Thomas Nagel and Consciousness.

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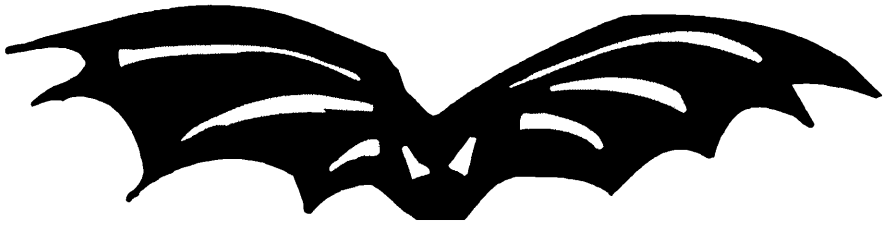
THOMAS NAGEL AND CONSCIOUSNESS



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SUMMARY

This dissertation mainly concentrates on Thomas Nagel's 1974 paper "What is it like to be a bat?" I examine some of the key ideas and concepts that are contained in this paper, which are chiefly concerned with the phenomenon of consciousness. In the first chapter, I try to ascertain what Nagel meant by his use of the phrase "what it is like", as there seems to be a number of different construals of this phrase in his "bat" paper. In examining Nagel's use of the phrase "what it is like", I mainly use the ideas of H.O. Mounce, D.Z. Phillips and J. Biro. In the latter part of chapter one, I examine the so-called Ability Theory of Laurence Nemirow and David Lewis, whose origin, I believe, is contained in one particular construal that Nagel gives to the phrase "what it is like". In the second chapter, I examine Nagel's concept of a subjective point of view, and what this involves in relation to subjectivity and consciousness. Mainly using the ideas of Kathleen Wider, I also try to ascertain whether Nagel's conception of the subjective point of view leads to epistemic solipsism, and if it does, what this means for Nagel's views on consciousness, e.g., whether they conflict with the views of Wittgenstein (on which question I utilise a key distinction made by David Chalmers). This leads me to examine the relationship between subjectivity and solipsism, and whether the latter can be avoided whenever one takes the former seriously. In the third and final chapter, I examine Nagel's concept of the objective point of view, and his views on the effect that this viewpoint has on the phenomenon of consciousness, e.g., whether science will succeed in providing a reductive explanation of conscious experience.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will examine the work of the philosopher Thomas Nagel, especially his work on the philosophy of mind, much of which has concentrated on the problem of consciousness. In particular, I will be examining the ideas concerning consciousness which are contained in his 1974 paper, "What is it like to be a bat?"[1] I have decided to concentrate on this paper, as it is generally regarded as being a seminal article in relation to the topic of consciousness, whose arguments and conclusions are still being philosophically debated to the present day. Indeed, Daniel Dennett has described the paper as "(t)he most widely cited and influential thought experiment about consciousness..."[2] Having said this, I will of course be referring to Nagel's later work on consciousness when necessary, but the overall structure of the dissertation will revolve around the arguments in his 1974 paper.

It must be said that Nagel was not the first to ask the question of what it was like to be a bat. This accolade went to B.A. Farrell, who asked the question in his 1950 paper called "Experience".[3] It is interesting to note that the conclusions Farrell came to regarding experience were radically different to the ones Nagel would later come to. Farrell seems to have adopted a behaviourist position, seeing no distinction between "experience" and "behaviour". Indeed, he took the view that science was on the verge of rejecting the notion of "experience" altogether, viewing it as "unreal" or "non-existent". He went so

[1] Nagel, T. (1974) "What is it like to be a bat?" *In:* Nagel, T. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 165-80.
[2] Dennett (1991) p.441.

far as to state that "...the notion of "experience" can be shown to resemble an occult notion like "witchcraft" in a primitive community that is in the process of being acculturated to the West".[4] I think it is accurate to say that when Nagel asked the same question about the little furry *Chiroptera,* some 24 years later, this inspired him to conclusions that were as different to Farrell's as one can imagine. Nagel came to the conclusion that conscious experience most certainly did exist, that it was like something to be a bat. Indeed, he claimed that if a creature did possess conscious experience, then there would always be something it was like to be that creature (although, it must be noted that Nagel was not the first to make this claim, T. Sprigge (1971) has this honour, in a paper that was published three years before Nagel's "bat" paper). In claiming this, Nagel was referring to the concept of phenomenal consciousness, as opposed to what is called introspective or access consciousness. The former involved the "what it is like" factor of consciousness, just the way it feels to be a conscious, experiencing, organism in the world, with all the associated perceptions and sensations that this involves. With introspective consciousness, this involved consciously examining one's perceptions and sensations, which would enable one to recognize that one was in a certain state and perhaps give a verbal report about this. With phenomenal consciousness, there is no introspecting of one's perceptions and sensations, they are just experienced as they are, with no "inner" analysis of them occurring. Of course, this point stands to reason, if Nagel was attributing conscious experience to a creature like a bat, which we must suppose does not have the introspective or conceptual capabilities that a human has, i.e., of being a self-conscious creature.

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[3] Farrell, B.A. (1950) "Experience". *In:* Chappell, V.C., ed. *The Philosophy of Mind.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., pp. 23-48.

In the 20th Century, up to the time of Nagel's "bat" paper, I am not aware of many other positive and supportive philosophical views for the phenomenon of subjective consciousness. It seems that the topic of consciousness was more popular in psychology than in philosophy. For example, towards the end of the 19th Century, William James was studying the topic of consciousness, applying his well-known metaphor of a "stream", to the phenomenon of consciousness, as it presents itself to human experience. Following James, enquiry into the subject of introspective consciousness was very popular in psychology, until the rise of behaviourism, when the use of introspection in psychology was generally discredited. Verificationist and behaviourist influences were also to be felt in philosophy, especially in the middle of the last century, with the dual attack of Gilbert Ryle (1949) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953). While it is controversial as to whether Wittgenstein, and even Ryle, were actually bona fide behaviourists, it certainly seems as if both of these works had a negative influence on attitudes towards the existence of an irreducible, subjective phenomenon, such as consciousness. The general move was towards an objectification of what had previously seemed subjective and "private" phenomena. The influence of materialism also made itself felt in the philosophy of mind, beginning with behaviourism, then leading on to the mind-brain identity theories, to early types of functionalism towards the end of the 1960's. All of these theories were fundamentally objective in nature, with the subjective elements of mind either being ignored or reduced to objective elements, e.g., behaviour, neural activity or causal/functional roles.

[4] Farrell (1950) p.45.

Therefore, this was very roughly the background against which Nagel's 1974 "bat" paper was published. It was a bold statement of support to what Nagel viewed as a subjective reality, i.e., the existence of phenomenal consciousness; that he thought had not been adequately explained by philosophy or science. In addition to this, Nagel also gave an argument as to why he thought that science would find it extremely difficult to reductively explain the phenomenon of conscious experience. The argument is the following: if conscious experience is only comprehensible from the subjective point of view, how can science, which methodologically takes up an objective point of view, achieve an adequate explanation of it? Instead of moving closer to the phenomenon to be investigated, science is moving further away from it. It was this facet of Nagel's paper that led M. Davies/G.W. Humphreys (1993) to claim that Nagel was responsible for starting the process that would lead to the modern-day intuition that phenomenal consciousness was "mysterious" and "...would elude a physicalist view of the world".[5] I think that this point is correct, although, as I have read him, it seems to me that Nagel was not claiming that consciousness would never be explained by science, but that it had not been adequately dealt with up until that time, and it would be an extremely difficult problem to solve in the future. Nevertheless, in connection with the point about promoting the "mystery" and "elusiveness" of subjective consciousness, I think it could be claimed that Nagel began this process even earlier, with his 1965 paper "Physicalism".[6]

[5] Davies/Humphreys (1993) p.15.
[6] Nagel, T. (1965) "Physicalism". *In:* O'Connor, J., ed. *Modern Materialism: Readings On Mind-Body Identity*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., pp. 99-116.

However, as stated above, this dissertation is mainly going to concentrate on his 1974 "bat" paper. In the first chapter, the phrase "what it is like" will be examined, to try to discover what Nagel actually meant by his use of this phrase. It will be seen that there were several different meanings that could have been applied to his use of "what it is like". In this part of the chapter I mainly use the ideas of H.O. Mounce, D.Z. Phillips and J. Biro. I will then try to demonstrate how one of Nagel's meanings of "what it is like" contributed to the later development of the so-called Ability Theory by Laurence Nemirow and David Lewis: whose results would have troublesome consequences for some of the earlier conclusions that Nagel came to in his "bat" paper, i.e., the existence of subjective facts of experience. In the second chapter, Nagel's concept of the "subjective point of view" will be examined. This will involve looking at the connection Nagel makes between subjectivity and a point of view, and whether the points of view in question are tokens or types. The answer to the latter question will then lead on to the issues of epistemic solipsism and privacy of experience, issues which have been seen by some as the natural outcome of Nagel's conception of a subjective point of view (on this topic, I mainly use the ideas of Kathleen Wider). This in turn will lead to an examination of whether Nagel's views on conscious experience can avoid the challenge of Wittgenstein and his arguments against privacy of experience, in particular the private-language argument and the beetle-in-the-box analogy (in relation to this question, I use a key distinction made by David Chalmers). In the third and final chapter, Nagel's conception of the "objective point of view" will be examined. This will involve working out what this point of view consists of, and examining the process of objectification which is required to achieve this viewpoint, or "view from nowhere", as Nagel calls it. It

will then be shown how the objective point of view actually works in practice, with an example of a physical reduction of an objective phenomenon. It will then be determined whether this same process will work for a subjective phenomenon, i.e., consciousness.

(Note: For the rest of this dissertation, unless I specify otherwise, whenever I refer to a subjective point of view/viewpoint, I will usually mean a particular or individual subjective point of view/viewpoint.)

CHAPTER ONE

NAGEL AND "WHAT IT IS LIKE"

This chapter will look at Thomas Nagel's 1974 "bat" paper, examining in particular what Nagel meant by the phrase "what it is like". There do seem to be several strands of thought involved with this phrase. One strand seems to involve knowing what the bat's subjective facts of experience are like for the bat itself. Yet another strand of thought gives the impression that what is involved is the utilisation of the imagination in adopting a point of view, e.g., of a bat. In analysing Nagel's use of this latter, conceptual sense of the phrase "what it is like", a connection between this and the so-called "Ability Theory" will try to be made. I think that there is a connection, and it is of importance to the conclusions that Nagel reached in his 1974 paper. The reason for this is that the Ability theory makes the claim that "what it is like" only involves imaginative abilities, and not experiential facts. However, I believe that it was the existence of these experiential facts (e.g. of a bat) that was of vital importance to Nagel's thesis about conscious experience.

Nagel, "What it is like" and Imagination

In his "bat" paper, Nagel makes the claim that the possession of conscious experience by a creature means that there is something it is like to be that creature, and this is what Nagel calls the subjective character of experience. In consequence of this, he further believes that this subjective consciousness relies on a specific point of view which can only be apprehended from the position of the experiencing subject. This then involves

certain subjective facts (or phenomenal information) of experience which are accessible only from this point of view,[7] which goes to make up the subjective character of experience of the creature in question. By subjective facts, I take Nagel to mean the conscious experiences of a creature as they appear to the creature. A bat will know "what it is like" to have a certain sensation, this is an experiential fact for the bat (though not a consciously entertained one), and it is a subjective one because only the bat will be directly aware of this fact. Nagel does admit that the "what it is like" question he has posed could be misleading, "It does not mean 'what (in our experience) it *resembles*', but rather, 'how it is for the subject himself'".[8] This means that Nagel is really interested in the subjective, first-person, account of experience, not the objective, third-person, account of experience. Now this is important, as has been noted by H.O. Mounce in his paper "The Aroma of Coffee",[9] where he thinks that Nagel did not emphasise this idea enough. In his paper, Mounce was drawing attention to what he thought was a common fallacy amongst philosophers, that of confusing what they failed to understand with what passed beyond their understanding.[10] Mounce was using Nagel's example of the bat's experience to show how some concepts pass beyond the understanding of humans,[11] and this is what he thinks Nagel is trying to show as well. But he claims that Nagel had a problem, "His use of the phrase 'what it is like to be' is not entirely happy, because it is

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[7] On this point, Nagel states that "Whatever may be the status of facts about what it is like to be a human being, or a bat, or a Martian, these appear to be facts that embody a particular point of view". Nagel (1974) p.171.
[8] Nagel (1974) p.n170.
[9] Mounce, H.O. (1989) "The Aroma of Coffee". *Philosophy* 64, pp. 159-73.
[10] Mounce declares that "Many philosophers take for granted that there is nothing which cannot be described, at least in principle...What passes beyond one's understanding is identified with what one fails to understand. I fail to understand something when I might have succeeded; but since I might have succeeded, even when I failed, there is nothing which passes beyond my understanding". Mounce (1989) p. 165.
[11] Mounce (1989) p.164.

so often associated with differences of degree rather than of kind".[12] By this, I take Mounce to mean that when "what it is like" is interpreted as a difference of kind, then it is a difference that is beyond any act or effort to reconcile that difference. Whereas, if "what it is like" is viewed as a difference of degree, then there is the possibility that some act or effort can bridge the difference. However, is Mounce correct in his analysis of Nagel's "what it is like" question?

