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NAGEL'S THEORY OF THE SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR RATIONALITY IN ETHICS

by

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ABSTRACT

Nagel's Theory of the Subjective and Objective: Implications for Rationality in Ethics

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In this thesis, I consider the consequences of applying Thomas Nagel's theory of the subjective and objective to rational decision-making in ethics.

In chapter one, I am concerned with the notion of rationality. I discuss a common assumption man has about rationality and analyze the four necessary conditions for rationality.

In chapter two, I present Nagel's theory. I draw out implications which are important in connection with rationality.

In chapter three, I examine the implications of Nagel's theory for the notion of rationality. I focus on two problem cases which are designed to highlight a conflict between Nagel's theory and rationality. I use an analogy to Derek Parfit's work on prisoner's dilemmas to support my claim that the acceptance of Nagel's theory rules out the possibility of performing actions based on rational decisions. Finally, I argue that the type of rationality which is possible under Nagel's theory is deprived of any action-guiding force.
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INTRODUCTION

A number of philosophical problems have defied satisfactory resolution. In his article, "Subjective and Objective," Thomas Nagel claims that these problems share the common difficulty of requiring both a subjective explanation and an objective explanation before all the aspects of the problems can be accounted for. Man, says Nagel, has a tendency to objectify his conception of the world, and thus, his theories and beliefs about the world, before accepting them as a true description of the world. The difficulty in accepting such a purely objective conception of the world, and thus, an objective explanation of the philosophical problems, is that the problems are resolvable only if both an objective and a subjective explanation of the problems are given. The requirement of providing both a subjective explanation and an objective explanation is difficult to meet because the two types of explanations are often in conflict with each other, and require the acceptance of conflicting ways of conceptualizing the way things are.

Nagel lists a number of these problems which require a subjective explanation. One problem is the conflict between consequentialist theories of ethics and more agent-centered theories. In this thesis, I propose to examine the subjective/
objective conflict between competing ethical theories. Specifically, I am interested in the choice that we must make between acting on self-interested reasons or acting on more altruistic reasons. In various forms, the same question has been raised throughout the history of ethics, "When my interests conflict with the interests of the general good, which action is it more rational for me to perform, the self-interested one or the altruistic one?"

Nagel presents the conflict in terms of the subjective, as the more self-interested, and the objective, as the more universal. In Nagelian terminology the question becomes "When my subjective considerations conflict with my objective considerations, which action is it more rational for me to perform, the ones based on subjective considerations or the ones based on objective considerations?"

My major claim in this thesis is that Nagel's theory voids essential conditions of rationality and thereby rules out the possibility of performing actions based on rational decisions. I have no intention of arguing for the acceptance of Nagel's theory at the cost of our notion of rationality, nor do I plan to argue for the retention of our notion of rationality at the cost of Nagel's theory. My only purpose is to show that Nagel's theory and the standard notion of rationality cannot both be accepted. I want the reader to be aware of a serious consequence of accepting what appears to be a very promising, insightful, and useful theory.
In order to demonstrate the conflict between Nagel's theory and the notion of rationality I need to present both. Chapter one is devoted to the notion of rationality. I will discuss a common assumption man has about rationality and then I will discuss the necessary and sufficient conditions for rationality. Chapter two presents Nagel's theory on the subjective and objective. After offering an explanation of the theory, I will draw out certain implications which are important in connection with rationality.

Chapter three examines the implications of Nagel's theory for our notion of rationality. I will focus on a problem case which is designed to highlight the conflict between Nagel's theory and rationality. The necessary and sufficient conditions of rationality will be applied to the problem case which shows how a decision is attempted under a Nagelian interpretation. Finally, I will present a second problem case, a standard prisoner's dilemma, and explain how Derek Parfit's treatment of prisoner's dilemmas parallels the Nagelian approach to decision-making. I will use Parfitian terminology to explain how a compromise between our notions of rationality and the subjective/objective theory is not possible.

We must either reject Nagel's theory or we must reject rationality as we know it.
CHAPTER ONE
RATIONALITY

We assume that when given a choice between two actions, we ought to perform that action which is the more rational action for us to perform. A long-standing interpretation of this assumption states that when given a choice between actions, we ought to perform that action which is most beneficial to us. This interpretation has us acting rationally when we act in a self-interested manner. Although this interpretation is fairly common, it is by no means unquestioned.

One proponent of the interpretation is Gilbert Harman.\(^1\) When discussing the different types of "oughts" which are often conflated in ethical discussions, Harman also makes a distinction between morality and rationality.

The sentence "They ought not to go around killing people." is therefore multiply ambiguous. It can mean that one would not expect them to do so (the "ought" of expectation), that it is not in their interest to do so (the "ought" of rationality), that it is a bad thing that they do so (the normative "ought to be"), or that they are wrong to do so (the moral "ought to be").\(^2\)

Harman's description for the "ought" of rationality states that the agent has acted rationally when the agent performs those actions which will promote the agent's own best interest. This explanation of rationality disregards the ongoing debate of whether rationality must always be connected with self-interest. The question of which action is the more rational, whether man is rational to act to promote his own interests or rational to sacrifice his interests for
a moral principle, is not the settled issue Harman implies by his distinction between the "ought" of rationality and the "ought to be" of morality. The issue of how a man must act if he is to act rationally will be discussed later in the paper. For now, I simply want to point out that while I do think Harman is correct to draw the distinction between the types of "oughts" he does, I disagree with his insinuation that the "ought" of rationality means only self-interest or prudence.

I am primarily concerned with the distinction Harman draws between the "moral ought" and the "ought of rationality" as I feel that these are the two uses which are conflated in the assumption that man ought to perform that action which is the more rational action to perform. I want to suggest the possibility that non-self-interested actions can be moral actions. If this possibility is allowed, Harman's distinction between the moral ought and the ought of rationality will be unacceptable since his distinction separates the idea of moral (non-self-interested) actions from the idea of rationality. Since I am calling into question a fairly accepted definition of rationality, namely the idea that rational actions will always be self-interested actions, I want to suggest the following terminology to avoid confusion: An action is self-interested (prudent) when the agent will benefit from performing that action. An action is moral (altruistic) when others besides the agent will benefit from the action. As will be
discussed shortly, the agent may benefit from a moral action, but if the action was done for moral reasons, the benefit was not the determining factor in performing the act. An action is a rational action when the action is supported by reasons. The reasons can be either self-interested or moral.

In order for a normative theory to maintain its action-guiding force, it must be able to provide reasons why man ought to abide by its rules. A Utilitarian theory prescribes certain actions on the ground that those actions promote the general good. That an act has the consequence of promoting the general good is seen by the Utilitarian as a reason to perform that act. Kantianism prescribes certain actions based on their conformity with the categorical imperative. The reason man ought not to lie is because lying violates the categorical imperative. A moral theory which prescribes a certain action but is unable to give a justification or argument in support of that action fails to provide a reason to do the action. If a moral theory fails to provide reasons for the acts it prescribes, the theory is a dead theory.

An accepted belief about morality is that no moral theory can require a man to act irrationally. Thus, no moral theory can require a man to abide by its rules if the man has stronger reasons to perform acts which are prohibited by the theory. Stronger reasons can either be qualitative in nature or quantitative. The distinction between more reasons and better reasons
will be discussed later in this chapter under condition two of the Rationality Condition.

If morality cannot require a man to act irrationally, against reason, then in order for morality to have claim upon man's actions, morality must be able to provide stronger reasons for the actions it prescribes. Unless morality can provide stronger reasons to be moral than an opposing theory can provide to be immoral, morality will be irrational.

Morality has never been able to provide conclusive evidence that its reasons are stronger reasons. Socrates was unable to refute Glaucon's Challenge in the Republic. Kurt Baier attempted to argue for morality based on the consequences of immorality. Unless all men were moral, claimed Baier, society would revert to a Hobbesian state of nature. Since the Hobbesian state of nature will not come to pass if only a small minority are immoral, Baier's argument is flawed by its failure to provide a reason for each person to be moral. Therefore, all that Baier gave was an argument why each man has a reason to want everyone else to be moral; he did not give an argument why I, as an individual, should be moral.

Baier's theory is defeated by the same line of argumentation which is often raised in objection to Act Utilitarianism. In Act Utilitarianism, the consequence of each act, taken separately, is judged by its effect on the utility of the general welfare. If an act will not lessen the overall utility and will promote an individual's utility, then even if the act
is in violation of the rules of the society, the act ought to be
done because of its utilitarian consequences. There is
reason for the majority to abide by the rules of society,
since a majority of rule-breakers will decrease the overall
utility, but there is no reason for each individual to abide
by the rules of society. Therefore, each individual has
reason to want everyone else to abide by the rules, but no
reason to abide by them himself.

The task for morality is to provide stronger reasons to be
moral than to be self-interested. A partial reason why morality
has had so much difficulty in providing an argument which will
establish stronger reasons for each person to be moral is
based on the ambiguous use of "rational." In the quote from
Harman's work given earlier, Harman used only one sense of
"rational." Harman's use of "rational" implied that the
person will only be rational if he acts in his own best
interest. Morality sometimes requires actions which seem
not to be in own's best interest. Morality can complete its
task of providing stronger reasons to be moral than to be
self-interested by either a) showing that morality is in
one's own best interest, which I shall argue is not
possible, or b) showing that there are reasons which are not
based on self-interest but which are capable of providing
guidance for action, and which, if not always stronger, are
at least of equal weight to the self-interested reasons.

Because I believe that moral actions cannot be done for
self-interested reasons, I find Harman's usage of rationa-
lity to be damaging for the whole notion of morality. I would like to present an argument which shows that the meaning Harman gives to rationality rules out the possibility of an agent both acting for moral reasons and acting rationally.

The justification for my claim about the implication of Harman's use of "rationality" lies in the Kantian definition of morality. If an act is done for any reason other than because of its adherence to the categorical imperative, then regardless of its consequences, the act is deprived of its moral worth. Consider the case of the God-fearing man. All of his actions conform to the dictates of his religion. He performs what appear to be moral actions and good consequences result from his actions. Yet he performs these actions because of a fear of damnation and hellfire and because of a desire for the reward of eternal life in heaven rather than because the actions are intrinsically the right actions to perform. He is in fact performing moral acts for his own benefit. Under the Kantian definition of morality, the man's actions have no moral worth. He does not perform these actions because they are right actions to perform, but performs them because he does not want to end up in hell. According to the teachings of Kant, the God-fearing man will not achieve his goal of spending his after-life in heaven. If the man did not care where he spent his after-life, then he would have no reason to act morally. Therefore, the man's "moral" actions are based on a hypothetical imperative
rather than a categorical imperative, and ultimately are done for self-interested reasons rather than moral ones.

