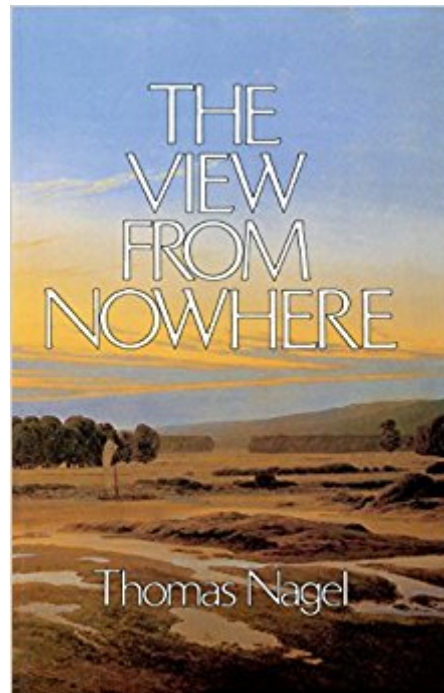


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The View From Nowhere



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The long and successful march of scientific and technical knowledge has introduced us to manifold viewpoints, many of which are quite alien to the comfortable or traditional views we grow to accept as the inner views of our lives. These larger views transcend science in their significance as they impinge on our inner views and ways of thinking and operating in the world. The result is an asymptotic view, a view from nowhere, that has gradually manifested itself in our cultural consciousness. Prof. Nagel explores these inner and outer contradicting viewpoints, and especially within the context that these views are at least partially forced on us. Simply adopting a highly personal inner view, or subjective view of life, or a highly detached impersonal view, or objective view, may seem to be extraordinarily appealing, but this appeal, according to Prof. Nagel, is illusory. He thinks that we are caught in an ineluctable struggle within the context of these opposing views, with a result that life seems, at least in part, absurd. This book is a brilliant, deep attempt to struggle with this conflict, by considering a multiplicity of arguments that arise once one accepts the conflict, and the curious necessity of having to accommodate, within one's individuality, the view from nowhere. I find that he develops numerous somewhat complex ideas, and the result is that it has whetted my appetite to read more of his work. He seems to be developing ideas that have an important bearing on contemporary life.

I was reading Paul and the Stoics by Troels Engberg-Pedersen and he was describing the ideal that a person should be striving for as a goal, and towards the "good life", according to Marcus Aurelius, who Troels is using for an example of a Stoic, since he wrote out a systematic description of those beliefs. The ultimate state to be in, as a result of those efforts at self improvement would be able to see things as one who was looking from above. Then Troes has a note describing discussions on this subject and suggested The View from Nowhere by Thomas Nagel, for a modern treatment. Really what it means from a Stoic viewpoint is what they thought of as seeing what was "real" and to find a "natural" way of fitting into that reality. Of course this is just my take on it from reading just this one book on the Stoics, plus studying Aristotle's Metaphysics for one day, and reading a good blog on Aristotelian philosophy. So, I thought I would expand my understanding of this idea by going ahead and ordering this book, by Nagel, trusting Troels as being a good and qualified person to make such a recommendation. I placed my order, and when I read some of it, I can update this

review, since it does not seem like there is a short time limit on editing them.

Nagel's jargon-free masterpiece starts with fundamental issues in epistemology, consciousness, and identity and then moves on to issues of morality and meaning with a consistent but modest appraisal of what we can know and what we cannot. His analysis is penetrating, and his arguments are tight. It will challenge you and reward rereading.

Excellent book. Thought provoking. Challenges the common secular views.

Excellent condition

Tough read but worthwhile.

begin by understanding you are insignificant, that time is an illusion, that space is connected to that illusion and then launch yourself like a pea in a straw at lunchtime in a junior high school cafeteria.

However it uses a bit overly technical language for a book that is truly about spirituality. I often found it disconcerting when reading about something simple for 3 pages.

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