When Nagel chose the example of a bat, he was trying to show that even though we could not comprehend what it was like to be a bat, it was still quite probable that the bat had its own subjective character of experience.[13] He claimed that this led to the existence of certain facts which were beyond the conceivability of humans,[14] because they were only accessible from the point of view of the bat. Therefore, because a human has a different subjective point of view from a bat, he could not know what it was like to be a bat, and vice versa. At this point, Nagel's argument is that a bat has a unique point of view of experiencing the world, which enables it to perceive the subjective, phenomenal facts, which make up its subjective conscious experience, which is beyond human conception. It is this which Nagel claims is left out of an objective, physical analysis of the bat, no

[12] Mounce (1989) p.164. A similar point is made by J. Biro (1993). Biro also distinguishes two strands of thought in Nagel's 1974 paper, the weaker difference of degrees and the stronger difference of kind. However, Biro makes the further claim that the former is concerned with types of points of view while the latter is concerned with single points of view (using Nagel's sense of "points of view").

[13] Nagel (1974) p.170.

[14] Nagel states that "My realism about the subjective domain in all its forms implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts...There are facts which could not ever be represented or comprehended by human beings...Simply because our structure does not permit us to operate with concepts of the requisite type...Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language. We can be compelled to recognize the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them". Nagel (1974) p.171.

matter how detailed the analysis ends up being.[15] Therefore, at this point, "what is it like to be a bat?", means what is it like for the bat to be a bat. It is a difference of kind, as Mounce would say, one creature cannot know what it is like to be another creature, simply because they are different creatures and have different experiential points of view. It seems to be an epistemological problem, there are certain types of facts which are impossible for humans to access, due to their different biological makeup.[16] I believe that Nagel's main point behind asking "what is it like to be a bat?" is that just because we cannot access the bat's subjective facts of conscious experience, it does not mean that the bat has no conscious experience (the bat's subjective consciousness is an ontological reality, i.e., it actually exists, even though there are epistemic difficulties in ascertaining this fact). He backs this up by then talking of a similar situation if a Martian were to examine humans objectively, and fail to find the subjective facts of our consciousness. The Martian would be wrong to come to the conclusion that humans had no subjective conscious experience, because, quite obviously we do.[17] But these facts of conscious experience are only accessible to the subjective point of view of the creature in question.

However, Nagel then discusses how one might try to extend our understanding to include what it is like to be a bat. Because we do not have the experiences that a bat has, or

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[15] Mounce concurs on this point, where he states: "Considering it as an object, one may describe what a bat is like. But one has not, in so doing, described what it is like to be a bat. One has ignored it as a subject...What has been missed...is precisely what is essential to consciousness, namely, that it is a feature not of an object but of a living subject, that it is subjective in its very essence". Mounce (1989) p.163.

[16] Biro makes the claim that to utilise physiological differences for explaining differences in experience between a human and a bat, is to come close to embracing a physicalist reduction, which Nagel is arguing against. Biro (1993) p.185. However, even if one were to accept this line of reasoning, the most it would show is that creatures with different physiologies might not have different experiences (Biro claims that for all we know bat experience might be like human experience). But the main point would still stand, we would not be able to verify this point, as the other creature's subjective experiential facts were still inaccessible to us, for what ever reason. But despite this, the creature could still be said to have conscious experiences.

possess anything like a bat's sonar, he comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to try to imagine what it would be like to be a bat from the standpoint of a human being (this situation is also analogous to the situation of a Martian trying to form a conception of what it was like to be a human). He claims that our imagination is limited to the materials that our own experience gives us, which is inadequate to form anything more than a schematic conception of the bat's experience.[18] So here Nagel is admitting that humans can only imagine things that utilise the resources that their experiences have provided them with.[19] One could imagine what it was like to be a bat, but of course this would be from a human point of view, and not from the bat's point of view, which would not really answer Nagel's "what is it like to be a bat?" question. And yet, he has mentioned trying to use the imagination to try to conceive what it would be like to be a bat, even though he says that this is not possible. However, Nagel then claims that the point of view he is concerned with is not a particular or individual point of view, but a type of point of view.[20] He goes on to claim that creatures of the same type, could be able to imagine the points of view of each other, though not of creatures that were very dissimilar to them. So one human would be able to use his imagination to take up the point of view of another human being,[21] and presumably one bat would be able to imagine the point of view of another bat. So even though it was declared impossible for us to know what it was like to be a bat, Nagel now declares that beings of the same type can know what it is like to be each other. Also, that the method to achieve this is

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[17] Nagel (1974) p.170.
[18] Nagel (1974) p.168/9.
[19] Even though he is not an empiricist, this is a standard empiricist position taken by Nagel. See John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2,1,2; and David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1,1,1.
[20] Nagel (1974) p.171.
[21] Nagel (1974) p.172.

supplied by the imagination. So, for Nagel, the "what it is like" question is still a matter of kind concerning the bat, but is a matter of degree concerning humans. Nagel then muddies the water even further, when he states:

> It may be easier than I suppose to transcend inter-species barriers with the aid of the imagination...The distance between oneself and other persons and other species can fall anywhere on a continuum. Even for other persons the understanding of what it is like to be them is only partial, and when one moves to species very different from oneself, a lesser degree of partial understanding may still be available. The imagination is remarkably flexible. My point, however, is not that we cannot know what it is like to be a bat. I am not raising that epistemological problem. My point is rather that even to form a conception of what it is like to be a bat (and *a fortiori* to know what it is like to be a bat) one must take up the bat's point of view. If one can take it up roughly, or partially, then one's conception will also be rough or partial.[22]

Here then, Nagel makes the "what is it like to be a bat?" question also be one of degrees, like it is for other humans. Nagel explicitly states that he is not talking of an epistemological problem, now it seems to be a conceptual problem involving the human imagination. He gives the impression that "what it is like" is an ability to use the imagination to take up the experiencer's point of view, which will have variable success depending on how close, physically and physiologically, the experiencer is to oneself.[23] Therefore, it appears that Mounce was correct in his analysis of Nagel's "what it is like" question. The question started as one of a difference of kind, but has finished as one of a difference of degrees. And Nagel is completely responsible for this! According to Mounce this would be a case of something which was once inconceivable to humans, now becoming just something which humans fail to understand. So, Nagel would be committing the fallacy of which Mounce thought philosophers in general were guilty of, which was mentioned earlier. However, could it be that Nagel is simply trying to extend

[22] Nagel (1974) p.n172.

his understanding, using the imagination, in a case that would be similar to ones that D.Z. Phillips argues for in his paper "From Coffee to Carmelites",[24] which was a response to Mounce's paper. Phillips believes that Mounce does not recognise that understanding does not stay static in relation to a problem, but can change its form to try to accommodate a more successful analysis of the problem in question.[25] However, in this case, I do not think that there could be such a radical change made to one's understanding, that might enable one to know what it was like to be a bat.[26] The subjective life of the bat is beyond human conception. No amount of change or extension, in the powers of the objective physiological analysis of a bat, or in the powers of the human imagination, would enable us to know what it was subjectively like to be the bat. My reason for believing this is the following: how would one know if a partial conception of the point of view of a bat had been achieved? Would a person standing in a dark room, with a bucket over his head and making chirruping noises have achieved a *partial* conception of the point of view of a bat? Or would it be the case, as is more probable, that the person had a *complete* conception of the point of view of someone standing in a dark room with a bucket over his head and making chirruping noises. My point is that we would not know what the point of view of the bat was, in order to judge whether our physical or imaginative efforts were partial, complete, or whatever.[27] It is

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[23] Nagel (1974) p.178/9.
[24] Phillips, D.Z. (1990) "From Coffee to Carmelites". *Philosophy* 65, pp. 19-38.
[25] Phillips declares "What Mounce does not recognize is that not every acquiring of understanding is a matter of succeeding within the same mode of understanding within which one had previously failed. One's understanding may be extended or transformed". Phillips (1990) p.22. Biro also endorses a similar view, where he claims "...our powers of imagination may change, as they clearly do for many reasons, not least as a consequence of additions to our knowledge and understanding". Biro (1993) p.188.
[26] A similar point is made by Torin Alter (1999) p.5.
[27] Kathleen Wider (1990) p.n493, makes a similar point. Indeed, it is Nagel's use of the imagination to find out about others' subjective experiences that Wider believes partly contributes towards a solipsistic strain in Nagel's work. That is, the only experiences that one can be sure about are the experiences from one's own subjective point of view. Imagination does not accomplish what Nagel intends it to, and other

somewhat similar to the problem which came about due to the representational theory of perception which was adopted by the Empiricists in explaining their theories of experience and knowledge. One could never compare the idea, impression etc., to the actual object of which it was a representation, due to the fact that the actual object or thing-in-itself was beyond the understanding (we could never escape the representations or perceptions, as these were the immediate objects of the understanding).[28] So it seems that to know "what it is like to be a bat" remains a difference of kind, not of degrees, and is inconceivable to human beings, whatever imaginative feats they can perform.[29] In his later writings, Nagel seems to acknowledge that to try to use the imagination to comprehend the subjective character of a radically different creature to a human is doomed to failure.[30] It was Nagel's vacillation on the effectiveness of the imagination on this point that caused the shift from a difference of kind to a difference of degrees, which Mounce noted.

In his 1974 paper, Nagel also makes a distinction between the various types of imagination that can be used. There is perceptual imagination and sympathetic

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subjective viewpoints are not as accessible as one's own. This is roughly what I believe as well, Nagel's "what it is like" question only seems to make sense as one of a difference of kind, rather than degrees (one has to take up the point of view of the bat to know what it is like to be a bat, and that is imaginatively impossible). The solipsistic strain that this results in does not really worry me. It seems fairly reasonable to suppose that I can apprehend or "know" my own phenomenal consciousness better than someone else can, and vice versa (I might discuss this more when talking about subjective points of view).

[28] Locke recognised this, but still kept his belief in the causal efficacy of external objects. On the other hand, Berkeley used this situation to promote his belief that there were just minds and ideas. Meanwhile, Hume believed that there were external objects, but that we could never actually observe what they were like, as we could not get outside of our perceptions, which led him to scepticism.

[29] In *The View From Nowhere*, Nagel claims that, "a being of total imaginative flexibility could project himself directly into every possible subjective point of view, and would not need such an objective method to think about the full range of possible inner lives". Nagel (1986) p.17. The same objection would apply to this being, how would we know that he really was accurately conceiving the subjective points of view that he claimed.

