



The View From Nowhere

By Thomas Nagel

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In his 1986 book *The View From Nowhere*, the philosopher Thomas Nagel described a philosophical puzzle - the kind of puzzle that seems to make the existence of the Matrix possible. The puzzle is this: we see the world from a point of view, namely, the point of view of our own conscious selves. As babies, we only have a view of the world from this viewpoint. But as we grow older, we also have what Nagel calls the "view from nowhere". This is the idea of the world as objectively existing, independently of both our viewpoint or any other particular viewpoint. We consider ourselves to be a part of this world. Therefore we have a view of ourselves from the inside as perceivers of the world, but also of ourselves as members of the objective world. Common-sense tells us that when we accumulate knowledge, this knowledge includes knowledge of the objective world. But Nagel sees a problem in the enterprise of accumulating such knowledge. Objective knowledge requires a neutral perspective. But we cannot occupy this neutral perspective. Therefore, objective knowledge seems unattainable. What we try to do is give an account of the world that "includes an explanation of why it initially appears to us as it does". The problem here is that, while doing this, we always have to keep our subjective perspective, so there is always room for doubt that we are not getting the proper picture. "The most objective view we can achieve will have to rest on an unexamined subjective base." The skeptical response to this is to accept that we just can't have knowledge of the objective world. For all we know, we might live in the Matrix..." (thanks to "skimpydoo" of Ireland)

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