Kant's theory of morality has been never been generally accepted, so I do not expect my argument based on Kant's theory to be taken as a defeat of Harman's claims. However, I do think that there is enough merit to Kant's argument to raise serious doubt about the consequences of accepting Harman. If Harman is correct, there is no possibility the morality will be a rational theory to accept because Harman equates rationality with acting in one's self-interest while Kant denies that an act done for self-interested reasons can be a moral act.

If the connection between morality and rationality is to retain viability, there must exist the possibility of non-self-interested reasons which are capable of providing action-directing force. Kantian moral reasons can only exist if there is the possibility of a man having a reason to perform an action that will not necessarily benefit him. If it is true that a man can have reasons which are not self-interested reasons then there will be two types of reasons, reasons which are self-interested and reasons which are the more general impersonal reasons. Following the terminology suggested by Thomas Nagel in The Possibility of Altruism, these reasons will be called subjective reasons and objective reasons, respectively. The meaning of these terms will be explained in more depth in chapter two when I discuss Nagel's theory.
To say that a man is rational to do X, then, can either mean that he has a subjective reason to do X or that he has an objective reason to do X. If the reason is subjective then the man will benefit by doing X and that benefit is his motivation; thus X is a reason "for" him. If the reason is an objective reason then, even if the man may benefit from the action, the benefit is not his motivation. If the man has objective reasons to perform an act then even if he will not benefit, or even if the act will cause harm for him, he will still have a motivation, a reason to the act. If the possibility of objective reasons is allowed, as Kant's argument would suggest, then a man can be rational, that is, he can act with the support of reasons, even if he acts in a manner not in his own best interest. The difficult part is to establish the validity of objective reasons.

Much of moral philosophy has been based on the idea of objective reasons. Indeed, if my assessment of the consequences of limiting rationality to a purely Harman-like definition of rationality is correct, then all of morality is dependent upon objective reasons. Kant's categorical imperative is an appeal to objective reasons, as is Utilitarianism, although neither theory makes use of Nagel's terminology.

The only point I wish to make at this stage is that the possibility of objective reasons has not been successfully dismissed and so definitions of rationality, such as those suggested by Harman, and implicit in Glaucon's Challenge,
should not be accepted without qualifications.

If the validity of both subjective reasons for action and objective reasons for action are granted, then man will often have conflicting reasons for action. As will be shown in chapter two, the subjective considerations will often suggest action X, while the objective considerations suggest action Y. In several cases, the performing of Y will necessarily rule out the performing of X. When man accepts that he has both subjective reasons for action and objective reasons for action, he will sometimes be faced with the impossible suggestion that he perform X and not perform X. Although a man is rational to follow the suggestion of his reasons when the reasons conflict over which action to perform and suggest the performance of X and the non-performance of X, he will have to choose between the reasons. In order for a man to still be rational even when his reasons conflict over what action he should perform, he must consider the reasons and choose between them before he can act. The procedure for acting rationally will be presented in the following discussion on the Rationality Condition.

Accepting the assumption that man ought to be rational, the following condition for rationality must be met:

Rationality Condition

S is rational in performing an action X, if and only if, S takes all available relevant information into consideration, weighs against each other the various factors for and against action X, determines that X is supported by the most and/or best reasons, and then proceeds to actualize X.
The Rationality Condition (RC) has four necessary conditions, which, when combined, prove a sufficient condition for rationality.

1) S takes all relevant available information into consideration. There are two clauses to this condition, "relevant" and "available." Available information is,

...[the] best justified system of beliefs available at the time. It is contrasted with the beliefs the agent actually has, which may be scanty or unjustified, as compared with the science or common-sense knowledge of his day. It is also contrasted with the beliefs an omniscient being might have....[it is] the propositions accepted by the science of the agent's day, plus factual propositions justified by publicly accessible evidence and the principles of logic. 8

This clause of the condition is strict, but it captures essential aspects of rationality. For example, if I need to make a decision, such as what town to move to when looking for work, and I base my decision on hearsay and out-dated knowledge, I have not been as rational as I could have been. And if I have all the knowledge necessary to make a rational decision, but simply refuse to follow the laws of logic, I will very likely reach the wrong decision. Since I could have reached the right decision, but chose not to be logical in the handling of my information, I have not been as rational as possible.

On the other hand, by contrasting our actual knowledge with that of an omniscient being, and to knowledge not known by the science of the day, by not requiring the omniscience which is beyond man, man is granted the possibility of
being rational. We do not want to say that the alchemists were irrational in their attempts to turn lead into gold since they probed into different areas to expand their knowledge, and they applied the laws of logic. They were mistaken in their beliefs but they were not irrational.

If man is to be rational, his information concerning decisions will need to meet these standards. Man rarely meets all these requirements, but this failure does not mean that the requirements are too strict. It means, rather, that man is rarely as rational as he could be in making decisions.

The second clause of condition 1) deals with relevance.

A piece of information is relevant if its presence to awareness would make a difference to the person's tendency to perform a certain act, or to the attractiveness of some prospective outcome to him. Hence it is essentially a causal notion. The notion of relevance is intended to qualify the range of factors in the world which are available. All relevant factors need not be taken into account, but only those factors which will have some influence on the judgments to be made. For example, the number of people wearing mismatched socks on the day that Carter reinstated the draft is indeed a fact of the world and supposing that the number of people wearing mismatched socks were a fact stated everyday in the newspaper like the weather, then the fact about socks would be publicly available. In a purely comprehensive account of the world, this fact would have to be included. But the number of people wearing mismatched socks in not a relevant fact for any moral judgment made about Carter's decision.
Also, there will be facts which are relevant, but are not available as specified by the first clause of condition 1). Both clauses are needed as complements in order to allow man the possibility of being rational. Man does not have to take all relevant information into account, nor all available information, but only all relevant available information to be considered rational.

2) S determines that X is supported by the most and/or best reasons. A reason is an argument why an action ought to be done. A rational action can either be done because one has the most (numerical quantity) reasons to do that act or a rational action can be done because one has the best reason (quality) to do that act, or best of all, a rational action can be done because one has both the most and the best reasons to do that act. For example, there are several reasons to get married. Marriage occurs because of pregnancy, greed (if the intended is rich), the sealing of treaties, the desire to be single no longer, the desire for companionship, the desire to have children but not to be a single parent, or the fear of a lonely old age. Marriage also occurs because of the love between the two people involved. This last reason will be considered here as the best reason to get married, while the others are to count merely as the listing of various reasons to be married. It is, of course, possible for any number of the several reasons to coexist with the best reason to get married. The possibility also exists that a number of the several reasons
can exist together without the existence of the best reason.
While I think this is a very interesting question, I will not attempt a solution to it at this time. The question of whether to make a decision based on the best reason or the most reasons will be raised again at the end of the thesis.

3) $S$ proceeds to actualize $X$. This notion is simply the application of what I will call 2nd level rationality. There are two levels at which a decision can be evaluated in terms of its rationality. "Rational" refers both to the desired end (1st level) and to the means used to reach that end (2nd level). A man is rational (1st level) if his desired end can be considered to be a rational end to desire; the man is irrational (1st level) if his end is not considered to be rational to desire. A man is rational (2nd level) if he acts in a manner that promotes his desired end. A man is irrational (2nd level) if he acts in a manner that defeats his desired end.

Man is not rational simply by deciding which course of action would most effectively achieve his goal. In order for man to be fully rational he must proceed to perform the actions his rationality prescribes. To knowingly not do what one knows one desires and what one knows is rational to desire, is to act irrationally. The evaluation of 2nd level rationality does not reflect at all on how rational it is to have a certain end in the first place. 2nd level rational only refers to how rationally one sets about to reach that
end.

Two qualifiers to condition 3) are needed. First, man need not actually perform the course of action his deliberations suggest. All that is necessary in some cases is that he have the intention of proceeding to actualize the course of action. If the man has met conditions 1) and 2) and cannot, for certain reasons beyond his control, complete the action he intended to perform, then the man still can be considered to have met condition 3). If the reason he cannot actualize his choice of action is because of some fact which was available and relevant, as described in condition 1), and which he overlooked, then the man has not been rational. But if the reason he cannot complete the suggested course of action is for some reason which he could not have known about, such as being run over by a car just as he was beginning to perform the action, then he has still met condition 3) and still should be considered rational.

Second, a physical action will not always be required. Sometimes the third condition can be met by an adjustment in the way of thinking. As will be seen, an ethical theory usually requires physical action.

To say that a man ought to be rational, when referring to 2nd level rationality, is just to say that man ought to promote his desired end and ought to do so by the most effective means available and known. This is the notion captured by condition 3). It is rational for a man to promote his desired end simply because having a desired end
implies that he will want to achieve it. Harold Brown discusses the question of why it is rational for a man to promote his desired end.

Our reply to the question "Why be rational?" amounts, then, to the claim that I ought to be rational because this seems to be the most effective way of achieving my goals, but this answer has no force unless it is assumed that we ought to attempt to achieve our goals....to accept a goal is just to accept the imperative that I ought to pursue that goal. Brown's thoughts on why man ought to be rational applies only to 2nd level rationality. As he continues his discussion on why man ought to be rational, Brown brings up the question whether man still ought to be rational (2nd level) even when he knows that his desired goal is immoral. Brown concludes that once man accepts a goal he is committed to the belief that it ought to be pursued.

4) S weighs the various factors against each other. In an issue like rationality, where a course of action will be undertaken based on a decision made in accordance with the conditions of rationality, there will be cases where the information taken into consideration will suggest different, even opposing courses of action. If there were not a conflict of reasons and the corresponding conflict over the courses of action a man has reasons to perform, there would never be a need to make a decision. To make a decision is precisely to choose between options. The suggestion of opposing courses of action will happen almost every time all the relevant factors for a decision are taken into account. When this happens man must evaluate the factors against each
other in regard to his desired end. If the information suggests different courses of action and man is committed to condition 3), proceeding to actualize the suggested course of action, then some of the information, though relevant and available, will have to be dismissed in favor of other factors which are considered to be more favorable.

While all the available relevant factors must be considered in order to make a rational decision, in the interest of not requiring a man to do contradictory actions simultaneously, it is not necessary that all the relevant factors be accepted. A factor may be dismissed from further consideration once it has been evaluated against the other factors, and has been found to be less effective or of less importance.