[30] Nagel (1986) p.17.

imagination. Nagel states that "(t)o imagine something perceptually, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the state we would be in if we perceived it", while "(t)o imagine something sympathetically, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the thing itself (This method can be used only to imagine mental events and states – our own or another's)".[31] An example of perceptual imagination, would be imagining what it is like to perceive, say, a man in pain; while sympathetic imagination would involve imagining what it is like to actually be the man in pain. Nagel does not elaborate on these two types of imagination, however, it seems fairly clear that when Nagel talks of using the imagination to comprehend what it is like to be a bat, he is referring to sympathetic imagination. He is trying to get a conception of what it would be like to be a bat from the inside, what the conscious states of the bat actually feel like for the bat. It is this sympathetic imagination which fails us in knowing what it is like to be a bat, due to the differences between our subjective characters of experience being too great. This in turn is due to us being radically different creatures, with different types of points of view, due to our different physical and physiological makeup. It is also this sympathetic imagination which Nagel believes we can use with more success in trying to adopt the points of view of other humans, due to the points of view being of the same type. It is because of this that Nagel explicitly states that the points of view he is talking about are a type and not private and particular ones applying to individuals.[32] Perceptual imagination is not really mentioned in Nagel's "bat" paper, except in a footnote (on page 176).

[31] Nagel (1974) pp.n175/6.
[32] Nagel (1974) p.171.

It is time to take stock of what has been discussed in this section, before going on and tackling the Ability theory/hypothesis. The first, and I believe, most important construal of the phrase "what it is like", involved knowing what it was like for the subject himself to have his own experiences (i.e., what it was like for the bat to be a bat). This knowledge was found to be inaccessible to any human efforts, including objective analysis and subjective imagination. So, at this point, as Mounce would agree, "what it is like to be a bat" is a difference of kind. In my opinion, it appears to be an epistemological problem for humans (contra Nagel), which must not lead them to think that just because they cannot access the bat's subjective experiential facts, the bat has no conscious experience. However, the other construal that Nagel then gives to the phrase "what it is like", is that it involves using the imagination to take up the point of view of the experiencer. With regards to the bat, this gives the impression that our imaginative capabilities might be able to partially succeed, so giving the impression that "what it is like to be a bat" is now a difference of degree. From being an epistemological problem for humans (how to find out "what it is like"), it is now viewed as a conceptual problem for the human imagination (how to imagine "what it is like"). But this was seen to be a dubious course of action, and the difference was still one of kind rather than of degree. To "know what it is like" in Nagel's (difference of kind) sense first involves having the relevant experience, which then gives the material for the mind to use its imaginative abilities. This is why it was strange when Nagel suggested that we might be able to partially conceive of a bat's point of view, when we still did not have any of the bat's subjective experiential facts to work with.

What is the Ability Theory/Hypothesis?

The Ability theory or hypothesis has been put forward most coherently by Laurence Nemirow[33] and David Lewis.[34] There are differences between their versions of the Ability theory, but they both have the following in common. The claim is made that "to know what it is like" is equivalent to having certain imaginative abilities, and does not involve any subjective facts or phenomenal information. Both Nemirow and Lewis have identified their target, the subjective facts or phenomenal information of "knowing what it is like" to experience such-and-such. The reason for this is that the aforementioned facts/information are claimed to be overlooked or not accounted for in physicalist or materialist theories of consciousness and the mind. If this were true, then physicalism, which claims that all factual information in the world is physical in nature, would be false.[35] There would be certain phenomenological facts that existed which were not covered by the physical sciences, which would essentially mean that there was non-physical information in the world. Therefore, unless these so-called non-physical facts can be explained with the aid of physicalism, the next best strategy for nervous materialists could be to deny that they were facts or information in the first place.[36] Therefore, Nemirow declares:

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[33] Nemirow, L. (1980) "Review of Nagel's *Mortal Questions*". *Philosophical Review* 89, pp. 473-7.
Nemirow, L. (1990) "Physicalism and the Cognitive Role of Acquaintance". *In:* Lycan, W.G., ed. *Mind And Cognition: A Reader.* Oxford UK, Cambridge USA: Blackwell, pp. 490-9.
Nemirow, L. (1995) "Understanding Rules." *Journal of Philosophy* 92, pp. 28-43.

[34] Lewis, D. (1983a) "Postscript to "Mad Pain and Martian Pain"". *In:* Lewis, D. *Philosophical Papers Vol.1.* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 130-132.
Lewis, D. (1988) "What Experience Teaches". *In:* Lycan, W.G., ed. *Mind And Cognition: A Reader.* Oxford UK, Cambridge USA: Blackwell, pp. 499-519.

[35] Lewis declares that, "We dare not grant that there is a sort of information we overlook; or, in other words, that there are possibilities exactly alike in the respects we know of, yet different in some other way. That would be defeat". Lewis (1983a) p.131.

[36] As Richard Warner (1986) states, "...a physicalist reply to Nagel has emerged since Nagel's article: namely that the argument turns on misconstruing possession of a certain ability to recognise pain as (or as involving) knowledge of a fact about pain. It is this (supposed) fact that Nagel argues cannot be fully

> The principal importance of acquaintance in cognition is the production of sophisticated imaginative abilities that give rise to an elaborate network of other abilities...Thus it does justice to the cognitive significance of acquaintance to equate knowledge of what an experience is like with the ability to imagine.[37]

While Lewis states that:

> ...knowing what it's like is not the possession of information at all. It isn't the elimination of any hitherto open possibilities. Rather, knowing what it's like is the possession of abilities: abilities to recognize, abilities to imagine, abilities to predict one's behavior by means of imaginative experiments.[38]

With the quote from Nemirow, it seems that he is claiming that the actual having of the experience is of main importance in producing imaginative abilities. He bypasses any possible subjective factual/informational content that the experience might possess for the experiencer (i.e. what it is like for the person to actually have the experience), and goes straight to the subjective abilities that are gained. This is a major feature of the Ability theory. It seems to minimize the impact and importance of the actual experience, and maximize the importance of the imaginative abilities. Therefore, to know what x is like, for Nemirow, amounts to being able to imagine or visualise x. The actual experience of x goes towards producing the imaginative abilities which will enable one to know what x is like. Presumably, during the experience of x, before any abilities have been gained, one does not know what x is like, at least in Nemirow's sense.[39] Normally, one would think

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described by a physicalist theory. The physicalist reply is that there is no such fact". Warner (1986) p.249. Warner also comes up with an argument challenging physicalism, that depends on a limited incorrigibility between believing one feels a pain and of feeling pain. However, he also acknowledges that his argument is vulnerable to the Ability theory: a fact about a pain being construed as an ability to recognise pain.

[37] Nemirow (1990) p.498.

[38] Lewis (1983a) p.131.

[39] It could be that the Ability theorists' version of "to know what x is like" is achieved after introspection of the "phenomenal concept" of x (according to Michael Tye (1999b) p.710). But this would be a different "what it is like" to Nagel's sense, which I believe does not involve any introspection, but just immediate conscious experience.

that, for example, an experience of seeing x would be quite separate and different from visualising x. However, with the Ability theory, there appears to be a conflation of the actual experience and the imaginative ability, with the result that the actual experience is pushed into the background, so to speak, and the imaginative ability takes centre-stage. For example, consider what it is like to see a blue vase. When would one know what it was like to see the vase? With Nagel, one would know while one was having the experience of seeing the vase: it would be a subjective fact of one's conscious experience that the vase looked a certain way, a fact, which could then be later utilised by the memory, imagination, etc. However, with Nemirow it would seem that one would only know if one was able to imagine seeing the vase. What happens while one was visually experiencing the vase, is not really dwelt upon by Nemirow; the main importance of the actual experience (according to Nemirow) is that of producing abilities to imagine seeing the vase etc. It is in this way that Nemirow can then claim that there are no subjective facts involved in knowing what such-and-such is like, only subjective abilities. This point is reinforced by Lewis' quote, where he denies that there is any information or facts involved in knowing what it's like, there are only abilities. In claiming that there is no elimination of open possibilities, I believe that Lewis means that there are no possibilities of what the experience of x might have been like, which will then be eliminated when the subjective facts/information of the actual experience are apprehended by the person involved. No subjective information, only subjective abilities. Or put another way, it is not a case of knowing-that, but of knowing-how.

In a later work, Lewis makes the same claim:

> The Ability Hypothesis says that knowing what an experience is like just is the possession of these abilities to remember, imagine, and recognize. It isn't the possession of any kind of information, ordinary or peculiar...It isn't knowing that. It's knowing how. Therefore it should be no surprise that lessons won't teach you what an experience is like. Lessons impart information; ability is something else.[40]

Here again, what goes on during the actual experience, that is, whether one knows what the experience is like while having it, is overlooked. Lewis thinks that only when the imaginative abilities are gained (due to the experience), does one know what the experience is like. Lewis seems to think that because lessons will not teach you what an experience is like, it must involve knowing how, rather than knowing that. But it is not as clear cut as this. It could be that lessons impart propositional information, while experience imparts experiential information. This point is similar to the one that is brought out by Frank Jackson's famous "knowledge argument". This involves a neurophysiologist called Mary, who has spent her life in a black and white room. Despite this, she knows all the physical facts there are to know about the physiology of vision, due to watching a black and white television. The crux of the argument is the following: if Mary left her black and white room and came into the world we live in, would she learn anything or not? Would there be a fact of reality that she had not acquired while in the room? Jackson certainly thinks so, as he says "It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then it is inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete. But she had *all* the physical information. *Ergo* there is more to have than that, and Physicalism is false".[41] This

[40] Lewis (1988) p.516.
[41] Jackson (1982) p.471.

example emphasises the point that knowledge might well be gained from having an actual experience (a case of knowing that, rather than knowing how).

It is interesting that Lewis does differ from Nemirow on one important point. Whereas Nemirow does not mention any sort of information or facts being present while one is actually having an experience of such-and-such, Lewis acknowledges that some sort of information-transfer might be involved during the actual experience. He believes that "what experience E is like" denotes E itself.[42] This means that Lewis acknowledges that having an experience of something, is knowing what that something is like as you experience it.[43] However, Lewis denies that this "knowing what something is like" denotes a "subjective quality" that is part of the information being accessed by the perceiver. He also states that the abilities gained by experiencing something, may have as their causal basis "a special kind of representation of some sort of information...We need only deny that it represents a special kind of information about a special subject matter".[44] So here Lewis is saying that it is conceivable that the abilities gained by having the experience of E, could come from certain information gained from that experience. So knowing what something is like can occur during the actual experience of it, which then leads on to the abilities. He only denies that the information gained takes the form of "special phenomenal facts...which cannot be represented in any other way".[45] However, this is the whole point of Nagel's thesis of the subjective character of experience. That character is made up of subjective experiential facts or information

[42] Lewis (1988) p.519.
[43] This point is made by Tye (1999a).
[44] Lewis (1988) p.517.
[45] Lewis (1988) p.517.

which is only available from the viewpoint of the subject concerned. Lewis claims that it might be possible that experiences leave "distinctive traces" in people, but what could this mean? Presumably, each person would have their own distinctive traces, which, in my view, would mean that they were subjective in character. Now, Lewis does not state that these traces are subjective in character, but it seems to me that they would have to have some sort of subjective element to them, if each person had their own distinctive traces in them. Again, presumably, these traces would enable a person to know what an experience was like, so this would be a subjective fact of what the experience was like for the person concerned. Finally, these subjective experiential facts would not be available to an objective viewpoint, because they were subjective in their very nature. Now, to reiterate, this is just my interpretation of Lewis' position, he might well mean something else in talking of "distinctive traces", but I cannot see how he is going to avoid a subjective element in his explanation of them.

However, it can be seen that the Ability theory is a direct attack on the notion of a subjective character of experience, as Nagel would call it, involving subjective facts which are outside the scope of physicalism. It is also an attack on the above-mentioned "knowledge argument" of Frank Jackson, which, while this latter argument differs from Nagel's argument by not promoting the concept of a subjective point of view or a role for the imagination, still claims that there is phenomenal information which physicalism does not explain.[46] If subjective phenomenal experience can be shown to involve abilities

[46] However, Jackson is of the opinion that Nagel is raising a different problem. He thinks Nagel is talking about extrapolating from our experience to the experience of another, through the use of the imagination. Jackson (1982) p.473. Jackson is here referring to "What is it like to be a bat?", and the reasons why this impression is given in Nagel's paper were looked at earlier.

such as imagining and recognising, instead of certain facts or information, then the claims of physicalism will not be viewed as false or incomplete. This is because physicalism only claims that all the information in the world is physical in character, and so will not have to account for the non-factual/informational know-how of experience.[47] Therefore, if Nagel's hypothesis of subjective experience and corresponding subjective facts are to survive, the Ability theory must be dealt with.

