



The View From Nowhere

Thomas Nagel

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Human beings have the unique ability to view the world in a detached way: We can think about the world in terms that transcend our own experience or interest, and consider the world from a vantage point that is, in Nagel's words, "nowhere in particular." At the same time, each of us is a particular person in a particular place, each with his own "personal" view of the world, a view that we can recognize as just one aspect of the whole. How do we reconcile these two standpoints--intellectually, morally, and practically? To what extent are they irreconcilable and to what extent can they be integrated? Thomas Nagel's ambitious and lively book tackles this fundamental issue, arguing that our divided nature is the root of a whole range of philosophical problems, touching, as it does, every aspect of human life. He deals with its manifestations in such fields of philosophy as: the mind-body problem, personal identity, knowledge and skepticism, thought and reality, free will, ethics, the relation between moral and other values, the meaning of life, and death. Excessive objectification has been a malady of recent analytic philosophy, claims Nagel, it has led to implausible forms of reductionism in the philosophy of mind and elsewhere. The solution is not to inhibit the objectifying impulse, but to insist that it learn to live alongside the internal perspectives that cannot be either discarded or objectified. Reconciliation between the two standpoints, in the end, is not always possible.

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