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### August 19, 2013: If Materialism Goes, What Goes With It?

Bruce Ledewitz

*Duquesne University*, ledewitz@duq.edu

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Title: If Materialism Goes, What Goes With It?

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8/19/2013—Thomas Nagel argues that materialism, and its variant in Darwinian thinking, cannot account, practically in principle let alone in fact, for reality: in particular, the emergence of life, or consciousness, or self-consciousness, or cognition, or value determination. The problem with life is time and the actual mechanisms. Consciousness is subjective and the link between physical processes and subjectivity, even for animals, seems insoluble. By cognition, Nagel means the mental functions of thought, reasoning and evaluation that are limited to humans, as far as we know. Here the issue is that cognition transcends the immediate world and cannot be explained by evolutionary factors. The same is true of value orientation by humans that would seem to have no survival benefits. Leaving aside whether Nagel is right, I would like to assume for the moment that he is. What else goes when materialism goes? How much of the popular worldview of secularism is premised on materialism? For example, I just read a great critic of religion, Professor Marci Hamilton, invoke natural law principles to defend the right to abortion. But the natural law tradition, or the version we associate with Hegel, arises out of monotheism absolutely. If rights are real, in contradiction to materialism, which posits that only matter is real, where do they come from (to put it crudely)? Nagel says that once materialism is jettisoned as an explanation of the world, one is left with theism, which he rejects as implausible (no being separate from nature with an intention can exist given everything else we know) or some form of teleology somehow built into nature from the start. The latter is his position, but as H. Allen Orr pointed out in reviewing Nagel's book, this would require a whole new approach to everything. What I'm hoping is that the religious and nonreligious might meet in teleology.