Is "What it is like" an Ability?

It is my opinion, that Nagel's definition of the phrase "what it is like" in his "bat" paper did vary as the paper progressed. Firstly, and I think most importantly, Nagel intended the phrase "what is it like to be a bat?" to mean what it was like for the bat to be a bat. He was trying to show how subjectivity and a point of view were connected, with the subjective facts of the bat's conscious experience only being accessible from the point of view of the bat. These subjective facts would include what a sensation felt like to a bat, it would be a fact that an experience would feel like something to the bat. Nagel came to the conclusion that a physical, objective analysis of the bat would fail to reach the bat's subjective experience, on account of the fact that the analysis involved a different viewpoint to the bat's point of view, and so the bat's subjective experiential facts were impossible to access. However, just because a certain set of experiential facts were unknowable and unable to be analysed objectively, it did not mean that the bat had no conscious experiences of its own. So at this stage, in my view, the phrase "what it is like" seemed to be an epistemological question, not alluding to any imaginative ability. As Mounce would say, "it was a difference of kind", one creature was radically different

[47] Alter (2001) pp.2/3.

to another creature, and could not access each other's experiences. However, when Nagel then brings in the imagination, and starts discussing how we might be able to imaginatively adopt the point of view of the bat, the phrase "what is it like to be a bat?" then becomes one of human conceptualisation. It is now a "difference of degrees", and could be equated with having an ability to take up the bat's point of view using the imagination.[48] Indeed, Nemirow declares that "As Nagel's own theory provides, however, knowing what it's like essentially correlates with knowing how to imagine",[49] and later he then states his Ability Equation, "Knowing what it's like may be identified with knowing how to imagine".[50] Therefore, I believe that Nemirow adopted the "difference of degrees" version of Nagel's "what it is like" question. This would then enable Nemirow to claim that "to know what it is like to see x" is just the ability to visualise x, to imaginatively adopt the point of view representative of experiencing x. However, it can be seen that Nemirow talks mostly about the abilities that are gained through having the experience of perceiving something, but does not dwell on the actual having of the experience. And yet, could it not be claimed that to know what something is like occurs when you actually experience it? Nemirow's Ability Equation could be amended to the Subjective Facts Equation: knowing what it's like may also be identified with actually having the experience. From a knowing-how equation we have gone to a knowing-that equation. I am not claiming here that one cannot imagine anything which one has not experienced, but I am trying to show how the importance of actual experience is played-down by the Ability theory. I believe that this situation goes back to the two

[48] At one point, Nagel states that "At present we are completely unequipped to think about the subjective character of experience without relying on the imagination – without taking up the point of view of the experiential subject". Nagel (1974) p.178.
[49] Nemirow (1990) p.492.

different meanings of "what it is like" with Nagel. To know what it was like to be a bat with the first meaning, would mean what it was like for the bat to be a bat, to actually be in the bat's point of view and have its experiences. In the second meaning, it would mean what it was like to imaginatively take up the bat's point of view, and imagine having the bat's experiences. In the former case, one would actually know what it was like, while in the latter case one would imaginatively know what it was like. Personally, I think that Nemirow's possible conflation of "knowing" and "imagining" stems from Nagel, where he mixes up his meanings of the term "what it is like".

Therefore, to finish this section, I will analyse an example of having a particular experience, to try to ascertain when it is that one first knows "what it is like" to have that experience. Therefore, what is it like to have a visual experience of the cover of David Bowie's *Lodger* album from 1979? (It features Bowie somehow stuck on a wall, next to a sink, with his nose pushed out of shape). Firstly, experience of actually seeing the album cover is of vital importance, for this gives the raw material for the mental abilities to work on. Without this experience, we would not know what the album cover looked like, and so would not be able to visualise it, remember it, recognise it etc. Now, it could be claimed that just a description of the album cover (as I gave above) would be enough to enable one to know what the cover looked like, and so would not necessarily involve actual perceptual experience of the album. However, this point brings to mind Bertrand Russell's distinction between "knowledge by description" and "knowledge by acquaintance". If one was given a verbal or written description of the album cover, this would be called knowledge by description. It would involve propositional knowledge

[50] Nemirow (1990) p.493.

about the album cover. At this point, a person could only claim to know what seeing the album cover was like propositionally. In contrast, knowledge by acquaintance would involve one having direct perceptual experience of the album cover. After this kind of knowledge, a person could claim to know what seeing the album cover was like experientially. It is this immediate experiential knowledge of the album cover, that would enable one to actually know what it was like to visually perceive it. It would be knowledge of the object itself, rather than just knowledge of propositions about the object. One could still claim that after a description of the album cover, one would be able to visualise it. But this would be a visualisation of the description of the cover, not of the cover itself. The basis of propositional knowledge is experiential knowledge.[51] For there to be a description of the *Lodger* album cover, someone must have first been experientially acquainted with it.

Therefore, to get anywhere in knowing what a certain something is like, one first has to experience it (in this case perceive it visually).[52] Now, Nemirow would not disagree with this, and David Lewis would also not disagree. The difference is what the Ability theorists believe takes place during the actual experience. As we have seen, Nemirow

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[51] Bryan Magee (1995) makes this point, where he says, "The totality of propositional knowledge about the world is dependent for its very possibility, let alone its existence, on there being experiential knowledge". Magee/Milligan (1995) p.31. Also, see Tallis (1989) p.220.

[52] However, in connection with this point, D.H. Mellor (1993) makes the claim that with some experiences, one does not need to have experienced them at all, to know what they are like. He claims that the ability to imagine is all that is required to know what certain things are like (he gives examples of composers and painters, who can imagine their music and paintings, before they have heard or seen them respectively). Mellor (1993) pp.5/6. However, it seems to me that Mellor's claim is still debatable. As argued earlier, it seems that the Ability theorists conflate "knowing what something is like" with "imagining what something is like". I suppose it all comes down to how one defines the phrase "to know". It could be argued that a musician will only be *imagining* what his music is like before he actually hears it. Once he has experienced it, then he will *know* what it is like. And even if he claims that the previously imagined music was the same as the experienced music, it would still not mean that when he was imagining the music, he knew

thinks that the main role of having the actual experience, is that it goes towards the production of various imaginative abilities, and Lewis takes roughly the same view.[53] And I think that this is the crux of the argument. If "what it is like" involved knowing what, then this would entail there being certain facts ascertained at the time of the experience. Whereas, if "what it is like" involved knowing how, then this would not entail any facts being ascertained at the time of the experience. So, is knowing what it is like to visually experience the cover of David Bowie's *Lodger* album, only the gaining of abilities to imagine it, remember it and recognise it, or does one also "know" during the actual experience?

As stated earlier, the Ability theorists seem to want to rush past the actual experience, and concentrate on the abilities gained instead. But what happens when we actually experience something? By hypothesis, I am assuming that a person has had no previous visual contact with, or propositional knowledge of, the *Lodger* album cover. So, this person goes into a record store and discovers what it is like to see the cover of the *Lodger* album for the first time. It does not seem unreasonable to claim that while he is experiencing the cover he does at that moment know what it is like to be perceiving the cover; it is a subjective, experiential fact for him, that the cover looks the way it does to him. He knows "what it is like" during the actual experience. It also seems plausible that a number of possibilities have been ruled out by his perceiving the actual cover (contra Lewis). Before he had seen the *Lodger* cover, there were limitless possibilities as to what it might have looked like to him (a mischievous sales assistant might have shown him a

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what it sounded like. It would only be after the actual experience of the music, that he would *know* that his imagined music was identical to it. Before the actual experience, all he had was his imagined music.

Leo Sayer album cover, and pretended that it was the *Lodger* cover by covering Leo's name and the title). But once he is certain that it is Bowie's *Lodger* album cover he is looking at, all the possibilities are ruled out bar the one he is actually seeing, which is the *Lodger* cover.[54] Also, it does seem to be a case of knowing that rather than knowing how. It is a fact that the cover looks like that only to that person, as he is experiencing it. Therefore, why not call what it is like to see the *Lodger* album cover, a subjective experiential fact for that person? It is just one fact of many that go to make up that person's subjective character of experience, as Nagel would call it.

There is also no logical connection between knowing what an experience is like and gaining abilities from this knowledge. For instance, it is conceivable that the person seeing the *Lodger* album cover knows what it is like during the experience, but for some reason cannot form any mental images in his mind. So he has no abilities to imagine or remember what it is like to see the cover. However, when he then sees the cover once more he will again be able to know what it is like during the experience. This shows that knowing what it is like is not identical with gaining abilities.[55] However, having said

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[53] Nemirow (1990) p.498, Lewis (1988) p.516.

[54] David Chalmers (1996) puts forward this sort of argument, where he states "No doubt Mary does gain some abilities when she first experiences red, as she gains some abilities when she learns to ride a bicycle. But it certainly seems that she learns something else; some facts about the nature of experience. For all she knew before, the experience of red things might have been like this, or it might have been like that, or it might even have been like nothing at all. But now she knows that it is like this. She has narrowed down the space of epistemic possibilities". Chalmers (1996) p.145.

[55] This argument is from Earl Conee (1985), who declares "...Mary might learn how the sky looks without getting any of these abilities. She might have no ability to form mental images at will, and no ability to recall the look of the sky when she turns her attention to anything else. Yet still, she could know how the sky looks while she sees it. Such considerations show that Mary's learning is not identical to acquiring any abilities (abilities are neither necessary nor sufficient for the learning)". Conee (1985) p.298. Michael Tye (1999a) p.7, makes a similar point. In relation to this objection, Torin Alter (2001) attacks the Ability theorists' claim that "Know-how is ability". Utilising the arguments of Noam Chomsky, Alter shows that it is questionable as to whether know-how completely reduces to ability. He does this by giving examples

this, it is the case that most critics of the Ability theory, while claiming that knowing what something is like occurs during the actual experiencing of it, go on and claim that through this experience, abilities have been gained to imagine, remember, recognise etc. the experience.[56] However, some doubt could even be cast over this claim. When a person has not seen the *Lodger* album cover, he does not know what it looks like, and so lacks the ability to imagine it, recognise it, etc. When he has seen the cover, this experience leads to the relevant abilities being acquired. But, is it a gaining of abilities, or just a gaining of experiential information for abilities which are already present? While a person does not know what the *Lodger* cover looks like, he might well be acquainted with another album cover, which enables him to visualise it, remember it, recognise it, etc. And this applies to numerous other objects which he has had experience of, he is able to use his imaginative abilities with regard to these objects as well. So, while it is claimed that he lacks abilities concerning an object he has not experienced, it is quite clear that the imaginative abilities of his mind are still present and operating on previously experienced material.[57]

Could it be that the imaginative abilities are always present in the mind, but that they only become operative when experiential information is supplied to them. This could be

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where people have retained know-how, but for some reason have temporarily lost the corresponding ability. Alter (2001) pp.7/8.

[56] Chalmers (1996) p.145, Conee (1985) p.298, Jackson (1986) p.294.

[57] Martine Nida-Rumelin (1998) makes a similar point. She splits up experiential information into nonphenomenal(np) belief and phenomenal(p) belief. In reply to the challenge of the Ability theory, she states, "This objection is however easy to reject. Marianna's case shows that knowing that the sky looks blue(p) does not consist in knowing that it looks blue(np) plus recognitional abilities, the ability to imagine blue and the like. Consider the moment in Marianna's life when she is already acquainted with colors but has not yet taken her second step of epistemic progress. At this point she is able to imagine blue at will, she can recognize blue, etc., and she has, of course, the nonphenomenal belief that the sky looks blue(np) to normal observers, but she still does not have the corresponding phenomenal belief". Nida-Rumelin (1998) p.70.

something similar to Kant's categories of the understanding. These categories are *a priori* in relation to information from the senses, but are dependent on that sense information for their operation. The imaginative capacities of the mind would be dormant unless there were experiential information from the senses. Once this information is forthcoming, the abilities start their operations, and imagining, remembering, recognising, starts taking place using that information. So it could be argued that we do indeed need to experience something in order for the mind's imaginative abilities to start working, but that experience does not supply the abilities, it gives material for the already present abilities to process. In trying to give the impression that knowing what something is like is a matter of knowing how rather than knowing that, Ability theorists may have played on a confusion in the definition of the word "ability". In relation to overt, physical abilities, then one can be said to gain these. For example, the ability to ride a bike is gained, as it was not present before. This is quite straightforward, first of all one could not ride a bike, then eventually one could ride a bike, and so an ability had been gained. And more importantly, it could be said that one now knows *how* to ride a bike. But is it as straightforward with mental abilities? Well, one could learn how to do mental arithmetic, and so be said to gain an ability that one did not have before. But, is it feasible to claim that just by looking at an object one gains an ability? An Ability theorist would say yes, by seeing an object you gain the abilities of being able to visualise it, recognise it, etc. But there is an important difference in this case. Imaginative abilities are not intrinsic to the perception of the object, they are dependent on the perception, certainly, but one cannot be said to gain imaginative abilities just by perceiving an object.

