

Transcription, January 2015:

*The Watchman* (Boston) 85 (10) (5 March 1903): 8-9 (anon.).

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‘Man’s Place in the Universe.’

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, who shares with Darwin the honor of promulgating the theory of natural selection, contributes to the March number of the *Fortnightly Review* a paper on “Man’s Place in Nature,” which will command universal attention. The cable despatch to the *New York Sun* gives a clear view of the course of his argument. He states the skeptical argument, which made so deep an impression on Daniel Webster, that it is irrational and absurd to suppose that the Creator of unimaginable suns and systems should have any special interest in such a pitiful creature as man, the inhabitant of one of the smaller planets, attached to a second or third-rate sun, and that He should have selected this world for the tremendous and necessarily unique sacrifice of His Son.

Dr. Wallace holds that the conclusions of the new astronomy inevitably point to the finiteness of the universe, and that our sun is one of the central orbs of a globular star cluster which occupies the central position in the exact plane of the Milky Way, and that our

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sun is very near, if not actually at the center of the whole visible universe.

From this position Dr. Wallace advances to his second contention that our position as regards adaptability for organic life and for the higher form of intellectual beings is as central and unique as that of our sun in the stellar universe. Writers on this subject, he says, have usually been content to show that certain planets may possibly be now in a condition to support life not dissimilar to that upon the earth, but they never have considered the precedent question: Could such life have originated and been developed upon these planets? This is the real crux of the problem, and Dr. Wallace believes that full consideration of the required conditions will satisfy us that no other planet can fulfil them.

Dr. Wallace’s conclusion is:

“The three startling facts that we are in the centre of a cluster of suns and that that cluster is situated not only precisely in the plane of the Milky Way, but also centrally in that plane, can hardly now be looked upon as chance coincidences without any significance in relation to the culminating fact that the planet so situated has developed humanity. Of course, the relation here pointed out may be a true relation of cause and effect and yet have arisen as the result of one in a thousand million chances occurring during almost infinite time; but, on the other hand, those thinkers may be right who, holding that the universe is a manifestation of mind and that the orderly development of living souls supplies an adequate reason why such a universe should have been called into existence, believe that we ourselves are its sole and sufficient result, and that nowhere else than near the central position in the universe which we occupy could that result have been attained.”

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.