

Nagel, Thomas. Other Minds: Critical Essays, 1969-1994. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. viii + 229 pp. Cloth, \$????; paper, \$???? — This is not a study of the philosophical problem of other minds, but a collection of reviews and critical essays, all but one previously published, on the work of others. The book's twenty-two essays are equally divided into two parts, reflecting Nagel's dual interests: philosophy of mind, and ethics and political philosophy.

The essays, each with a brief new introduction, mostly concern contemporary authors (the exceptions being Aristotle, Freud, and Wittgenstein). About half were originally published in philosophy journals, while the remainder were taken from publications addressed to a broader audience, such as the New York Review of Books. This split provenance makes it unclear what sort of audience would most benefit from the work. Some of the more scholarly essays make important contributions to their topics, such as the extended review of John Rawls's A Theory of Justice. Other essays are pitched at a far more basic level, and for that reason will be less interesting to specialists. But these latter chapters, such as those on John Searle and Alasdair MacIntyre, would often make ideal introductions for a nonspecialist.

Nagel writes clearly, and with a certain flair, as when he asks of R.M. Hare's utilitarianism: "How does Hare manage to extract this large moral rabbit from what looks at first like a rather small and empty linguistic hat?" (151). The central strands of Nagel's philosophical thought are much in evidence

throughout: nonreductive in philosophy of mind, and a Kantian externalist in ethics. Chapters on Daniel Dennett and Bernard Williams, in particular, offer concise statements of Nagel's own views in these areas.

The essays span twenty-five years, and illuminate some of the underlying principles in Nagel's work. The interesting (and previously unpublished) intellectual biography, which serves as the volume's Introduction, advocates a "problem-centered style" of philosophical inquiry (6). With this phrase Nagel seems to endorse the view that there is a central core of distinctively philosophical problems, best investigated through traditional philosophical methods. In contrast, he rejects what he sees as the dominant Quine-Carnap approach in the profession: "a spirit of theory construction that sees philosophy as continuous with science, only more abstract and more general" (6). Complementing these methodological tenets is the conviction that a great deal of work still remains to be done in philosophy; many of the core areas in the field are still at a crude level. He rejects both dualism and materialism, for instance, and claims that "a solution to the mind-body problem is nowhere in sight" (105n). He speaks, too, of "the primitive current state of ethical theory" (182); we are, he says, in the "moral Bronze age" (157).

At many points Nagel would make a better critic if he were less dogmatic. A review of Robert Nozick's Anarchy, State, and Utopia is marred by its excessively dismissive tone. Eliminative materialism gets dismissed as "ridiculous" (72), and "work of astounding superficiality" (6). Ironically, however, an early

review of David Armstrong's A Materialist Theory of the Mind displays a great deal of sympathy for eliminative materialism (77); in a brief introduction to the review Nagel notices how his view has changed (72), but he doesn't explain how a position that seemed so promising in 1970 can seem so obviously and astoundingly wrong now.

The Armstrong review is one of several chapters that argue for claims Nagel would no longer defend. In introducing the Rawls review, for instance, Nagel says that he no longer subscribes to the principal criticism made therein. But, frustratingly, he doesn't say why he no longer accepts the criticism, nor does he direct the reader to some more recent statement of his views.

Although not all of these essays capture Nagel at his best, and they do not they always represent his current thinking, nevertheless there is something in this book for nearly everyone. This is not a volume to be read through from beginning to end, but it is a book that anyone engaged in these issues should know about, and should be quick to recommend when confronted with questions like "What does X think about...." — Robert Pasnau, St. Joseph's University.