An extremely important condition for the dismissal of any factor is that the factor has been dismissed for the correct reason. A factor may be dismissed when it is compared to other factors of the same kind, judged without prejudice and found to be inferior. In the following discussion, I will give only an intuitive presentation of how a factor is judged without prejudice. Full discussion of this notion occurs in the discussion of Parfit's work on prisoner's dilemmas in chapter three, section (II).12

As stated, the need to choose between reasons is common to decision-making. In some cases the choice of which reasons to accept and which to dismiss is relatively straightforward.
For example, if Letterman lives on the second floor and desires to pick up his mail on the first floor (this desire will be assumed to be rational), Letterman can fairly and easily evaluate the different courses of action available to him against each other in terms of their effectiveness in getting him to his mailbox.

He can either take the stairs or take the elevator. Since the desired end is to get his letters as efficiently as possible in terms of time and money, the speed and cheapness of the elevator suggests that Letterman would be rational to take the elevator. There is, however, the elevator man who likes to talk, so Letterman would be delayed at least ten minutes both going down and coming back up. This factor suggests that Letterman should take the stairs since the cost is the same and will take less time.

There is, however, a hungry tiger on the stairs. Therefore, in order to go down the stairs and arrive at the mailbox in any condition to read his letters, Letterman would first have to call out for pizza to be delivered to the hungry tiger. This would take thirty minutes and cost $12.95. Letterman would have to weigh the twenty minute delay via the elevator against the thirty minute delay and added cost of the pizza via the stairs to determine which course of action to take. Whether Letterman took the stairs and had to spend thirty minutes and $12.95 for the tiger or whether he took the elevator and had to spend twenty minutes in conversation depended on which course of action most
effectively achieved him his goal. Since his goal was to pick up his letters as quickly and as cheaply as possible, the rational choice for Letterman was to go downstairs via the elevator.

There is the possibility that no one course of action will be suggested. Suppose that the elevator man would take up fifteen minutes each way instead of just ten and suppose that Letterman owed the elevator man $12.95. In this case either course of action will cost Letterman the same in terms of time and money. He will be just as efficient to use the stairs as to use the elevator. Therefore, each course of action is rational to the same degree and Letterman is equally rational to choose either.

The weighing of the various factors when the end is not in dispute can be done easily because there is a given standard against which the considerations of each course of action can be measured. In the Letterman example the standard was cost and time efficiency. Both choices available to Letterman, the stairs and the elevator, involved factors which could be weighed against each other by means of a common standard. Whenever the desired outcome involves factors which can be weighed against each other by a common standard, the determination of which course of action most effectively achieves the desired goal can be easily done.

Once there is an undisputed end, a standard can be determined for the type of factors used in weighing the means. In the Letterman example, the given end was to
retrieve and read the letters in the mailbox. This end implied the factors of time and cost efficiency. With the factors in mind, it was simple to find a common standard by which to weigh each means of retrieving the letters, namely, the less time and money spent in retrieving the letters the more desirable the means, thus the more rational Letterman was to choose that means.

However, there are times where a decision must be made even though the end is poorly defined and in dispute. This is the case when the end is rationality.

The end of rationality is in dispute because the different ways of understanding what is meant to be achieved when one is rational are opposing. If the idea that self-interested actions are rational actions is accepted, then, when one is rational one would understand that they are to achieve self-beneficial actions. Because the possibility of non-self-interested reasons (the moral or objective reasons) has not be ruled out, such a self-interested definition of rationality is unacceptable. Unless man can know exactly what it is he is trying to achieve as his end, and can know what factors will influence his success in achieving it, his end is in dispute. Once his end is in dispute, man will have a very difficult time weighing the various factors against each other.

When the desired end is rationality, and the means available of achieving the end are opposing ethical theories, we must be careful not to accept the various definitions of
rationality proposed by the differing theories as the definition of 1st level rationality. To accept one of the various definitions as the definition of rationality as an end would cause the other theories' claims of rationality to be judged by a competing theory's definition. Doing so will necessarily cause the other theories to fail to meet the end of rationality before they are given a fair chance, i.e., before they are judged against a neutrally defined end. There must be a common end toward which each theory can be evaluated in terms of how well it achieves the common goal, rather than in terms of how well it achieves the end of some other, possibly opposing theory. Therefore, definitions of rationality which equate it with self-interest cannot be used as a definition for 1st level rationality. There needs to be a neutral end, one which is not prejudiced in favor of self-interest or in favor of altruism.

The difficulty in weighing reasons will not be solved at this time. The discussion of how to weigh reasons and why there is such difficulty in doing so will be discussed in chapters two and three.
CHAPTER TWO
THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

In the preceding chapter I established a criterion for rationality primarily as it pertained to decision-making in ethical theories. In this chapter I will look at Nagel's theory of the subjective and objective which is meant to deal, in part, with ethical decision-making and the difficulties associated with it. I will present and explain Nagel's theory and point out his basic claims of the purpose of his theory. I will not be looking at all of his theory, nor will I deal with certain important and interesting aspects of the theory. I am only interested in that part of the theory which effects our ability to make decisions which are capable of guiding our ethical actions.

Nagel begins his discussion of the subjective and the objective by providing a number of philosophical problems which have defied resolution. These problems include the meaning of life, the free-will/determinism issue, the mind-body problem, personal identity, and the conflict in ethics between deontological theories and consequentialist theories. Nagel presents these problems because he believes that "[t]here is a pattern in these examples which justifies us in locating a common philosophical difficulty behind all of them, concealed by their diversity, and sometimes ignored in their treatment with unfortunate results."1

In the dispute over consequentialism, [the clash between subjective and objective] appears between internal and external views of human life, both fully admitting the importance of human concerns
and ends. In the mind-body problem, it appears in the clash between an internal human view of human beings and the external view of physical theory. In the problem of personal identity, it appears in the clash between the point of view of a particular individual toward his own past and future and the view that others may take of him as a continuing conscious being, characterized by bodily and psychological continuities. (p. 207)

This common difficulty, as Nagel sees it, is that each attempted resolution has only been made from the objective approach when the problem in question can only be fully understood through both an objective and a subjective description or explanation.

The problem [common difficulty] is one of opposition between subjective and objective points of view. There is a tendency to seek an objective account of everything before admitting its reality. But often what appears to a more subjective point of view cannot be accounted for in this way. So either the objective conception of the world is incomplete, or the subjective involves illusions that should be rejected. (p. 196)

Nagel argues for the second possibility, that the objective conception of the world is incomplete, and argues against the first, that the subjective conception of the world is an illusion.

When Nagel introduces the notions of subjective and objective, he is not referring to conceptions of the world formed from two distinct viewpoints.

Although I shall speak of the subjective viewpoint and the objective viewpoint, this is just shorthand, for there are not two such viewpoints, nor even two such categories into which more particular viewpoints can be placed. Instead there is a polarity. (p. 206)

Nagel refers to this range of viewpoints with the subjective
Man moves along the spectrum from the subjective pole where he views the world from a very self-centered perspective to the objective which "regard[s] the world as centerless, with the viewer as just one of its contents" (p. 206). The movement toward greater objectivity is achieved by a continual abstraction and detachment from a personal viewpoint. Because of the lack of a clear distinction between one position and another, Nagel refers to the range of viewpoints as a spectrum. While there is a subjective end and an objective end to the spectrum,

...the distinction between subjective and objective is relative. A general human point of view is more objective than the view from where you happen to be, but less objective than the viewpoint of physical science. The opposition between subjective and objective can arise at any place on the spectrum where one point claims dominance over another, more subjective one and that claim is resisted. (p. 206)

Nagel repeatedly uses the phrases "objective viewpoint" and "subjective viewpoint." These phrases are difficult to understand because 1) Nagel uses the term 'viewpoint' as a metaphor, and 2) Nagel uses the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' in a unique way.

Nagel, at times, uses the term 'viewpoint' in its traditional role of referring to the conception formed of a physical object by sensory perception and determined by the spatial location of the perceiver. He also uses the term as a metaphor to explain why man forms certain conceptions about mental entities such as beliefs about values. For example, the phrase 'from an
altruistic point of view,' means, among other things, that a person will make certain judgments about what is a correct action to perform in a given situation based upon his belief that he should take the desires of other people into consideration when making a decision.

When the term 'viewpoint' is used literally, the 'point' is a spatial location and the 'view' is the appearance of the object to the observer from his spatial location. We see a chair and so have a conception of what the chair looks like. A person standing to the side of the chair has a different perspective or point of view of the chair than a person standing in front of the chair. A person's perception of what the chair is depends upon the spatial point from where he views the chair.

Nagel explains the basic beliefs we have about physical reality along the following lines(p.207). We do not believe that there is a physical object which is the way it appears and we do not believe that the chair itself changes as our perception of it changes. We believe that there is a chair which exists independently, as it is in itself, regardless of our perspective of it. We believe that the way the chair exists independently of our perspective is the reality of the chair. We reach an understanding of the reality of the chair by abstracting from the different individual perspectives we have of the chair.

Nagel claims that we believe we can have knowledge of the reality of the world and what is true about values and other mental entities by following a similar type of abstraction(p.209). We believe there is a way things are in
the world independent of how they appear to us, or, if the entity in question is mental, independent of what we believe about it. We believe that what matters has value, independent of our involvement in the conceptualization of the things that matter. We can reach an understanding of these independent values by detaching from the values any part of their conception which is based on characteristics particular to the conceptualizer. A Nagelian-objective conception is a conception which is detached from those characteristics of the conceptualizer which would distort the way the value or entity is in itself.

Since our conceptions about the values are not determined by a spatial location, the use of 'viewpoint' when applied to such mental objects as values, becomes metaphorical. The 'view' is what we believe rather than what we see and the 'point', for Nagel, is not a spatial location, but the position on the metaphorical subjective/objective spectrum(p.206).

The subjective/objective spectrum is a metaphor for the range of possible ways of world-viewing, the ways the world can be conceptualized and understood. An understanding of the world from a certain viewpoint (location on the spectrum) is a specific conception of the world. When a man has a specific conception of the world which is determined by how objectively or how subjectively he views the world, the man has three implicit beliefs. His conception of the world determines the beliefs the man has about himself, the beliefs the man has about the world, and the beliefs the man
has about what is true in the world.

A man can consider himself to be the single individual in the world. Such a solipsistic man may not consider that the other individuals in the world are real, or if they are real, that they have equal importance to himself. His belief about himself (that he matters most), his belief about the world (that there are no other individuals who matter as much as he), will determine his belief about what is true in the world (that altruism is not a rational approach for him to follow).