The Knowing That/How Distinction of the Ability Theory and of Gilbert Ryle

To conclude this chapter, it might be interesting to compare the Ability theory with an earlier theory that had a knowing that/how distinction in it. This earlier theory was by Gilbert Ryle, which he explained in his famous book, *The Concept of Mind.* Both theories try to argue that certain assumptions of subjective, non-physical, elements are wrong, and that the relevant factors can be explained by other means. The Ability theory tries to argue that subjective facts/information are non-existent in subjective experience, whereas, Ryle's thesis was that the mind was non-existent. Ryle thought that the conjoining of "mind" and "body" was a type- or category-mistake,[58] which resulted in people thinking that mind and body both existed, but were separate, each involving mental and physical processes/activities respectively. This would be similar to the category-mistake involved in saying, "He came down stairs and opened the door in his pyjamas", to which the jocular reply would be "That's a funny place for a door".[59] Here, the terms "door" and "pyjamas" are of different types, and so should not be conjoined. I suppose that Ryle wanted us to see the absurdity of talking about "a mind in a body" in a similar manner, so that we might reply "That's a funny place for a mind". However, it appears that Ryle did not completely rule out the existence of mental processes, but was just arguing that the propositions "mind" and "body" should not be conjoined. If it was realised that they were two different types, then "the argument will not show that either of the illegitimately conjoined propositions [i.e. mind or body] is absurd in itself".[60]

[58] Ryle described the category-mistake as representing "the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category(or range of types or categories), when they actually belong to another". Ryle (1949) p.16. This category-mistake resulted in what Ryle called "the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine", the idea of an immaterial mind contained in a material body.

It could be said that the Ability theory also believes that there is a category-mistake, this time involving the terms "subjective facts" and "experience", and that the two should not be conjoined. The difference between Ryle's category-mistake and this one, is that the Ability theorists would be nervous about what sort of "subjective facts" one was talking about. I suspect that some Ability theorists (e.g. David Lewis) would not object to the terms "subjective facts" and "experience" being conjoined, as long as the subjective facts were physical ones. Whereas, they would object if non-physical subjective facts were involved. So perhaps it is not a category-mistake after all, but an argument concerning the type of subjective facts concerned. Despite this, it does seem that both their attacks are on the same targets, which are types of non-physical objects. Also, both the Ability theory and Ryle's theory come to use the knowing that/how distinction to help them in their respective arguments, by turning to abilities to help with their attack on the non-physical "subjective facts" and "mind" respectively. As we have seen, the Ability theory claims that knowing what something is like consists in gaining mental abilities, such as imagining, remembering, recognising, etc. Gaining an ability is viewed as "knowing-how" to do something. This is in contrast to gaining certain experiential subjective facts of what something is like, which would involve "knowing that". Similarly, Ryle claims that to see the workings of a person's mind, one only has to observe their overt, physical ability in doing various tasks. He states that quotes of intelligence describe "not the knowledge, or ignorance, of this or that truth, but the ability, or inability, to do certain things".[61] According to Ryle, an intelligent performance of a physical ability, consisted only in the execution of the physical ability itself, it was just doing one thing. The

[59] Ryle's example is, "She came home in a flood of tears and a sedan-chair". Ryle (1949) p.22.
[60] Ryle (1949) p.22.

influence of "Descartes' Myth" would have one believe that two things were happening, the carrying out of the physical ability and a corresponding mental operation which provided the intelligence to the physical behaviour. So, Ryle thought that there was only "knowing how" involved in physical, intelligent, actions, and not also a preceding "knowing that" to the physical actions, which would come from the supposed mental judgements of propositions concerned with the physical behaviour.[62]

So, both the Ability theory and Ryle's theory use "abilities" in arguing that certain non-physical phenomena which would involve "knowing that" certain propositions were the case, do not in fact exist. For example, an Ability theorist would claim that to know what it was like to see a red patch would involve the ability to imagine or remember the red patch, and not any subjective, experiential facts of how the patch appeared to one. Similarly, Ryle would claim that a person who played a clever shot at tennis had the ability of making an intelligent, overt action only, which did not involve any mental operations mirroring the overt behaviour. It is interesting that the Ability theory utilises mental abilities while Ryle's theory utilises physical abilities. Indeed, it could be argued that Ryle might not be very supportive to the ideas behind the Ability theory. It is not at all certain that Ryle would agree that knowing what something was like consisted solely in the ability of imagining it. His assertion of the importance of the physical over the mental, would surely mean that he would support the view that actually having the experience of seeing what something was like took precedence over just being able to imagine it mentally. For Ryle, being in close physical proximity to the perceived object,

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[61] Ryle (1949) p.27.
[62] Ryle (1949) p.32.

would be the truest way of knowing what something was like. However, both the Ability theory and Ryle's theory have one further similarity, they both have an air of implausibility hanging over them. In getting rid of the "ghosts" of subjective experiential facts and the mind respectively, they seem to be getting rid of something of vital subjective importance. Possibly, it's the subjective character of experience, what something subjectively feels like when a person perceives something or carries out a physical action. With Ryle, physical behaviour or dispositions to behaviour are meant to replace subjective mental states. But even if we accept this, there still seems to be a discrepancy between this view and what entities we are aware of, existing in the world (in an ontological sense). There is physical behaviour, but there is also a subjective, conscious mentality. While the latter can certainly be seen as affecting the former, there is no way that physical behaviour exhausts the analysis of conscious mental states. Physical behaviour and mental states seem to be different elements of human experience, and it would be a mistake to conflate them. The Ability theory also contains an implausible conflation, but not of such a stark nature as with Ryle's theory. This time, the conflation does not involve physical and mental entities, but only mental entities; that is, subjective mental facts and subjective mental abilities. Once again, in an ontological sense, there seem to be both subjective experiential facts and subjective abilities in the world. If a person is experiencing a pain, then there is a subjective fact of what this pain feels like to that person. This is different to having the subjective ability to imagine or recognise the feeling of pain. In my opinion, it would be a mistake to conflate the two.

Conclusion

In his article "What is it like to be a bat?", it seems to me that Nagel had in mind several conceptions of the phrase "what it is like". H.O. Mounce labelled these different conceptions as a difference of kind and a difference of degrees. The difference of kind version of "what it is like" had Nagel wondering what it was like for the bat to be a bat. He came to the conclusion that it was impossible for us to gain this knowledge, as we had a totally different point of view, and so had none of the bat's subjective experiential facts to work with, only possessing our own, human, experiential facts. To put it another way, the subjective character of experience of the bat was too unlike the subjective character of experience of a human. However, and I think that this is Nagel's important point, even though we could not access the bat's subjective experiential facts, it did not mean that the bat was not having conscious experiences of its own. At this point, in my view, "what is it like to be a bat" was an epistemological problem for humans (although Nagel denied that he was referring to this particular problem). There were certain subjective facts which were out of reach of human investigation. The bat could be objectively analysed by science, but science would not discover the bat's experiential facts of what it was like to be a bat, as these were accessible only from the bat's subjective point of view. However, Nagel then introduced his difference of degrees version of the "what it is like" question. Here, Nagel mooted the idea that it might indeed be possible for a human to get a conception of "what it was like to be a bat" by the use of the imagination. From being an epistemological problem for humans, it now became a problem of imaginative conception for humans. The difference of kind version of "what it is like", which was deemed impossible, had changed to the difference of degrees version of "what it is like",

which was deemed difficult, but not impossible. However, we then saw that "what is it like to be a bat" was still a difference of kind, despite any imaginative efforts that could be made. This was because we still did not possess any of the subjective facts of the bat's experience, and so would not be able to determine how close/far away our imaginative efforts got us to the bat's conscious experiences.

However, with Nagel bringing in the imagination to the "what it is like" question, this resulted in a change of emphasis to the question. Nagel gave the impression that the "what it is like" question now involved the use of imaginative abilities. And I think that this provided the inspiration to Laurence Nemirow and David Lewis, which resulted in the creation of the Ability theory. Nemirow and Lewis were able to declare that knowing what something is like did not involve any subjective experiential facts, that escaped an objective physicalism, but only involved the gaining of abilities to imagine, remember, recognise etc., the experience. Unwittingly, Nagel had planted the seeds to undermine his thesis of subjective, perspectival, facts of experience, in the very paper that he had introduced the thesis, by bringing in the concept of imaginative abilities. However, all is not lost for Nagel. It was hopefully shown in the second part of this chapter that the Ability theory is a very dubious theory, to say the least. Ability theorists have a habit of diminishing the importance of the actual experience of such-and-such, while concentrating on the mental abilities gained due to the experience. It seems that during the experience, there is no "knowing what it is like" going on, only with the gaining of the imaginative abilities, does one start to "know what it is like". The Ability theorists version of "what it is like" seems to involve some introspection, whereas, Nagel's version

of "what it is like" does not (by introspection, I mean that one consciously makes an effort to examine one's inner thoughts/sensations). I am fairly certain that Nagel is referring to the immediate phenomenal consciousness of a being, what such-and-such is like to that being, as they are perceiving it, before any introspection has occurred. This led me to question whether Ability theorists were confusing "knowing" with "imagining". If one had actually experienced an event, then one could claim to know what that event was like. However, if one had not experienced the event, then one could still claim to *imaginatively* know what that event was like. But this would not be the same "know" as the one used previously, it would not be experientially known, only imaginatively known. Even if Ability theorists were to actually experience such-and-such, it still seems doubtful that it is the gaining of imaginative abilities that is the important point, and not the having of the actual experience, in knowing what such-and-such is like. It seems that in trying to get rid of Nagel's subjective facts of experience, the Ability theorists must always curtail or diminish what happens during the having of the actual experience. The Ability theory appears to be another questionable attempt to turn a conception of "knowing that" into one of "knowing how" (the first being Ryle's concept of the mind), which does not seem convincing, as something of subjective, experiential importance is being left out. It is still possible that this "something" of importance could well be Nagel's subjective facts of experience, which go to make up a creature's subjective character of experience.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW

What is the Subjective Point of View?

The idea of a subjective "point of view" is of extreme importance to Nagel and his thesis of consciousness. In Nagel's opinion, the conscious, phenomenal, experience of a creature is intimately connected to its subjective point of view. He declares that, "...every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view...",[63] and, "Whatever may be the status of facts about what it is like to be a human being, or a bat, or a Martian, these appear to be facts that embody a particular point of view".[64] However, what does Nagel mean by the expression "point of view", and what is the connection with subjectivity? Ordinarily, when one speaks of a subjective point of view, one is referring to a situation like the following, where someone may declare, "I think *The Matrix* is a better film than *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*". This statement is basically a subjective opinion, whose truth or falsity cannot be gauged by comparison with any objective facts in the world. It might be an objective fact that others agree with the person's opinion, but it still remains a subjective opinion or point of view. It seems certain that Nagel is not referring to this ordinary usage, when he talks of a subjective "point of view". I think that Nagel means that if a subject is capable of having conscious experiences, then, as a consequence of this fact, it has a subjective point of view on the world. Any creature or being which is capable of having conscious experiences is

[63] Nagel (1974) p.167.
[64] Nagel (1974) p.171.

classed as a subject. This is the difference between being a "subject" and being an "object" in the world. For example, a lump of rock would be classed as an object, as it is not alive and having any conscious experience, and this would stay the case for its entire existence as a "rock" in the world. It would not have any viewpoint on the world and would not realise that it was classed as an object in that world. In contrast, a person would be classed as a subject in the world. After coming into existence, a person would become a conscious, experiencing subject, with a point of view on the world. Like the rock, a person would be a physical object in the world, but unlike the rock, the person would also be a subject in the world. There would be something it was like to be a person (a subject), but nothing it was like to be a rock (an object). (It is an interesting point as to what the status of a person would be who died. The person would still be a physical object in the world, but would no longer be classed as a subject, as they were not having conscious experiences any more. Put harshly, the dead person could possibly be viewed as an object, like the rock, there being nothing it was like to be a dead person.[65] But of course this is not really the case. People who have died are treated with respect and dignity. While they may technically (in Nagel's sense), be only objects, they are remembered as the subjects they once were, when they were alive.[66] As for the rock, it is just remembered for being an object, although it might still be treated with respect and dignity, e.g., if it had religious significance, if it had been autographed by Bob Dylan, and so on).

