

# Thinking from Nowhere

Integrating the Subjective and Objective



# Two Spheres of Reason

- \* Theoretical Reason: this is the faculty by which we seek the truth.
  - \* According to Aristotle, the first principle of theoretical reason is the Principle of Non-contradiction (PNC), the claim that it is not possible for any  $x$  to be both  $\phi$  and not- $\phi$  at the same time and in the same respect.
    - \* One question we might ask—but won't ask just today: is the PNC itself objective or subjective?
- \* Practical Reason: this is the faculty by which we determine the good.
  - \* According to Aquinas, the first principle of practical reason (PPR) is that the good is to be desired.
    - \* One question we might ask—but won't ask today: is this PPR objective or subjective?



# Today's Question

- \* In either of these spheres, can the objective and subjective be reconciled?
- \* Should we try to reconcile them?
  - \* Are we simply confused if we try?



# A Simple Case to Begin: Free Will

- \* One might look at each practical actor from without or from within?
- \* From without: (i) every event has a cause; (ii) if every event has a cause, we are not free; so, (iii) we are not free.
  - \* We are but dominoes falling in a row.
- \* From within: we have an unshakeable phenomenology of agency.
  - \* That seems a fancy way of way: we *seem* to ourselves to be free—we ponder, we plan, we execute, we're pleased/disappointed with ourselves, we're sometimes remorseful and sometimes satisfied.
    - \* Yet all of this presupposes that we regard ourselves as free.
- \* So, what gives?



# Nagel's Thought

- \* Thinking about a moment of choosing as an event, let us say that neurophysiological event, from the outside: it is but one event among a multitude of others, each caused and explained by what causes it, each causing some further event beyond itself, in a ceaseless, law-governed march forward.
- \* Thinking about that a moment of choosing from the inside: it a spontaneous production of our own authorship; *we* are in control; *we* explain why it has transpired.
- \* 'When the act is viewed under the aspect of determination by antecedents, its status as an event becomes prominent. But as appears upon further investigation, no account of it as an event is satisfactory from the internal viewpoint of the agent doing it.' —Nagel (*MQ*, 199)



# A Conflict of Perspectives

- \* Each point of view presents as a jockeying for preeminence: one side claims authority, authenticity, domination over the other.
- \* Each point of view claims *authority*.
- \* Only the objective is real, is the proper claimant of our truth-seeking orientation.
- \* No, no, says the agent: *I* am real, my agency is real. Only the subjective has the status of being undeniable and so has both epistemic and metaphysics privilege.



# The Contours of Conflict

- \* The points of view appear irreconcilable: neither subordinates to the other
- \* No degree of inter-subjectivity transitions to objectivity; no degree of inter-subjectivity even approximates objectivity.
  - \* It is simply more subjectivity piled on top of subjectivity.
- \* The problem is real and vivid: 'the same individual is the occupant of both viewpoints.' (*MQ*, 208)
- \* The pursuit of objectivity implicates the individual in a two-fold transcendence of the self (from self as individual and from self as sort).
- \* Trouble occurs when 'the objective view encounters something, revealed subjectively, that it cannot accommodate.' (*MQ*, 210)
- \* We seem to want to pledge allegiance to both points of view.
  - \* Yet we cannot do so. We cannot.



# Where to go?

- \* Reduction: subordinate one point of view to the other, *defining* the one in terms of the other
  - \* No obvious successes here.
- \* Elimination: admit that reduction is a failure and jettison one point of view altogether
  - \* Some obvious failures here.
- \* Annexation
  - \* Probably a mirage.



# Nagel's Initial Hope

- \* 'I shall offer a defense and also a critique of objectivity. Both are necessary in the present intellectual climate, for objectivity is both underrated and overrated, sometimes by the same persons. It is underrated by those who don't regard it as a method of understanding the world as it is in itself. It is overrated by those who believe it can provide a complete view of the world on its own, replacing the subjective views from which it has developed. These errors are connected: they both stem from an insufficiently robust sense of reality and of its independence of any particular form of human understanding.' —Nagel (*VN*, 5).