Another man might hold a position midway on the spectrum. Such a position might yield a theory like Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is not as subjective as solipsism because from the Utilitarian point of view more than just the individual matters. The world is composed of several individuals, each having value because he is a member of a certain group.

But Utilitarianism is not a totally objective theory, not in the Nagelian sense of objective. The Utilitarian still regards the world from a point of view of a being within the world. To be totally objective, a theory would have to have a conception of the world which did not depend on the perspective of any being within the world for its truth. Utilitarianism depends upon the perspective of sentient beings to determine which actions produce the greatest good.

At the other pole of the spectrum is the subjective conception of the world. The subjective conception of the world derives from a "particular individual, having a specific constitution, situation, and relation to the rest of
the world" (p. 206). The subjective conception gradates into the objective conception by a process of continual abstraction from,

...first, the individual's specific spatial, temporal, and personal position in the world, then from features that distinguish him from other humans,...gradually from forms of perception and action characteristics of humans, and away from the narrow range of a human scale in space, time, and quantity, toward a conception of the world which as far as possible is not the view of anywhere within it. (p. 206)

This final conception is the objective conception which "regards the world as centerless, with the viewer as just one of its contents" (p. 206).

The objective conception of the world, for Nagel, is the conception of the world which is perceived by a viewer who is able to see himself, not as himself, but as just one of the many objects in the world. The objective viewer does not see himself as himself but as an entity separate from the entity perceiving. The objective viewer would also see humans, not as a species to which he belongs, but merely as one of many species in the world. To be totally objective, the viewer would have to be able to form a conception of anything, without allowing any of his characteristics of who, what and where he is to contribute to the formation of the conception. The aim of the objective is to understand what is true no matter who, if anyone at all, is doing the conceptualizing.

Nagelian objectivity differs from the standard usage of objectivity. In epistemology, the term 'objective' refers
to what is publicly observable. This for Nagel, following Wittgenstein, is "intersubjectivity" (p. 207). Nagelian objectivity is not achieved by "an increase of imaginative scope that provides access to many subjective points of view other than one's own" (p. 207).

The pursuit of objectivity therefore involves a transcendence of the self, in two ways: a transcendence of particularity and a transcendence of one's type. It must be distinguished from a different kind of transcendence by which one enters imaginatively into other subjective points of view, and tries to see how things appear from other specific standpoints (p. 209).

Rather, objectivity is achieved by "discount[ing] for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that makes things appear to us as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are" (p. 208).

Objective transcendence aims at a representation of what is external to each specific point of view: what is there or what is of value in itself rather than for anyone—the aim is to represent how things are, not for anyone or any type of being (p. 209).

Although Nagel rejects man's tendency to only accept accounts of the world made from an objective point of view, he does understand from where the tendency comes.

The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that makes things appear to us as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are. We flee the subjective under the pressure of an assumption that everything must be something not to any point of view, but in itself. To grasp this by detaching more and more from our own point of view is the unreachable ideal to which the pursuit of objectivity aims (p. 208).

Man desires to have his theories grounded in objectivity
because he believes that the more objective conception of the world is closer to the way things really are, closer to reality.

Objectivity is naturally linked with reality; it is easy to feel that anything has to be located in the objective world in order to qualify as real, and that it must have as its real nature some character which, whether physical or not, can be regarded impersonally and externally. (p. 202)

Man thinks that an objective conception of the world will give him a description of the world as it is in itself, not as it appears to subjects inside it which man considers to be an illusion, something to be discarded. Man also believes that a description which presents things as they are in themselves will be an account of all that there really is in the world. Man does not believe the way things appear to subjects in the world is part of what is really there, and so, in order to have a comprehensive account of what is really there in the world, all man has to do is to give an objective description of things.

But the consistent pursuit of greater objectivity runs into trouble, and gives rise to the philosophical problems I have described, when it is turned back on the self, as it must be to pursue its comprehensive ambitions.

The trouble occurs when the objective view encounters something, revealed subjectively, that it cannot accommodate. Its claims to comprehensiveness will then be threatened. The indigestible lump may be either a fact or a value. (p. 210)

Nagel agrees with the objective's claim that it can provide a description of the way things are in themselves, the way they really are. What he disagrees with is the further claim of the
objective, that its description is a comprehensive description. Nagel's main argument is that no point of view, either subjective or objective, can be comprehensive. He briefly looks at the idealist tradition, but "[has] concentrated on the tendency to resolve the conflict by objectifying everything because it has dominated recent analytical philosophy in spite of Wittgenstein"(p.212).

In order for a description of the world to be comprehensive it would have to be able to describe everything that is a part of reality. According to Nagel, the objective can only describe the way things are in themselves, and not as they appear to a viewer if physical, or as they are for a 'viewer' if mental(p.201).

Nagel is concerned with conceptions of the world and the corresponding realities and how those conceptions affect our theories. When Nagel discusses comprehensiveness, he is not concerned with a listing of propositions. He is concerned with the way the world is. He claims that the ways of world-viewing are, in fact, the ways the world is; how the world is for a subject is a part of reality. The way things are for an 'experiencing creature' is a part of the way things are in reality even though it is not a part of the way things are in themselves. A comprehensive account of reality can no longer simply provide a list of the way things are in themselves, but must accept as a part of reality, as a part of what is there really is, the way things are for the experiencing creature.

For example, an agent-centered morality depends on the way
the agent perceives his role in the world. The way an agent perceives his role in the world depends on the conception the agent has of himself and the world he is in. If the only conception of the world which was true were the objective conception, then agent-centered morality would be grounded in an illusion. Nagel's claim is that the perception of the world from a more subjective point of view is not an illusion, but "an irreducible fact of life" (p. 213). The subjective perception the agent has of the world allows him to give consideration to his own interests and desires, even at the cost of more general, universal and objective concerns.

Appearances are acknowledged as a part of our knowledge—we know that when we stand far away from a building, the building will appear smaller than it is in reality. What Nagel is arguing for is that the way the building is for me, the way it appears, be accepted, not just as a piece of knowledge, but as a part of reality. The properties which make events be experiences can only be explained from a subjective point of view. An event is not an experience of any particular sort unless it is an experience for someone, the "experiencing creature." Experiences are subjective because the "properties that make them [events] experiences exist only from the point of view of the types of beings who have them" (p. 201).

We do not want to deny the reality of experiences and yet we cannot explain experiences unless we do so from a subjective point of view.

Nagel denies that the subjective experience is dependent on
a more objective reality. Instead, there is both the subjective reality of an experience, i.e., an event as it is for whomever or whatever is experiencing, and the objective reality of an event, which is just a series of actions, and is not dependent on the perspective of anyone for its existence. Granted, the event may require humans for it to occur, but it is not dependent upon their perspective of what is happening.

Nagel does not deny that objectifying will enable man to get a closer representation of the way things are in themselves, but he does deny that an account which only presents things the way they are in themselves will be a comprehensive account.

We must admit that the move toward objectivity reveals what things are like in themselves as opposed to how they appear....Therefore when the objective gaze is turned on human beings and other experiencing creatures, who are undeniably parts of the world, it can reveal only what they are like in themselves. And if the way things are for these subjects is not a part of the way things are in themselves, an objective conception, whatever it shows, will omit something. So reality is not just objective reality, and the pursuit of objectivity is not an equally effective method of reaching the truth about everything.(p.212-13, emphasis mine)

If Nagel is correct that the subjective is essential to so many of the problems of philosophy, then man no longer has a valid reason to prefer the objective conception over the subjective conception since the objective will no longer be able to justify its claim to comprehensiveness.

Applying this idea to moral theories, any event judged as good or bad is experienced by someone. The degree from which man can detach from his experiences before evaluating them is shown by the different types of moral theories.
But, if Nagel is correct to claim that the subjective perspective is essential to experiences, then the tendency to only accept objectified moral theories is called into question. More to the point, the claim of objective moral theories as dominate moral theories because of their ability to provide a comprehensive account of reality has been defeated.

Nagel considers the possibility that everything real must be objectively describable. He considers three possible ways to account for subjective facts under an objective interpretation: reduction, elimination and annexionation (p. 210-11).

Reduction is the attempt to accommodate subjective facts under an objective interpretation, but this method fails because the very fact to be accommodated is so altered under any interpretation but a subjective one that the reason for keeping the subjective fact is lost.

Elimination is the attempt to dismiss the subjective fact, possibly by offering an explanation as to how it came to be a part of our beliefs in the first place and why we think it is important to maintain the subjective fact. Under elimination, the subjective facts are dismissed as an illusion. Nagel in turn dismisses elimination because he believes in subjective facts and his theory is an attempt to understand them, not to simply dismiss them. Nagel does not feel that man can realistically outright deny the existence of subjective facts and values.
The third attempt is annexation, the "invention of a new element of objective reality especially for the purpose of including this recalcitrant [subjective] element"(p.211). Nagel dismisses annexation as obscure and as a "metaphysical invention"(p.211).

It is no good trying to amplify our conception of the objective world to include whatever is revealed subjectively, for the problem is not that something has been left out. An objective conception of space and time cannot be faulted for leaving out the identification of the here and now. Any conception that included it would not be objective and any objective realization would fail to capture it.(p.211)

The task before Nagel is to establish that there are subjective facts which are essential to the problem under discussion and which therefore must be included in any theory for the theory to be comprehensive, and further, that these subjective facts cannot be accounted for by the three means he considers and then dismisses. Nagel attempts his task of defending subjective facts primarily by use of examples.

The example which I feel gives the clearest intuitive feel for Nagel's meaning of the subjective and the objective and why man is dissatisfied by accepting either just an objective conception or a subjective conception deals with the meaning of life. The meaning of life can either be viewed from an internal or subjective point of view, or it can be considered from an external, detached, objective point of view. The problem about the meaning of life is that both the internal subjective point of view and the external objective point of view claim priority. By claiming priority, each point of view insists that its particular claims
should be accepted and the claims of the other point of view be subsumed.

The internal point of view questions activities as they relate to the life that is being lived, the life of the individual. What has importance has importance because it matters to the individual. An internal position does not have to imply a solipsistic point of view. The internal point of view does not mean that things matter only as I consider them to be of importance, although solipsism certainly is a possible subjective point of view. What the subjective point of view does mean is that things are considered to be important only in so far as they relate to the individuals involved; values which are detached from the individuals' concerns are not concerns for the individuals. The subjective point of view is opposed by the objective point of view which "[r]egards life in detachment from specific or general human purposes"(p.196).