[65] Wittgenstein writes that, "I am inclined to speak of a lifeless thing as lacking something. I see life definitely as a plus, as something added to a lifeless thing". Wittgenstein, *ZETTEL*, 128.
[66] This is emphasized by the way people differentiate between talking about the corpse and the "the dearly departed", etc.

So, for Nagel, a subjective point of view is something that every creature, which is capable of having conscious experiences, could be said to possess. However, some philosophers, such as Douglas Hofstadter,[67] have tried to argue that the point of view in question could be an artificial one (a physical representational system), for example, centred on a computer. Hofstadter then claims that if there is a connection between a point of view and a physical representational system, one could think of a bat's point of view, for example, as a complicated version of a physical representational system, and so objectify some of the subjectivity of the point of view of the bat[68] (its memories, its history etc.). However, I do not think that this is the sort of point of view which Nagel has in mind. The key elements of Nagel's point of view is that it is conscious and subjective, both of which are missing from Hofstadter's version of a point of view. A computer has no conception of being conscious or of being subjective (i.e., a subject of experiences). This means that there would be something it was like to occupy a conscious, subjective point of view, e.g., of a bat, a human, etc., but nothing it was like to occupy the "point of view" of the computer. Indeed, I think it is extremely doubtful that a physical representational system could be thought of as holding any sort of point of view at all. If one considers a system as holding a point of view, because, for example, it has memory facilities and holds a certain position in relation to incoming and outgoing data, this would mean that a television set could be said to have a "point of view", but this seems highly implausible. So, for Nagel, his concept of a point of view, essentially involves subjectivity and consciousness. Further to this, it is only from a creature's specific, subjective, point of view on the world that the subjective facts making up its

[67] Hofstadter, D.R. (1981) "Reflections on "What is it like to be a bat?"" *In:* Hofstadter, D.R. & Dennett, D.C., eds. *The Mind's I.* Brighton: The Harvester Press, pp. 403-14.

character of experience can be apprehended. This was the reason why Nagel brought in the example of the bat, to show that only from the bat's point of view could its subjective facts of experience be accessed, and not from, say, a human point of view (although Nagel suggested that this might be possible through the use of the imagination). Having said this, Nagel does not really elaborate on the concept of a point of view, so I will endeavour to build up a picture of what I take to be the subjective point of view of a human being.

First of all, I think that the point of view of the subject is an experiential or perceptual one. Nagel is concerned with the phenomenal or conscious experiences of creatures, not necessarily involving any introspection of thought. The phenomenal consciousness of a human consists in subjectively experiencing the world, with all the perceptions and sensations that this involves. The human subject perceives the objective world from his own subjective viewpoint,[69] and can never escape this perspectival view as long as he lives.[70] The reason why a human cannot escape his subjective point of view is because it is through his physical body, his sensory organs, that he receives his experiences of the

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[68] Hofstadter (1981) p.411.

[69] John Searle (1992) p.95, makes this point.

[70] Briefly, it is an interesting question as to whether one should be frightened of dying or not. There are those who believe that we should not be fearful, by looking at death from an "objective" point of view and just seeing it as "Nature's way" of working. However, I do not think that one's subjective point of view on death can be so easily replaced by an objective one. It is quite reasonable to suppose that death is a natural process, which one can objectively observe occurring all around one. If death only occurred objectively, then perhaps it might not be that frightening. However, death is a natural process which also occurs subjectively, that is, to one's self. One might not actually experience death as such, as one will already have stopped existing after dying, but this does not stop one fearing the process of death. This is the frightening part about death, it is only from one's own subjective point of view that one will directly experience the process of dying, knowing that death is the end result of this process. The experience of this process is not shareable, you are "on your own" so to speak. Therefore, I don't think it is irrational to fear one's subjective point of view coming to a permanent end, even if it is the result of an inevitable process of nature.

world, of which he is then conscious.[71] I do not believe that there is any other way of consciously experiencing the objective world, other than through the organs of sense. This is why I am suspicious of so-called Out Of Body Experiences (OOBE's), which claim that people are able to somehow leave their bodies and travel about as spirit-like entities. When a person is out of his body, how is he perceiving the world? Does the world appear as it did from the vantage point of his physical body, which he claims to have left behind. Or if it is different, what does the difference in perception amount to? It seems to me that in order for any part of the universe to be perceived in some way, there has to be an existent perceiver, who must have perceptual apparatus in order to carry out the perception. The perception then provides the conscious experiences that go to make up the subjective character of experience of the perceiver. The experiences of the objective world that a subject is conscious of, are always mediated by the sensory organs of that subject. It could be said that one's entire body is one's perceptual point of view on the world, as the skin which covers our bodies gives us the sensory qualities of touch and feel. However, I think that the main perceptual locus for a human is the head area, which houses the eyes, ears, nose and mouth (as well as the skin covering). It is from the sensory organs in the head area where humans get most of their phenomenal, conscious experience of the external world. Because of the mediation of the sense organs, it is not a direct experience of outer reality that a human receives, but

[71] For example, Searle states, "However, speaking in the most general terms, it seems clear that consciousness serves to organize a certain set of relationships between the organism and both its environment and its own states. And, again speaking in very general terms, the form of organisation might be described as "representation". By way of the sensory modalities, for example, the organism gets conscious information about the state of the world...we can say that in conscious perception the organism has representations caused by states of affairs in the world...". Searle (1992) p.107.

representations of that reality.[72] However, even though we are only acquainted with representations, this is basically reality for the human, as he cannot subjectively experience reality any other way, due to his contingent physiology[73] (by "contingent", I mean that the physiology could have been different, e.g., we might have had an extra sensory organ on the top of our heads).

The idea that all we get of reality are biologically manufactured representations is driven home in Oliver Sacks' book, *An Anthropologist on Mars*. In this book, Sacks looks at a number of people, who, through accident or disease, have had their perceptions of the world radically changed. After a car accident, a "Mr I", lost his ability of producing normal colour vision, and could only visually perceive the world in black and white. As can be imagined, this had a shocking effect on Mr I, especially as he was a painter, who relied on his visual perception of the world for his work. Part of his normal, subjective, perceptual, point of view on the world had been altered, and he had to battle to get used to the new point of view on reality that he possessed.[74] As it turns out, it was certain parts of Mr I's brain, the V4 areas, which were responsible for producing and processing

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[72] Bryan Magee makes this point, and also claims that there is a common confusion involving Empiricists, where, "The great...tradition of the past to which most professional philosophers in the English-speaking world still see themselves as most closely related is that of Empiricism. And I am afraid that for this reason they are still mis-taking our experience of reality for reality – in fact they frequently use 'experience' and 'the world' as interchangeable concepts...they mis-take epistemological entities for ontological ones". Magee/Milligan (1995) p.25.

[73] This is like Kant's "transcendental idealism", where all we are given are representations and not the things in themselves. Kant does not doubt that there are external objects, but that "If we treat outer objects as things in themselves, it is quite impossible to understand how we could arrive at a knowledge of their reality outside us, since we have to rely merely on the representation which is in us". Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A378.

[74] Concerning this, Sacks writes that, "Mr I., it was clear, could discriminate wavelengths, but he could not go on from this to translate the discriminated wavelengths into colour; he could not generate the cerebral or mental construct of colour...Mr I.'s primary visual cortex was essentially intact, and it was the secondary cortex (specifically the V4 areas, or their connections) that bore virtually the whole brunt of the damage". Sacks (1995) p.27.

our visual colour images, that were not working properly. So it can be seen that what we term as our visual reality of the external world, depends on certain neural processes going on in our brains (I take this to be the case, not just for sight, but for all our sensory modalities). Indeed, the importance of the brain in processing the input from our sense organs, so it is presented to us in the form it is, cannot be overstated. In his paper "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness",[75] Nagel looked at the results of certain split-brain experiments, and drew attention to the fact that our concept of a single subject of consciousness and mental operations may only be an illusion. One naturally thinks that there is one mind per brain, so to speak, but Nagel tells of how the two cerebral hemispheres each have the same perceptual, memory and control systems contained in them.[76] Each of the hemispheres could run the body without the assistance of the other; indeed, when the corpus callosum, which connects the hemispheres, is severed, it seemed as if there were now two brains where there was only one before. As can be imagined, this result certainly complicates one's outlook on the unity of consciousness of a human being. However, with regards to a human's subjective point of view, I don't really think that these split-brain experiments have much effect on the concept of it. Nagel talks of there being an "illusion" of conscious unity, but surely, this illusion is our subjective reality. With a normal brain, both cerebral hemispheres work together in tandem to produce the perceptual point of view that a human is used to. Now, there may very well be duplication of brain processes in the two hemispheres, but this only comes to the fore

[75] Nagel, T. (1971) "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness". *In:* Nagel, T. *Mortal Questions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 147-64.

[76] Perhaps this is evolution's idea of having a backup of the really vital, controlling parts of the human body. Possibly, earlier evolutionary models of the brain had all the functions together in one brain mass, but it proved more fruitful to separate and duplicate them for the long term survival of the human being. Then, after some time had elapsed, the two separate hemispheres might have started exchanging

when they are physically separated by surgery. When the hemispheres are still conjoined, it is essentially one brain doing the work; the perceptual point of view stays the same, even though there may be various exchanges of information between the two hemispheres. The perceptual point of view of a human is real enough, never mind how it is neurophysiologically produced. In Nagel's 1974 "bat" paper there is certainly no appearance/reality distinction in connection with consciousness and experience. One's conscious experience can only be apprehended from one's subjective point of view, and it is real for the subject, there is no appearance of conscious experience. Conscious experience is a subjective reality, for what would be the objective reality of one's conscious experience? If the brain was examined, one might see various neurons firing in the two cerebral hemispheres, but there would be no consciousness on view. The brain probably is responsible for our conscious experience, but it is only from the subjective point of view that it is experienced as it is. I take one's consciousness to be an ontological reality, that is, as something which does exist in the world, even though it can only be apprehended subjectively, and so cannot be said to have the usual "objective" stamp of reality.

Therefore, the subjective point of view of a human, is just that, a biologically processed point of view by a subject, of the outer reality that surrounds him.[77] Indeed, in relation to the conception that Nagel has of a subjective point of view, it could be said that it

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information, and so coalesced into "one brain", operating for the maximum benefit of the concerned organism.

