

The Fundamental Asymmetry Between Teleology and Physicalism

Since the late 19th century, a leading theme in the philosophy of science has been the explanatory superiority of physicalism: the thesis that everything is physical, and that non-physical entities, such as souls and God, do not exist. Physicalism carries obvious negative implications for theism and Christianity, but many Christians try to neutralize the thesis by accepting the view of methodological naturalism, which asserts physicalism in the practice of science, but not in metaphysics or theology. In this talk, Dr. Nelson argues that teleological reasoning (i.e., employing design concepts) can fully embrace physical discoveries – whereas physicalism can admit no part of teleology. This asymmetry creates profound advantages in the philosophy of science for teleological frameworks.

Paul A. Nelson studied evolutionary theory and the philosophy of science at the University of Chicago, where he received his Ph.D. in 1998. Since that time, he has been a Fellow of the Discovery Institute and from 2004 to the present an Adjunct Professor in the Master of Arts Program in Science & Religion at Biola University. Nelson's scholarly articles have appeared in journals such as *Biology & Philosophy*, *Zygon*, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, and *BioComplexity*, and book chapters in the anthologies *Mere Creation*, *Signs of Intelligence*, *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics*, and *Darwin, Design, and Public Education*. He is a member of the Society for Developmental Biology (SDB) and the International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology (ISHPSSB).

I. The Tale of Teleo and Fizzik, Two Artisans Who Shared A Workshop

II. Fizzik's Tools: A Brief Review of Physical Discoveries, 1700 to 2015

III. Teleo's Puzzles: The Unsolved Problems of the Origin of Life and Biological Complexity

IV. Fizzik Complains to the Government: The Rise of Methodological Naturalism (MN)

V. Why MN Is a Bad Philosophy of Science – For the Christian First, But Also For the Agnostic, Atheist, or Simply Any Curious Human Being

VI. How Teleo and Fizzik Can Work Happily Together

Suggested Readings:

George F.R. Ellis, “Top-down causation and emergence: some comments on mechanism,” *Interface Focus* 2 (2012):126-140.

Robert B. Laughlin, *A Different Universe: Reinventing Physics from the Bottom Down* (New York, Basic Books, 2005).

Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin’s Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).