The internal view asks, what is the importance for the individual life of insignificance from an external point of view? Life is lived from inside, and issues of significance are significant only if they can be raised from inside. It therefore does not matter that from a point of view outside my life, my life does not matter.

The external view, on the other hand, comprehends within its scope of observation all the aims and commitments by reference to which internal significance is measured....It claims a position of dominance, as the only complete conception of how things really are. This dominance is not imposed from outside, but derives from the intrinsic appeal of impersonality to individual reflection. Life seems absurd because it seems absurd to oneself, taking up a point of view that is both natural and appealing.(p.197)

Nagel sees the tension, the conflicting ways of
understanding the world to be "an irreducible fact of life" (p. 213). Nagel urges man to resist the tendency to unify all knowledge under an objective understanding. In place of unification, Nagel suggests "Accepting the polarity without allowing either of its terms to swallow the other..." (p. 213).

That there is a tension between competing theories for their respective problems seems hard to deny. Nagel is correct to point out the common difficulty found in these problems and his theory is able to provide an explanation why there is the tension. What is difficult to accept is his solution to this tension by "accepting the polarity."

There are two main difficulties in accepting Nagel's theory. First, Nagel seems to imply that there is not the one world, but several worlds (p. 212). There has been much discussion on how literally Nagel intended this claim. There has also been discussion whether this consequence of his theory is reason to reject Nagel's theory. Second, and of most importance for this paper, Nagel's solution gives rise to doubts about the possibility of comprehensive knowledge, and how comprehensive knowledge can co-exist with consistent knowledge.

The several-worlds theory derives from Nagel's insistence that man cease striving for "the one truth" (p. 212). If Nagel is correct, then there is no one reality, but several realities, each of which can only be known from its corresponding point of view. This claim of the several realities is the
foundation of the several-worlds theory, for if there is not one reality which is the way the world is, there is not reason to think that there is only the one actual world. Instead, we should think that there will be different ways the world is, corresponding to the realities describable from the different points of view.

There are three options for interpreting this claim:

1) metaphorically, with the truths of the one world simply being justified ways of world-viewing,
2) literally, with the world being an unfathomable entity which is able to exist both as a unified spatial-temporal entity and as an entity which does not have a single, consistent way of existing, or finally,
3) as the claim that the world exists as a single spatial-temporal entity but man is unable to comprehend the world in its entirety.

The essential claim of Nagel's theory is that no one account of the world can ever be comprehensive. This claim follows whether there are several actual worlds or whether there is only the one physical world, which does exist in a unified physical form but which is such that man can only grasp aspects of the world at any one time. So whether it is the world which is multiple or man's understanding which is multiple, the same result occurs: man cannot give a single consistent account of what the world is like. Although the question of how to understand this particular part of Nagel's theory is rich and interesting, a resolution of this point is not necessary before the rest of the theory can be examined. Under either interpretation of how to understand Nagel's claim about the world, the
positions on the spectrum can be considered to be viewpoints man has about the world.

The second major difficulty with Nagel's theory is grounded in his denial of the possibility of any one point of view being comprehensive. This denial has damaging implications for the type of consistent and comprehensive knowledge established in chapter one as a requirement for the possibility of rational actions. Nagel denies that comprehensive knowledge can come from only one point of view but is vague about whether he thinks that comprehensive knowledge itself is thereby an impossibility (p. 210). If comprehensive knowledge is an impossibility from only one point of view, then comprehensive knowledge may still be possible if more than one point of view is taken. The question I want to look at now is whether the combination of the different points of view will 1) result in comprehensive knowledge and 2) if this means of achieving comprehensive knowledge is able to maintain consistency.

I will call a point of view which is both comprehensive and consistent a unified point of view.

If comprehensive knowledge is possible, if man can have a full accounting of the way the world is, and if this knowledge is not possible from only one point of view, then man must be able to "piece together" the knowledge he has from the different points of view. This piecing together might occur either by 1) postulating the existence of a special type of point of view which is capable of taking all
the information into account and remaining consistent or 2) by allowing the truth of one point of view to be known from another point of view, gradually building up the knowledge from all points of view, while remaining consistent, until comprehensive knowledge is obtained.

A point of view that combined all the points of view would have to be a neutral point of view, a point of view that was not itself slanted toward the objective or the subjective. There are two difficulties with a neutral point of view. First, Nagel specifically says that no point of view, located on the spectrum between the subjective pole and the objective pole can be comprehensive (p. 206). So the neutral point of view would have to be a point of view off the spectrum. What a point of view off the spectrum would be like is a very difficult notion to conceptualize. Second, the neutral point of view would have to include naturally opposing points of view, which would necessarily cause an inconsistency within the neutral point of view.

The second option, having knowledge of the truth of one point of view while in another point of view, is also subject to the charge of inconsistency. Nagel claims that the various points of view are opposing. Because the subjective is different from the objective, the objective cannot give an account which is adequate in covering the facts or values found in the subjective point of view. Since the objective cannot provide for the subjective, as Nagel claimed in his discussion of reduction, elimination and annexation, then
the only chance of having consistent comprehensive knowledge is to have points of view which are compatible and which can be accepted by the same individual. As already stated, the points of view are not compatible and so no unified point of view is possible by this means.

Man is not satisfied with a description of the world from only one perspective. He is not satisfied because he is aware of the facts which have been left out, either subjective or objective in nature, depending on whether the theory accepted is objective or subjective, respectively. But man is unable to satisfy his desire for both complete knowledge and consistency by simply combining two or more points of view. He cannot have comprehensive knowledge of the world and have consistency simply by combining the different ways of world-viewing because the different ways of world-viewing are in conflict and are irreducible. Since the way of world-viewing determines what beliefs man has the different ways of world viewing cause necessarily inconsistent sets of beliefs about the world.

Incomplete knowledge is as unacceptable as inconsistent knowledge. Not only can man not act to implement inconsistent beliefs, since he cannot perform simultaneously contradictory acts, but man is no more satisfied with having inconsistent beliefs than he is with having incomplete knowledge, perhaps even less so. To trade incomplete knowledge for inconsistent knowledge is to shift the focus of the problem, not to solve it.
In some sense, to deny that man can have comprehensive knowledge of the world is ludicrous. Certainly man can be aware of and even appreciate both an egoistic and a consequentialist point of view at the same time. What is seems he cannot do is accept both at the same time as a reason for action which he will then proceed to actualize. The reason he cannot act to fulfill both types of theories, at least in some cases, is because the type of action prescribed by one theory is in direct opposition to the type of action prescribed by the other theory.

An egoist is correct to believe that it is foolish for him to return money found on the street because from an egoistic point of view it is true that the person who lost the money is not of equal importance to the egoist who found the money. On the other hand, the Utilitarian is correct to believe that he should return the money if returning the money is dictated by the outcome of a utilitarian equation. There are two different beliefs about what should be done, each determined by the point of view taken. The two different beliefs about what to do are in contradiction.

In comments he gave for an earlier draft of this thesis, Derek Parfit raised the following objection to my last claim: "I think Nagel would deny that there are any pairs of true statements which are contradictory. He would say that it is impossible for two such statements both to be true. There may be pairs of statements whose truths cannot both be known from a single viewpoint but this is quite different."
If Parfit is correct then I see nothing to prevent man from looking at an issue from two or more viewpoints simultaneously. If there is a truth of each statement, and if the truths of both statements cannot be known from one point of view, then all man has to do to obtain full, and according to Parfit, what would be consistent knowledge, is to combine the points of view. If no single description of the world can provide a full account of the truth and the truths of each point of view are not in contradiction, then the simplest solution to the problem of having complete and consistent knowledge would be to combine the different descriptions of the world which man has from his different points of view until he has full knowledge.

Man does not lose knowledge of the truth of a point of view when he considers the claims of some other point of view. In fact, Nagel claims that the cause of the tension in so many philosophical problems is because "the same individual is the occupant of both viewpoints" (p. 208). So man should be able to combine what he knows from the different viewpoints. There may be some psychological difficulty in achieving this state of consistent and comprehensive knowledge, but if Parfit is correct there will not be a logical difficulty.

I agree with Parfit that the egoistic truth cannot be known from a Utilitarian point of view nor the Utilitarian truth from an egoistic point of view, but man is not limited to having knowledge of the world from only one point
of view at a time. What is true from one point of view may not hold true from some other point of view, but certainly man can be aware that there are different points of view and that these different points of view conflict about what is true.

Nagel presents man's conflict of beliefs about ethics by presenting first, beliefs man has from the objective point of view,

On the one hand there is the position that one's decisions should be tested ultimately from an external point of view, to which one appears as just one person among others... This point of view claims priority by virtue of greater comprehensiveness. The agent's situation is supposedly given its due in a larger perspective. (p. 205)

and then contrasting those objective beliefs with beliefs held from the subjective point of view.

The pursuit of what seems impersonally best may be an important aspect of individual life, but its place in that life must be determined from a personal standpoint, because life is always the life of a particular person, and cannot be lived sub specie aeternitatis. (p. 205)

Because man can appreciate that there is more to any issue than just what one point of view can present, man is dissatisfied with an account which claims priority but leaves out important aspects of the issue. In each moral theory some notion which is important to our idea of morality seems to have been left out.

And yet, man cannot combine the beliefs he has from the different, opposing points of view because the points of view are in contradiction and cannot be reduced into some
neutral point of view.

...it appears the something must give way, for two
natural and necessary ways of thinking lead to a
collision and cannot without adjustment be accom-
modated in a single view of how things are. (p.210)

As I presented earlier, the only means of adjustment were
rejected by Nagel.

I believe that the difficulty of maintaining con-
sistency when pursuing comprehensive knowledge is a major
flaw in Nagel's argument, especially if Nagel intends to
maintain the possibility of rational decisions, which he
gives all indication of doing.

The real issue is the relative priority, in
regard to action, of the two ways of looking
at the world. (p.205)

It is crucial to recognize that in arguing for the
acceptance of the subjective point of view as a part of what
there is in the world, Nagel does not deny the validity of
the objective point of view. Nagel does not want to dismiss
either viewpoint and instead argues for the acceptance of
both points of view when trying to understand our role as
moral agents. Nagel argues that both points of view must be
accepted on their own terms if we are ever to be able to
understand the conflicting pull we feel when faced with a
moral dilemma.

Each of point of view represents a different aspect of
reality. Because they represent different aspects of
reality, they will conflict about what actions a moral agent
should perform. And, because it is true that they represent
a part of reality neither successfully can be dismissed. The subjective will claim that the personal concerns should be actualized; the objective will claim that the general concerns of the species should be actualized.

