. I'm not sure that this is required before one can assert that there is more to the universe than the material.