

Thomas Nagel, *What does it all mean? A very short introduction to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

As the subtitle indicates, this is indeed a very short introduction to philosophy. One hundred and one pages to get you acquainted with epistemology, ontology, ethics and the meaning of life. Actually the last sentence of the book is "Life may be not only meaningless but absurd." (p. 101) Presented thus, I assume one is not very eager to read this book. Eleven pages to explain the mind-body problem, seven pages to tell you what the meaning of life is all about. Is this a serious way of doing philosophy? The answer to that question is : no, in ninety-nine per cent of the cases. The book under review does not belong to that category. If someone confronts you with the problem "Get me an introduction to philosophy and I only have one evening free to read it", I can recommend Thomas Nagel's introduction. If for the umpteenth time you are asked "What philosophy is all about", tell him or her to read this book.

Writing a historical introduction to philosophy within the limits mentioned is obviously impossible. Instead Thomas Nagel has taken the problem-oriented view. The book is basically a list

of problems and questions. Starting from everyday situations problematical features are identified leading straight away to core questions in philosophy. There are no final answers to be found here and this is precisely what this reviewer enjoyed most. Finishing the book the reader must have the impression that philosophy is a very lively subject, filled with open problems and difficult questions to be answered. To my mind a very adequate characterization.

The professional philosopher will perhaps not be inclined to read this book but I would recommend it to anyone involved with philosophy teaching. How would you go about explaining the complex relation between a deterministic world-view and the free will problem? Thomas Nagel shows how it can be done and quite impressively so.

Jean Paul Van Bendegem