As long as Nagel insists that the subjective and the objective are necessary for comprehensive knowledge, and that they cannot be reduced into each other, and, as I have claimed, cannot be reduced into some neutral point of view, there will be no comprehensive, consistent point of view; there will be no unified point of view.

The full effect of this claim on the notion of rationality will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

EFFECT OF SUBJECTIVE/OBJECTIVE THEORY ON RATIONALITY

In the preceding chapters I presented two separate theories, a theory of rationality and Nagel's theory. In this chapter I will bring the two theories together by applying both of them to specific cases of decision-making.

Each problem case will present a situation where a decision must be made. In each case it is assumed that the decision-maker is a Nagelian and that he is striving to act rationally. Because of the way the problem cases are set up, not to make a decision is to allow a course of action to become actualized. The person making the decision is aware that even if he does not actively make a decision he will, by default, have chosen one course of action over another. This condition is built into the problem cases to force the person to make a decision. The options available are in opposition to each other. By choosing one course of action and acting upon it, the person acts in opposition to another course of action and thereby effectively cancels out the other options. The structure of the problem cases prevents the possibility of a) choosing and acting upon all the options and thereby avoiding the necessity of choosing between them, b) choosing and acting upon none of the options, and c) feeling confident that all courses of action are equally rational and so it does not matter which course of action is actualized.

Problem Case 1: A young man, who is poor and cold, is
walking behind a richly dressed, intoxicated older man. A few dollar bills fall out of the older man's coat pocket, unobserved by anyone except the youth. The youth must now make a decision between keeping the money or returning it. Having a philosophical background, the youth realizes the importance of being rational. (His philosophical background also explains why he is cold and poor.) Also, the youth is a Nagelian and will consider both the subjective reasons and the objective reasons. Using his analytically trained mind to assess the situation, the youth comes up with the following considerations:

a) will he be caught and prosecuted if he keeps the money - no
b) will he feel guilty if he keeps the money - no
c) does he need the money - yes
d) does the man need the money - unlikely since the youth can see several more bills sticking out of the man's pocket
e) will the youth put the money to better use than the man will - probably, since the youth needs some warm socks and the man, who just swallowed the last drops of gin from a flask, has turned to enter a liquor store
f) is the youth in fact stealing the money and does he consider it wrong to steal - yes
g) will the structure of society be harmed if the youth keeps the money - highly unlikely
h) could the youth will his actions to be a maxim of universal law - the youth never did understand Kant, but thinks probably not

On the basis of these considerations the youth must decide whether to return the money (to act morally) or to keep the money
(to act self-interestedly). Because the youth is a Nagelian he immediately runs into difficulty in trying to evaluate the Kantian considerations with his own desire to have warm feet. In the terminology presented earlier, the youth is having trouble with the more objective reasons (Kantian) and the more subjective reasons (personal, having warm feet). So far, there seems to be no way to satisfactorily choose one over the other. To be rational, the youth must take all the relevant considerations into account and he cannot deny that both the objective and the subjective considerations seem relevant. A tension arises whenever the youth tries to make a decision based on either the subjective considerations or the objective considerations because either way he leaves out facts or values which he considers to be important. When the youth tries to take both the subjective and the objective into account he is at a loss to know what standard to use to evaluate both of them. Any standard he tries to use seems either objectively biased and thus prejudgets the subjective as inferior or subjectively biased and thus prejudgets the objective as inferior. The youth cannot find a standard which allows him to weigh the subjective and the objective on the same terms.

And so the youth finds himself in the same dilemma which has plagued moral philosophy from Socrates and Plato, to the present-day works of Baier, Nagel and Parfit. The youth believes that on those occasions in life when faced with a moral decision he ought to be rational. He believes
that in order to be rational he must take all relevant considerations into account. He further believes that ought implies can, and that because he ought to be rational he can be rational. So he believes that he can make a decision on the basis of rationality. And yet, he cannot make a decision on the basis of rationality because crucial relevant considerations appear to him to be incommensurable. The youth stands in the snow a few moments longer, pockets the money and crosses the street, going back the direction from whence he came.

The youth accepts that he cannot live his life in accordance with all the theories on the ethical theory spectrum. The youth realizes that while he may desire to have an ethical theory by which he can determine all his actions, having an ethical theory is not necessary since he could evaluate each action on its own merits.

For example, he may think he needs to decide whether to be a Utilitarian or a Kantian, and have this decision determine what type of actions he will perform throughout the rest of his life, but then realizes that he can act in accordance with one theory one time and another theory another time. He will be accepting the claims of any particular theory for the case at hand without accepting the theory as a way of life. So he then tries to decide what to do each time, to assess each situation on its own. But just as he cannot live his life in accordance with all the theories, or even more than one theory should the two or more theories suggest conflicting
actions, neither can he perform an action which is in accordance with more than one theory at a time. And because of the circumstances an action is required.

The task is to decide which point of view to adopt for any particular situation. For the specific case given, the youth cannot follow the suggestions of both egoism and Kantianism. To try and live a life both as an egoist and as a Kantian is an impossibility. Even if man can continually change positions on the spectrum of moral theories for different situations, he must still decide which position to accept for any specific decision. When faced with a moral decision, such as the decision between keeping the money found on the ground or returning to the person known to have lost it, the youth must choose between the conflicting theories of egoism and Kantianism. The youth cannot both keep the money and return the money. The youth needs a way to determine which type of reasons he should follow; he need a means of evaluation.

The main concern for the poor youth is that his decision be based on rationality. In insure this, the youth tries to make a decision conforming with the decision-making procedure described under the Rationality Condition in chapter one.6

The first condition of the Rationality Condition is easily met. The youth must take all relevant available information into account. The youth can do this by meeting Nagel's requirement for comprehensive knowledge, namely, by
taking both the subjective and the objective into his deliberations. If Nagel's theory is accepted, which is assumed at this point, then condition one can only be met when both the subjective and the objective are taken into account since Nagel's main claim is that both are essential to any understanding of our roles as moral agents. Nagel claims that any account which left out the subjective would be an incomplete account, and would thus be an account which did not include all the relevant information necessary for a rational decision. Nor would an account which left out the objective be any more complete.

The second condition of rationality, the question of whether a decision should be made on the basis of the quantity or the quality of the reasons has only limited application to Nagel's theory. Nagel never discusses whether the subjective reasons are more numerous than the objective reasons or vice versa, but he does say that one type of reason cannot be dismissed in favor of the other type of reason, thus leading to the conclusion that he does not seem to believe that there is a distinction in the quality of subjective and objective reasons. This issue will be brought up again at the end of the thesis when a possible solution to the conflict between Nagel's theory and rationality is suggested.

The third condition of rationality is that man must act upon his decision; he must proceed to actualize the decision made based upon his deliberations. Once the poor youth has
met the first two conditions of rationality he has reasons which suggest different courses of action. For the poor youth, there are reasons to return the money and reasons to keep the money. The youth is willing to act upon the course of action his deliberations tell him to take, but since the youth is a Nagelian, he takes both the subjective reasons and the objective reasons to be relevant. Since the subjective reasons suggest a different course of action than the objective reasons do, the youth's reasons for action are no longer unified. He can no longer take all of the relevant reasons for action into consideration and still have a single course of action suggested by the compilation of reasons. Since the subjective suggests a different course of action than the objective does, the youth must either 1) find a means of choosing between the subjective and the objective or 2) perform both courses of action, which is impossible.

Being a modest individual the poor youth decides to do 1), to choose between the subjective reasons for action and the objective reasons. His decision to choose between the subjective and the objective brings him to the third condition of rationality. He must now weigh the various considerations for action against each other.

There is a problem when a Nagelian such as the poor youth tries to weigh the various relevant available factors against each other. Nagel's theory argues that in order to have comprehensive knowledge both the subjective and the
objective must be accepted. Further, he claims that neither the subjective nor the objective can provide for, within its own point of view, in its own terms, the terms of the other without itself being altered so drastically that the original point of view loses its essential character. As argued in chapter two, without some means of combining the two separate points of view there will be no unified point of view, no point of view which incorporates the essential claims of both types of viewpoints. Unless there is the possibility of a unified point of view, the two viewpoints cannot be evaluated against each other.

I base my claim that there is no possibility of an evaluation between the two points of view unless there is a unified point of view which can fairly consider each point of view on Derek Parfit's work on prisoner's dilemmas. My second problem case, therefore, is a presentation of a standard prisoner's dilemma.

Problem Case 2: Around midnight, the two infamous catburglers, Macavity and Thomasena, enter the grounds of the Nagel estate. Unnoticed, McGruff the Crime Dog hides out behind the pool chairs. Macavity and Thomasena swiftly climb the trellis and disappear into the mansion. Despite a bad case of the nervous giggles, the two cats reappear only minutes later, a gem of a manuscript clutched in their paws. Feeling very pleased with themselves, the two cats quickly descend the trellis, only to grow cold as they hear a low growl behind them...
Later that night, as McGruff paces in his office, he goes over the terms that are being offered to the two cats. MacGruff knows that he has only caught the tip of the iceberg. If he could get the cats to talk he would be able to break the notorious crime ring which had eluded him for years. Each cat has been placed in a separate isolation cell and has been given the same set of terms. If both cats confess to the crime and tell the names of their employer they shall both be sentenced to 10 years in prison. If only one cat confesses, he will be freed and the other cat will receive 12 years. If both cats keep silent, they can only be charged with breaking and entering and shall both receive only 2 years. From the earlier conversations he heard between the two, McGruff knows that the two cats only met today, and, being cats, do not have any bond of loyalty between them. McGruff knows that each cat will try to save its own skin and will not care about how much punishment the other cat receives.

Alone in his isolated cell, Macavity paces in circles, until he realizes what dog-like behaviour this is. Sitting on his haunches, tail curled disdainfully around him, he stares unseeing into the darkness of his cell and thinks about the decision facing him.