[77] Schopenhauer, who also held a representationalist theory of what we perceive, wrote "It then becomes clear and certain to him [a man] that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth; that the world around him is there only as representation, in other words, only in reference to another thing, namely that which represents, and this is himself". Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1, 3.

necessarily requires that biology and physiology are involved in any such point of view. As a consequence of this, it seems to me that in order for outer reality to be perceived, this has to involve the perceiving apparatus of some creature, which in turn means that the only access to that reality will be mediate or indirect, through the representations that the sensory apparatus provides to the creature. But for the subject, these representations are reality, as this is the only way that the subject can access the external world. Because of this, it might as well be claimed that oranges really are orange and that tomatoes really are red. We can take our representations of reality as the way things really are, because there is no other subjective point of view on reality that we can take. It is only when one's perceiving apparatus undergoes a radical change, as occurred with Mr I, that one realises that the way the world looks to us depends on biological processes in ourselves. The "things-in-themselves" of the external world will never be immediately or directly perceivable by any subject, as the actual act of perception involves the biological, subjective, representation of that external world. Having said this, there is of course the theoretical, scientific, objective, point of view on reality, which does claim to view the world free from any subjective viewpoints (this objective point of view will be looked at in more detail in the next chapter). However, the point is that science claims to see reality as it "really" is, that is, free from subjective representations. Using Locke's terminology, the secondary qualities of external objects are relocated in the mind of the perceiver, while the primary qualities of the external objects are seen as being intrinsic to those objects. For example, with a red snooker-ball, the redness of the ball would be viewed as not really belonging to the ball, but belonging to the subjective representation of the ball. However, the round shape and mass of the snooker-ball would be viewed as

actually belonging to the ball. I suppose that this means that if there were no perceivers of reality, or perceivers with a different type of visual apparatus, the snooker-ball might not appear red anymore, but would still appear to have a round shape. While this view on reality does have its problems, it does show up an important point, that is, if there was no subjectivity in the universe, then there would be no conscious apprehension of the universe, there would just be unobserved, unexperienced, reality. This in turn, means that the conscious experience of the external world is always accessed from an individual, subjective, point of view. This is the connection between subjectivity, a point of view and consciousness that Nagel is claiming is so important. Every creature that has conscious experience (or phenomenal consciousness), has a subjective point of view with which it apprehends this experience.

Points of View and the Possibility of Epistemological Solipsism

However, this idea of an "individual" subjective point of view creates some problems for Nagel. It raises the philosophical issue of solipsism and the related issue of the so-called "privacy of experience".[78] There are strong and weak versions of solipsism. Someone holding the strong version believes that only their own mind exists, and that other peoples' minds do not exist, or are just illusory. However, this seems highly implausible, and outside of media and advertising circles, not many would subscribe to this view. By contrast, the weaker version is far more plausible, and problematic. This claims that one can know that one's own mind or consciousness exists, but cannot have that same certainty that others' minds and consciousnesses exist as well. All one can do is just

assume that others have minds and conscious experiences similar to one's own, due to physiological and behavioural similarities with oneself. It is this form of solipsism that Kathleen Wider (1990) accuses Nagel of advocating, due to his theory of subjective points of view and his use of the imagination in finding out about others' points of view. Wider argues that, "...he [Nagel] never directly confronts or attempts to overcome what I will call 'epistemological solipsism', i.e., the view that the only experience I can *know* exists is my own. Nagel simply assumes that others (including other non-human animals) have experience".[79] So, what is Nagel's strategy to escape the charge of epistemological solipsism? It is quite simple, he claims that:

> I am not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor. The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a *type*.[80]

By this, Nagel seems to mean that one member of a species can have some idea of the point of view of another member of the same species, due to their similar physiological make-up, producing similar subjective experiences. For example, if one human said that he was experiencing fear, then another human could claim that he understood this feeling of fear in the first human. This was because the two humans would have a point of view of the same type, and so have an understanding of the "human" feeling of fear. This example is based on a point made by Norman Malcolm (1988), where he states, in contrast to Wider, that "Nagel seems to have been persuaded by Wittgenstein that 'mental concepts do not refer to logically private objects of awareness' ...Nagel allows that this

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[78] I should acknowledge here that much of the discussion in this section, in relation to the idea of Nagel's use of the imagination leading to epistemic solipsism, has been influenced by Kathleen Wider's excellent 1990 paper, which is far more lucid than what follows.
[79] Wider (1990) pp.483/4.
[80] Nagel (1974) p.171.

fear does not belong to me alone; others may have the same fear; this fear that I have is not 'a logically private object'".[81] This result is possible because, as Nagel states, "someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription" is able "to adopt his point of view – to understand the ascription in the first person as well as in the third..."[82] This means that because one human has experienced fear in the first-person subjective, he is then able to understand the feeling of fear in another human, even though this is only in the third-person objective. One human is capable of adopting the point of view of another human, due to their physiological, and therefore also psychological, similarities. However, the more different a creature is, in physiological terms, then the greater the difficulty in understanding that creature's point of view. So, for example, a human would have much more difficulty in adopting the point of view of a creature that was physiologically much more different to a human, e.g., a bat. By this method of defining the point of view as a type, rather than an individual point of view, Nagel makes the attempt to escape the charges of epistemological solipsism and the privacy of experience. But, is he successful? There is a forceful objection to Nagel's idea that the type of point of view is differentiated by physiological means, which is mentioned by Wider (1990) and also J. Biro (1993). What Nagel is arguing for is that physiologically similar sensory organs produce a similar type of experience for the creatures which possess those sensory organs. Whereas, a creature with a physiologically different set of sense organs will have a different type of experience again, due to the physiological differences. Now, this all seems quite sensible, and a good way to separate the types of points of view that different species will have. However, there is a problem for Nagel, which both Wider and Biro

[81] Malcolm (1988) p.149.
[82] Nagel (1974) p.172.

seize on. Nagel has been arguing against psychophysical reduction in explaining conscious experience, so one would not expect physiological differences to make any difference to the experience that a creature is said to have. On this point, Wider argues that:

> Even given the abundant evidence that most humans have similar neuro-physiological processes occurring within them when, for instance, they see, it would not follow given Nagel's view of the relation between the physical and the mental that similar kinds of phenomenological features attach to everyone's seeing. Nagel has always argued against psychophysical reductionism...[83]

On the same issue, Biro declares that:

> If we can individuate experience types only in terms of physiological differences, we have already embraced a kind of physicalism, indeed, one might think, something perilously close to a reduction...If qualia really were nomological danglers, one would not expect a creature's physiology to imply anything about its experiences.[84]

By referring to qualia as "nomological danglers", I think Biro means that qualia, or the qualitative character of experiences, are viewed [supposedly by Nagel] as properties that fall outside of the nomological net of physical science, they are something that scientific laws cannot explain. So, it can be seen that Wider and Biro are using Nagel's supposed antireductionism against him, when he tries to differentiate types of experiences by different physiologies. They are arguing that if Nagel claims that conscious experience cannot be reduced to the physical, then he cannot legitimately use the physical to differentiate conscious experiences. On the face of it, this is a good argument, but, does it accurately describe Nagel's position on psychophysical reductionism? In his 1974 "bat" paper, one could argue that Nagel was not against psychophysical reductionism *per*

[83] Wider (1990) p.490.

se, but only that the reductionism that had been put forward so far, did not give a reasonable account of conscious experience. Nagel points out that reductionist analyses of the mental at that time usually involved functional, intentional or behavioural characterizations, which, in his opinion, did not directly address the subjective character of conscious experience.[85] So, Nagel is not saying that there never will be an adequate psychophysical reduction, but only that the psychophysical reductions that had been made, were, to him at least, inadequate to explain conscious experience. It could be said that Nagel was still of the opinion that conscious experience probably did have a physical basis, but that it was not apparent how this would be discovered.[86] Our position on physical events causing mental events, could, Nagel argues, be similar to a person who locks a caterpillar in a safe, and opens it later to find a butterfly inside. If that person had no conception of insect metamorphosis, then he would be at a loss to explain what had exactly occurred inside the safe. However, as he was quite sure that only the caterpillar had been in the safe, he would have to come to the conclusion that it had played a part in the production of the butterfly, but he would not understand the process involved.[87] So it might be argued that Nagel could still hold a position against the psychophysical reductionism of the time, but still believe that conscious experience did ultimately rely on physical causes. And so, this would mean that he was still entitled to claim that it was probable that different physiologies would result in different experiences, and use this for the basis of his theory of different types of points of view. So, using his types of points of view, Nagel can claim that, for example, two humans (sharing the same type of

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[84] Biro (1993) p.185.
[85] Nagel (1974) pp.166/7.
[86] Alter (1999) makes a similar point on pp.6/7.
[87] Nagel (1974) p.177.

viewpoint), were capable of adopting the point of view of each other, and so have an understanding of each other's experiences. This would enable Nagel to escape the charges of epistemological solipsism and the privacy of experience that were levelled at him.

However, there is a further problem for him, and, as Wider has stated, it concerns the way that one would take up the point of view of someone else. For one person to adopt the point of view of another person, Nagel once again turns to the imagination to carry out the task. As we saw in Chapter 1, he was depending on the imagination in trying to take up the point of view of a bat. That is, he was suggesting that a human could use his imaginative abilities to try to get a conception of what it was like to be a bat. However, it was seen that the success of this strategy was extremely doubtful. A human could certainly use his imagination to come up with whatever point of view that he imagined, but how would one know how far or close this imaginative viewpoint was to the bat's actual viewpoint? Part of Nagel's argument was that only the bat itself had the correct subjective point of view on being a bat, so a human would face great difficulties in attempting to imagine the point of view of a bat, as he had a completely different point of view. So, a human did not have access to the bat's subjective conscious experiences, in order to gauge the success or otherwise of his imagined "bat" point of view. Now, the question is, will Nagel have more success with one human imaginatively taking up the point of view of another human? After all, Nagel could claim that a human and a bat have radically different types of point of view, and so the task for the one to imagine the other's viewpoint was always going to be difficult. With two humans, both having the

same type of point of view, surely it would be that much easier for the imagination. For example, say that someone is drinking a pint of Guinness. Now, if another person wanted to imagine the point of view of that first person drinking the Guinness (i.e., what it was like for the person to drink the Guinness, the "gustatory experience"), what would this involve? If he was also drinking a pint of Guinness at the same time, it seems fairly straightforward. He takes a sip of his Guinness, taking note of the qualitative character of this experience (what it feels like in his mouth, going down his throat, and the strange sensation he then has in his stomach). Having done this, he then watches the other person take a sip of his Guinness, and then brings to mind the sensations that he felt during his Guinness-experience, and imaginatively tries to transfer them to the other person, to try to be the other person having those sensations. Now, it could be that the result of this is that one person quite accurately takes up the point of view of the other person who is drinking the Guinness. After all, they are both humans, they have the same physiologies, the Guinness was taken from the same tap, etc. In effect, there does seem to be a rational warrant for assuming that the imagined point of view taken up by one person is similar to the actual point of view of the other person. But, in reality, how can we confirm this? The person doing the imagining is remembering his own individual point of view, and then imaginatively transferring this to the other person. At no time does he directly know what the other person's subjective point of view is actually like.[88] Of course, as humans do have a conception of language to describe and compare the actual and imagined experiences, they may very well agree that their Guinness-experiences were similar. However, they will still only have subjectively experienced their own feelings and

[88] The difficulty of trying to imagine another's sensations is also discussed by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, 302.

sensations, and will have come to a warranted and rational assumption about their shared experiences; but they will still not know for certain that their Guinness-experiences were actually similar. It seems that the point of view of a bat and another human are both ultimately inaccessible to an imaginative effort to adopt their respective viewpoints.