In her own cell, Thomasena also has been thinking. She conceptualizes her options in the following diagram:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thomasena keep silent</th>
<th>Thomasena confess</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>keep silent</strong></td>
<td>each serves two years</td>
<td>Thomasena serves 0 years; Macavity serves 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>confess</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>each serves 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macavity</strong></td>
<td>Thomasena serves 12 years; Macavity serves 0 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prudence, the desire to do what is best for her, tells Thomasena to confess. If Macavity confesses then Thomasena will get 10 years rather than 12; if Macavity keeps silent, then she shall get no years rather than two. Either way she shall be certain to save herself two years in prison. Thomasena realizes that the same reasoning holds for Macavity. But if they are both prudent they shall both get 10 years. If they are not both prudent they will only get 2 years. So if they are both prudent, doing what is in their own best interest, they will do what is worse for both of them.¹²

In his cell, Macavity reaches the same conclusions as Thomasena. He considers taking the brunt for Thomasena but realizes that he is not sure what to do to insure that
Thomasena will go free since any outcome is dependent upon the decision of both cats; no one cat can determine what will happen to the other. As he stares into the darkness, he mutters under his breath, "Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity." Convinced of his importance, Macavity decides to do what is best for him.

At 3:30 a.m., McGruff demands an answer from his two isolated prisoners. If the two cats are rational, which of the two options available to them, confessing or keeping silent, will they choose?

While the story is completely imaginary and frivolous the problems raised by it are very real and difficult. One possible implication of this example, as pointed out by Braybrook through Parfit is that prudence is self-defeating. Parfit says an act is self-defeating when "it prevents the very outcome which it is aimed to achieve. The aim of a prudent act is to achieve the outcome which is best for the agent." Under this definition, Parfit claims that prudence is not self-defeating in the dilemma faced by the feline prisoners. This dilemma is the standard prisoner's dilemma (PD).

Let us apply this definition [of prudence], to the original Prisoner's Dilemma. As we have seen, the prudent course for each of the prisoners is to confess. Would it be worse for either prisoner if he is prudent? It would not. If either is prudent, and confesses, this will be better for him whatever the other does. So on our suggested definition Prudence is not here self-defeating. Parfit claims that many people see prudence as being self-defeating in cases like PDs because the people "assume that
Prudence is self-defeating when it would be worse for each if all are prudent. And of course it would be worse for each of the prisoners if they are both prudent.\(^\text{16}\)

Parfit refines the distinction between "worse for each" and "worse for all" as "individually self-defeating" and "collectively self-defeating," respectively.\(^\text{17}\) An act is individually self-defeating when "it would be worse for particular people if they themselves are prudent."\(^\text{18}\) An act is collectively self-defeating when "it would be worse for each of a number of people if they are all prudent, whether or not it would be worse for each if he himself is prudent."\(^\text{19}\) About prisoner's dilemmas, Parfit concludes, "it would be better for each if he himself is prudent, but be worse for both if both are prudent. Prudence is here 'collectively' but not 'individually' self-defeating."\(^\text{20}\)

This conclusion, by itself, tells the prisoners nothing. Each prisoner wants to achieve the best state of affairs for himself. By being prudent, each prisoner will insure that he serves two years less than he would have if he had been moral. This fact of the two years hold no matter what the other prisoner does. However, this fact does not tell the prisoner whether to confess or to keep silent.

One argument in favor of the moral action, keeping silent, is put forth by David Gauthier and considered by Parfit.

Gauthier contrasts two conceptions of rationality. One he calls "straightforward maximization:"
we can call it Prudence. The other, "constrained maximization," mixes Prudence with a pinch of morality. A "constrained maximizer" always does what is best for him, except when he has promised not to do so in some mutually advantageous agreement. Let us call him "trustworthy."  

Let us also recognize that such a person would confess except in situations where he has made an agreement to keep silent, knowing that by keeping silent each prisoner will only get 2 years. Gauthier goes on to suggest that in such cases a prudent man will choose to be trustworthy rather than to be prudent. "On prudential grounds, he can justify the adoption of moral, rather than prudential, grounds of actions."  

According to Parfit, Gauthier concludes that man can only enter into advantageous agreements if he is trustworthy. Gauthier's conclusion is based on the belief that if man is not trustworthy than other men will have no motive to extend advantageous agreements to him. Parfit points out that the trust of others, their willingness to extend such advantageous agreements, depends

...not on what I am, but on what I seem to be. I shall be trusted only if I seem trustworthy. Men should think it rational, not as Gauthier claims to become moral, but to appear moral. This has long been known.

The conflict between being moral or being prudent exists because each way of acting claims to be the more rational way of acting.

Moralists wish to show that it is always rational to do our duty, even when it is against our interests. They must therefore show that we have independent reasons for acting morally, which are at least as strong as prudential reasons.
One argument which moralists use to show that there are moral reasons for actions which are as strong as prudential reasons is based on the claim that in a prisoner's dilemma we would all be better off if we were moral than if we were all prudent. Since we do not fare as well by being prudent as we would if we were moral, prudence is self-defeating. Parfit objects to this argument by relying on his distinction between "collectively" self-defeating and "individually" self-defeating.

There is a general problem in comparing moral and prudential reasons; since these reasons are of different kinds, it is hard to find a common scale. The argument just given weighs Prudence on the wrong scale. The argument points out that a community would not choose Prudence. If it is judged at the collective level, Prudence fails. But Prudence cannot be judged at the collective level. It is not a theory of collective rationality. Prudence can only be judged at the individual level. And, at this level, Prudence works.

Parfit asserts that prudence should not be considered to have failed, to have been self-defeating, simply because it does not work on the collective level of rationality. Prudence should not be expected to succeed on the collective level. To fault it for failing on the collective level is to weigh prudence on the wrong "scale," to evaluate it unfairly. In the analogy I am drawing, Parfit's "hard-to-find common scale" is Nagel's unified point of view. Both are the common measure between competing theories which would enable the theories to be weighed against each other.

I also want to claim that Parfit's distinction between moral reasons and prudential reasons parallels Nagel's
distinction between objective reasons and subjective reasons, respectively. For Parfit, a moral reason is defined by its collective nature, not its level of detachment and externality from the concerns of man. But a Parfitian moral reason is detached from an individualistic prudential reason, so the analogy between Parfit's moral reasons and Nagel's objective reasons holds. However, the Nagelian subjective reasons do have a much broader application than do the Parfitian prudential reasons. Prudential reasons are limited to a single individual whereas a subjective reason is a relative term determined by the scope of the objectivity of the viewer on whatever issue is under discussion. Nevertheless, on a spectrum of reason, Parfit's prudential reasons would be subjective in the Nagelian sense in relation to the more objective moral reasons.

Because of the parallel which can be drawn between Parfit's moral and prudential reasons and Nagel's objective and subjective reasons, the difficulties associated with Parfit's theory in connection with rationality can also be associated with Nagel's.

Rationality requires an evaluation of all the factors relevant and available before a decision about which action to perform can be made. The evaluation must be done fairly which requires that each factor be judged on its own level. To insure that each factor is evaluated fairly there must be a "common scale" or "unified point of view" by which each factor can be judged as to how well it achieves the aim it
intends to achieve. But just as prudence will succeed on its own level while failing on the collective level in Parfit's discussion of the prisoner's dilemma, so too will the subjective effectively achieve the aim of the subjective point of view, and will therefore be given priority over the objective point of view, while it will not achieve the aim of the objective point of view and be therefore subject to dismissal from considerations made from the more objective point of view.

The aim of the subjective differs from the aim of the objective much as the aim of prudence differs from the aim of morality. Prudence cannot be evaluated against morality because prudence only applies to the individual level while morality only applies to the collective. The subjective cannot be evaluated against the objective because the claims of the subjective only hold from a subjective point of view just as the claims of the objective hold only from an objective point of view. Without a common standard by which both the aims of the subjective and the objective can be measured there can be no evaluation between them. Without this evaluation, condition 3), the weighing of the various factors which are relevant and available to a decision, cannot be met. So no decision can be made which is based on the conditions of rationality, i.e., there is no possibility of a rational action, thus voiding condition 4). Man can still act, of course, but the action will not be determined by a rational decision.
One possible solution to the conflict between Nagel's theory and rational actions has been suggested by Baruch Brody. Brody thinks that we can still perform rational actions even if we accept Nagel's theory and the implications I have drawn from it. We can acknowledge that we have reasons, which are relevant and available, supporting both courses of action, while realizing that for any instance we can perform only one course of action. The realization of this state of affairs, says Brody, does not rule out the possibility of action, and, further, does not rule out the possibility of rational actions.

In order to act when no decision between the possible actions can be made requires that man perform one or the other action without making a decision about which action to perform. Brody grants for argument's sake that in any particular situation we will either perform that action which is supported by the more subjective considerations or we will perform that action which is supported by the more objective considerations. We can perform an action without making a decision each time about which action is the more rational action to perform and still have performed an action which was based on a rational decision. All we need to do is to base our action on an earlier decision to perform one type of action one time and the other type the next. This method would eliminate the need to make a decision each time the conflict came up. Since we cannot rationally chose between the courses of action, and since we cannot do both
courses of action each time, Brody suggests that we compromise and balance the occurrence of each type of action.

For example, when faced with two possible actions, one which favors the subjective point of view, like keeping the money found on the ground, and one which favors the objective point of view, like returning the money to the person who dropped it, the poor youth realizes he has good reasons to pursue both courses of action. Since the youth is a Nagelian, he cannot choose between the actions. Brody's solution to the dilemma faced by the poor youth is to have the youth do either one, as long as the youth does the other type of action the next time a similar dilemma occurs. Brody's example was for a person one day to give money to charity and the next day to buy herself a present.

If both actions are important, if no choice can be made between them, and if both cannot be done each time, then, suggests Brody, do each as often as possible, balancing out the occurrence of the different types of actions. This solution not only has a common sense appeal, but it seems to represent the way we actually behave. Also, the difficulty of having to convince the egoist to be at times more altruistic or the Utilitarian to be at times more self-concerned does not occur because the solution is only needed when Nagelians are involved. The person who accepts Nagel's theory would not be committed to any particular ethical theory, and so would be able to accept Brody's solution of balancing out the implementation of different ethical
theories.

The dismissal of a commitment to any particular ethical theory leads to a problem with Brody's solution. The solution only works when applied to individual actions which are not performed because of their adherence to an ethical theory. If the dilemma is between ethical theories, which Nagel himself presented as his example, then the solution fails, since an action done in accordance with an ethical theory is not open to the fluctuations between more subjective considerations and more objective considerations. If a man accepts an ethical theory which is objectively based, such as Utilitarianism, then he is committed to performing objectively-based actions. The man who has accepted an ethical theory as a way of life does not have the option of performing one type of action one time and the other type of action since the type of action he will perform is determined in advance by the type of theory he accepts. Perhaps we should give up the notion that we can make rational decisions about life-long decisions such as what ethical theory to accept as a way of life. But giving up the notion of choosing between ethical theories on the basis of which theory is the more rational as a way of life will have serious consequences for ethics and is a move generally resisted by moral philosophers.

However, even when restricted to individual actions, Brody's solution has problems. The solution assumes that situations will occur which balance the occurrence of the
subjective and objective instantiations. If my decision is between sending ten dollars to the Jacques Cousteau Calypso Society or buying Derek Parfit's new book, how can I be sure that my next decision will between a donation to Greenpeace and buying Nagel's new book? If the balancing act is not this literal, then how can I be sure that neither the objective considerations nor the subjective considerations have not been slighted? The only way to insure that neither point of view will incorrectly claim a position of dominance, the only way to insure that a balance will occur, is to appeal, again, to some means of evaluating the different types of consideration.

A possible means of deciding between the conflicting reasons for action is to appeal to condition 2) of the Rationality Condition, to choose one course of action over the other course of action because it is supported by more reasons or is supported by better reasons. We might feel that if we have several reasons to do the more subjective act and only a few to do the objective act, we should perform the subjective act. I might have several reasons to buy Parfit's new book: my thesis depends on it, I want to gain knowledge, I like the cover, it will complete my library, etc., and the only reason I have to send money to Greenpeace is because the whaling season starts in two weeks. Granted, the money for Greenpeace will help to save a species and this fact has important ecological implications and so there will be, in fact, a number of reasons to send
money to Greenpeace. But imagine for the moment that there are more reasons to buy Parfit's book. Imagine also that only yesterday I gave up buying new shoes for a special date just to be able to send money to the Calypso Society. Am I justified in buying Parfit's book, which is supported by subjective reasons, instead of sending money to Greenpeace, which is supported by objective reasons?

To argue that I should use the money for the more objective action, supporting Greenpeace, is implicitly to rely on the idea that because more people will be affected or because the future depends on it, that it is the action which should be done. This is to do exactly what Nagel argues against, i.e., to believe that objective concerns should be given more weight when there is a conflict between the objective and the subjective. In order not to fall back into this traditional way of thinking, I would have to believe that it is acceptable to buy the new shoes or the new book even though the Rainbow Warrior would not be able sail without the aid of my contribution. Most of us are uneasy enough about doing this that we would reject Brody's solution.

In conclusion, Brody's solution of balancing out our subjectively-based actions with our objectively-based actions is not applicable to decisions whose implementation would be permanent because the balancing between the types of actions could not occur. Nor are we willing to accept Brody's solution when problem cases are raised. Unless we
simply accept either the notion of doing one type of action one time and the other type of action the next time, without regard for the circumstances surrounding the occurrences of the conflict, or the notion that we should do whichever action we have the quantitative support for without regard for the quality of the reasons, we are left with the original problem. We still need a way to determine which type of considerations should be given more weight in our deliberations.

When faced with a moral decision, man must decide whether to follow the dictates of a solipsistic theory, a prudential theory, a Kantian theory or a Utilitarian theory, etc. As stated in chapter one, man assumes that he will have made the correct decision when he actualizes the more rational course of action. If Nagel's theory is accepted the problem of deciding between ethical theories becomes a problem of choosing between subjective and objective ethical considerations. The difficulty is to find a way in which the theories on the spectrum can be evaluated against each other with respect to their rationality.

Nagel suggests that a resolution of the problem should not even be attempted. Instead of resolving the conflict between competing theories in favor of one or the other, Nagel argues that man accept both and live with the inconsistency involved in admitting the truths of both theories into our beliefs about the world. What it is rational to do, therefore, will depend both on the individual view of
the situation and on the broader, more detached, external view of the situation. This causes the question, "What is it more rational for me to do?" to be a question whose answer will not provide guidance for action. The correct answer to the question would be "Whether or not it is rational to do X depends on whether the question is being asked from a subjective point of view or from an objective point of view." This answer does not address the real issue behind the question of which action it is more rational to perform.

A similar situation arises with Parfit's work on prisoner's dilemmas. The prisoners are concerned with what they should do, confess or keep silent, and all that they learn from Parfit is that if they wish to be collectively rational they should keep silent and if they wish to be individually rational they should confess. Parfit's work does not tell them whether they should be collective rational or individually rational.

Nagel's answer to the question would only cause the question to be rephrased as "Is it more rational for me to look at things from a subjective point of view or from an objective point of view?" This is the question which must be answered before a rational decision can be made between the conflicting courses of action and it is just this question which Nagel does not feel should be asked. The two different ways of looking at the issue will not give the same answer to the question "What is it rational for me to
do?" and yet, following Nagel's suggestion, man should not try to unify the two points of view but should accept them both and live with the resultant conflicting suggestions for action.

The coexistence of conflicting points of view, varying in detachment from the contingent self, is not just a practically necessary illusion but an irreducible fact of life.\textsuperscript{33}

Nagel's theory is difficult to accept because it voids certain strong intuitions we have about rationality. For instance, our intuition is strong that when a decision between subjectively-based reasons for action and objectively-based reasons for action \textbf{must} be made, the decision can be made based on rationality. Granted, there may be situations where there are both subjectively-based reasons and objectively-based reasons for action but we do not feel that we must make a choice between them, either because the two types of reasons suggest the same course of action, or, more generally, because we feel that the reasons supporting what will normally be opposing courses of action, are of equal weight. In the latter case our intuition is that we will be rational to choose either course of action. But in all cases the intuition is that we will be able to consider the reasons against each other in order to determine the correct weight to give them in our decisions.

When we believe that certain choices can be evaluated in terms of their rationality, we do not feel we are referring to a type of indexed rationality, such as suggested by Parfit in his work on prisoner's dilemmas. We
undercut an important and basic belief we have about rationality when we say "X is rational" and mean by "rational" that action X is more rational than action Y from an objective point of view, but from a subjective point of view, action Y is more rational than action X. Our notion of rationality is a comprehensive notion; if an action is the rational action to perform, then that action is the rational action all things considered. Implicit in the comprehensive aspect of rationality is our belief that we will be able to evaluate conflicting claims of rationality, choose between them, and then know which action to perform.

A type of rationality is possible under Nagel's theory, namely, an indexed version of rationality; what it is rational to do depends on what viewpoint or theory is accepted. This type of rationality is so altered in meaning that it is no longer able to function as the standard notion of rationality. Standard rationality is an encompassing notion which provides guidance for action. Indexed rationality is not able to provide guidance for action because once the factors involved in the decision-making procedure become indexed to their respective theories, they cannot be weighed against each other by means of a common scale; the indexed reasons become incommensurable. What it is rational to do in one theory is so different from what it is rational to do in another theory, that there is no reason to believe that the term 'rational' has maintained the same meaning from theory to theory. The acceptance of Nagel's theory
requires that rationality become indexed. Indexed rationality cannot provide guidance for action and it is because of just this guidance that man considers rationality to be such a valuable notion.

In some philosophical problems, indexing can occur and cause no difficulties. For example, appearances can be indexed. What appearance an object has is dependent on the position of the viewer. There would not be a single way of expressing what an object looks like without indexing the appearance of the object to a frame of reference linked to the viewer. But a theory which requires a decision and an action based on that decision rather than just an explanation of why apparently contradictory claims might both be true, cannot be interpreted under Nagel's theory. Not just ethical theories, but any theory requiring action, will be unacceptedly altered under a Nagelian interpretation.

The terms for rationality given in the Rationality Condition require comprehensiveness, which is determined by condition 1), and consistency which is determined by conditions 3) and 4). Nagel's theory will assure the fulfillment of comprehensiveness by insisting on the acceptance of both the subjective and the objective but his theory will negate the possibility of consistency by requiring the acceptance of incommensurable reasons for action. We can either accept Nagel's theory of the subjective and objective or we can retain our standard notion of rationality. One or the other must be given up.
There are reasons to accept Nagel's theory even though accepting it would require giving up some of our most basic intuitions of rationality. The notion of rationality has always had severe difficulties associated with it. Nagel developed his theory, in part, to deal with the tension man feels when he considers any ethical theory which claims a position of dominance but is unable to account for certain basic beliefs about ethics which man holds. The tension which Nagel was trying to ease by his theory is very real and present in all ethical theories which accept only those beliefs which can be held from a single point of view. The acceptance of Nagel's theory will allow man to at least understand why there is so much difficulty associated with rational decision-making in ethics.

While Nagel's theory will undoubtably lead to the denial of the possibility of fulfilling conditions 3) and 4) of the RC, that may not be a reason to reject Nagel's theory, since there is no assurance that those conditions can be met even without a Nagelian interpretation forced upon them. Because of the tension we feel when we choose one type of consideration over the other type we realize that there are values which are left out of any ethical theory. There has yet to be a theory which is capable of accounting for all we believe and which can still be a consistent plausible theory. Nagel may be quite correct to argue for a theory which suggests that we accept all of our moral beliefs even with the implication that there is no
possibility of a decision to be made between the types of considerations.

However appealing Nagel's theory might seem as a solution to the perennial problems of moral philosophy one should proceed cautiously in accepting it. Accepting Nagel's theory has the serious consequence of rejecting rationality as an action-guiding force. The rejection of rationality as such a force would require alterations in almost every area of philosophy.


6 Although there are numerous commentaries on Kant's moral theory, I think that Philippa Foot's article is one of the best. "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review*, 81 (1972), pp.306-12.


9 Brandt, p.12.


11 Brown, p.247.

12 Derek Parfit, "Prudence, Morality and the Prisoner's Dilemma," unpublished manuscript based on his British Academy Lectures, 1974; "Against Prudence," unpublished manuscript.
Chapter Two


3 Parfit's quote comes from margin notes he made while reading an earlier draft of this thesis. The emphasis has been added.

Chapter Three

1 See text, p.32.

2 Plato's Republic, 2.359d and 10.612b.

3 Baier, Moral Point of View, chapter eight.

4 Nagel, The Possibility of Altruism; "Subjective and Objective."

5 Parfit, "Against Prudence"; "Prudence, Morality and the Prisoner's Dilemma."

6 See text, p.11.


8 Nagel, p.213.

9 Nagel, pp.210-11.


11 Parfit, "Against Prudence,"; "Prudence, Morality and the Prisoner's Dilemma."

12 Parfit, "Against," p.6. This presentation of a prisoner's dilemma was taken directly from Parfit's work but the pronouns were changed to fit the example.


28 Conversation with Baruch A. Brody, September 1984.
29 Conversation with Brody.
31 See text, p.4.
33 Nagel, "Subjective and Objective," p.213.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