In his "bat" paper, Nagel addresses the problem of solipsism and his use of the imagination, by claiming that solipsism will result:

> if one misinterprets sympathetic imagination as if it worked like perceptual imagination: it then seems impossible to imagine any experience that is not one's own.[89]

To understand what Nagel is getting at, one has to remember the distinction he made between perceptual and sympathetic imagination. To imagine such-and-such perceptually, involves putting oneself in a conscious state resembling the state one would be in if perceiving such-and-such. While to imagine such-and-such sympathetically, involves putting oneself in a conscious state resembling such-and-such itself. An example would be the following. To perceptually imagine a person in pain, would involve putting oneself in a conscious state resembling the state one would be in if perceiving a person in pain. In contrast, to sympathetically imagine a person in pain, would involve putting oneself in a conscious state resembling what it was like to be the person in pain. With perceptual imagination, the view is an objective, third-person kind, while sympathetic imagination involves a subjective, first-person view. So, what does Nagel mean by talking of mistaking sympathetic for perceptual imagination? Perhaps he means that one tries to imagine what it was like to have the subjective point of view of

[89] Nagel (1974) p.n176.

another person (sympathetic), but one only ends up imagining the objective view of that person (perceptual); that is, there appears to be no way that one can imaginatively gain subjective access to the person's point of view. Therefore, it would appear to one that the only subjective, first-person access one could imaginatively achieve, was with one's own thoughts and experiences. I am not sure if I have understood this correctly, however, it seems to me that this does not really help Nagel overcome the charge of solipsism. Whether the type of imagination involved is perceptual or sympathetic, and whether they are mixed up or not, it is still one's own subjective imagination that one is utilising. One can certainly sympathetically imagine another's subjective viewpoint, what experiences and sensations another person is feeling. But this is only one's own subjective imagination doing this, at no time is one actually feeling what the other person is experiencing. One only has subjective, first-person access to one's own experience, which one then tries to imaginatively project or transfer in to the other person. Therefore, when one talks of having the "same experience" as another person, one is just assuming, quite rationally, that one's own subjective experience is similar to another person's subjective experience. For example, if you saw someone sit on a drawing pin that had mysteriously found its way onto their chair, you would be entitled to exclaim "Blimey, that's painful isn't it, the same thing happened to me last week", or words to that effect. In this instance you would be quite entitled to think that you and the other person had had similar experiences. However, you would not actually know how the other person felt, you would just recall your own subjective experience of sitting on a pin, and transfer it to the other person. But, in ordinary, everyday life, you would still be quite justified in claiming that you and the other person had the "same experience", or that you "know"

how the other person felt; as you and the other person have similar physiologies, the pin entered the same parts of your bodies, your behaviour after the event was similar, etc. However, in the final analysis, this would only be a rational assumption of similar experiences, as you are only directly aware of your own subjective experiences. Now it could be that this is all that Nagel is claiming, after all, he does say that it is because one knows what an experience is like in the first-person, that one is able to apply it in the third-person, that is, to someone else.[90] Nagel could claim that the result of this is that one can understand or know the quality of another person's experience. However, there is still no certainty in this, one does not really know, in the subjective sense, what another person's experience is like. So, even though Nagel tries to claim that the point of view he is talking about is a type, there is still the inescapable subjectivity of the "individual" point of view involved. And along with the subjectivity of the individual point of view, there are also the twin consequences of epistemological solipsism and privacy of experience. So it seems that Wider was quite correct when she charged Nagel with these consequences, as a result of his ideas on points of view and the role of the imagination.

Subjectivism and Solipsism[91]

However, I think that any theory which proclaims an irreducible, subjective, aspect of mind and consciousness, would face accusations of promoting solipsism. Subjective theories of this sort are basically claiming that there is a subjective reality, which does exist, but is not objectively observable. A consequence of this is that this subjective

[90] Nagel (1974) p.172.

[91] I should make it clear that the following section only contains my own views on solipsism and subjectivity, and not those of Nagel himself. Indeed, I don't think that Nagel would agree with my solipsistic conclusions.

reality can only be apprehended from the point of view of the person whose subjective reality it is. This of course means that each person is directly or intrinsically aware of their subjective reality, but are unable to have the same sort of access to another person's subjective reality. This means that one knows directly of the existence of one's own subjective reality, but does not know in the same way of the existence of others' subjective realities. This results in a certain element of one's subjective experiences being private and to a situation of solipsism. Of course, if one is able to objectify or eliminate the subjective aspect of mind and consciousness, then the problem of solipsism does not arise. For example, if one takes a behaviourist stance, then there is no problem of other minds. A person's "mind" is viewed as nothing over and above a person's overt behaviour or dispositions to behave. There is no subjective aspect to the mind, everything is objectively observable and checkable, and solipsism is not a problem. Again, if one takes a functionalist stance to the mind, the problem of solipsism is also avoided. Functionalism concentrates on mental states and the causal relations these mental states have with each other, in producing specific outputs from specific inputs to the mind. Whereas behaviourism eliminated the subjective aspect of the mind, functionalism just basically ignores the subjective aspect of experiences and sensations, as these are viewed as having no functional purpose. Therefore, no subjective aspect of mind, no danger of solipsism. Philosophical theories of mind and consciousness seem to go out of their way to avoid solipsism and privacy of experience. The view seems to be that if a theory entails some sort of solipsism then it is untenable and a non-starter as a theory of mind.

In finding epistemic solipsism a result of Nagel's ideas on consciousness, Wider is of the opinion that this result "...needs both acknowledgement and defense"[92] from Nagel. She also quotes Anthony Kenny as finding "...an odd solipsistic strain"[93] in the work of Nagel. However, is the idea of solipsism really that strange? Of course, I am not advocating a metaphysical solipsism, that is, trying to claim that only my mind exists in the world. I have no doubt that every other living human in the world also has his/her own respective mind. It is an epistemic solipsism that I think is in existence in the case of humans, that is, each individual can only know that their own mind/consciousness exists in the direct, first-person manner, due to the subjective viewpoint that they occupy. Now, is it really that odd to claim that one is aware of one's own thoughts and experiences in a way that is not available or accessible to anyone else? It seems to me that this is an inevitable outcome of the situation that we find ourselves in. Human beings are physical creatures, individuated into separate bodies, and by some processes, probably occurring in the brain, find that each of them are also subjects of conscious thought and experience. Of course, I don't know that other humans are in this position, as I have access only to my own conscious thought and experience. The subjectivity of my situation will only allow *me* to have this unique, first-person access to my thoughts, while I just assume that others each have their own unique, first-person access to their thoughts, due to physiological and behavioural similarities to myself. This is the classic asymmetry involved between finding out about one's own mind in the first-person and finding out about another's mind in the third-person. I think that conscious creatures are

[92] Wider (1990) p.483.
[93] Wider (1990) p.482.

like little "packets"[94] of subjectivity, moving in, and observing, the objective world. Each little "packet" has its own point of view on the world, which is only available to itself.

To explain what I mean by this, consider the following example. There are a hundred people sitting in a cinema, all watching the same film on the big screen. They are all engrossed in the film, laughing at the same time, gasping in unison at the exciting bits, etc. However, despite this communal and inter-subjective correspondence between their reactions, their perceptual experiences are still only apprehended in the subjective first-person mode. Any corresponding thoughts that they may have concerning those perceptual experiences are also first-personal and subjective in character. Because many of the hundred people laugh and gasp at the same time, there may well be public conceptions involved, of what counts as humorous and exciting situations respectively. But, each person only has direct access to his/her own perceptions and thoughts in the first-person. Consider just one person in the audience. That person has his own subjective perceptual experiences, they feel like something to him as he is apprehending them. The feelings of humour or excitement that these perceptions lead to are also experienced subjectively, even though the conceptions of "humour" and "excitement" have public meanings that everyone can understand and apply to everyone else. Indeed, these public conceptions of "humour" and "excitement" may possibly mould or refine the subjective experiences themselves, but it still seems to me that there is an ineliminable subjective element to the experiences. Now, I realise that this is not quite what Wittgenstein thought, as he was of the opinion that it was the public conceptions

[94] Colin McGinn (1993) p.169, talks of little pockets or packets of consciousness.

themselves that completely made our experiences what they were. Or, to put it another way, the direction of the process was from the third- to the first-person, and not the other way around. However, even if one accepts this, it still seems to me that there is a subjective, first-person element in the picture. One person in the audience, will laugh or be excited along with everyone else, but only he will know what his experiences directly feel like in the first-person. By saying this, I do not mean that only that one person will know what it is like to be "happy" or "excited", the conceptions themselves have a public meaning, but only that person will know what the experiences subjectively feel like to himself. When he looks around, and sees everyone else laughing or gasping as he is, he does not know what their subjective experiences are like, he can only observe their objective behaviour of either laughing or gasping. It is from the observation of this objective behaviour, which is similar to his own, that he makes the quite plausible and rational assumption that their subjective experiences are similar to his.

In the ordinary and everyday situation, these rational assumptions about other peoples' subjective experiences will be made quite naturally, so that we may not even realise that they are just assumptions; to us, we just do "know" what everyone else is actually feeling. However, I think that this attitude is due to the habit of human nature, which of course, none of us can get away from (this might be similar to Hume's theory on habit and the association of ideas, in relation to causality). Now, in response to this, it might be argued that as assumptions may be false, if there is no way of telling whether the above assumptions are false, why talk about assumptions in the first place? This is a good point. In reply to this, I can only say that assumptions can also be true, but if there

is no way of finding out that the above assumptions are true, then we can't *know* that something is actually the case, so we just have to assume or believe that we know. Therefore, it seems to me at least, that it is possible that a person's subjective experiences are private and first-personally available only to that particular person. It must also be said that this situation is only a contingent one, as it could well have been different. For example, humans could have evolved with an extra, telepathic sense, which enabled each of us to access another person's thoughts and experiences as if they were our own. This would mean that there would be no more problems in adopting another's subjective point of view, as this could be achieved as easily as accessing one's own point of view (I don't know how this process would actually work, but let's just pretend that it is the case!). Now, in a situation like this, it would make no sense to claim that there was epistemological solipsism, as it was possible for everyone to access everyone else's thoughts and experiences in the first-person subjective manner. To claim solipsism and privacy of experience in a situation like this, would indeed be "odd", and need a defence of some sort. However, we are not in a situation like that. Each human has his/her own subjective point of view, from which they apprehend their own thoughts and experiences in a specific and unique manner. We do not possess a telepathic sense to access others' thoughts in the first-person, only third-person, objective access being available. In a situation like this, does it really seem that "odd", or to need a defence, to claim that there is epistemological solipsism and that an element of one's subjective experience is actually private? It just seems a necessary consequence of the contingent situation in which human beings find themselves in. Indeed, it leads me to think that if any theory of mind or consciousness is to have any resemblance to the reality of the situation, there has

to be an element of some sort of epistemological solipsism contained in it. If it does not, then it cannot claim to be a complete theory, as the essential subjective, private, aspect of mind and consciousness has been omitted. Therefore, while I agree with Wider that Nagel's thesis leads to epistemic solipsism, I think that this result is a plus for Nagel, as it shows he is taking a realistic stance towards the subjective aspect of mind/consciousness (although, of course, Nagel himself would probably not agree with me!).

Criticisms against the view I am advocating usually have a Wittgensteinian colouring to them, such as Phillips (1995).[95] The strategy seems to be to try to break the so-called "privileged access" that a subject is said to have to his own experience. For example, questions can be asked as to whether "I" is a referring term. When someone says, "I am in pain", who exactly is that person referring to? Maybe his body? Or his mind/consciousness? Or maybe a combination of both? In relation to this, I think that "I" certainly is a referring term. When one uses "I" with a psychological predicate, one is referring to the particular subjective mind/consciousness of a particular objective body. It seems to me that the phenomenon of consciousness is probably dependent on neuronal interactions in the brain and central nervous system of a human, even though it is not known how this process actually works. This means that one can talk of a connection between mind and body, even though one may not understand it. For example, I can stand in front of a mirror, and observe the reflection of the body called MD. This body is objective and available for public scrutiny (for a small fee). Now, I do not think that it is asking too much, for me to have the opinion that it is my objective brain inside my

[95] My discussion of Wittgenstein in this section and the next is influenced by Marie McGinn (1997) and discussions with my supervisor.

objective body which is responsible for producing my subjective mind/consciousness. It is this consciousness which enables me to look in the mirror and identify the body with which my subjective consciousness appears to have a connection. When I look in the mirror, I only see one objective body, not a multitude of bodies, but only one. Of course, if I saw many different bodies when I looked in the mirror, then the question could arise as to which body is mine. But I only see one body, and I think it is a safe bet that this is the body with which my subjective consciousness has its connection. Of course, I cannot give a spatial location of my subjective consciousness, but the important point is that wherever this phenomenon actually is located, it does appear to have some sort of connection with the neurobiological activity inside my brain. Therefore, when I say "I am in pain", the "I" could be said to refer to my objective body and my subjective mind/consciousness at the same time. There seems to be an intrinsic connection between my objective and subjective reality. Now, at this point, it could be claimed that I am fairly certain which body is mine. However, a further question could be asked, namely, how do I know which consciousness is mine? In Phillips (1995) there is the following passage:

> Consciousness cannot tell me who I am. As J.R. Jones says, ['My' consciousness can 'pick itself out' in the required manner, that is, purely introspectively, only if it is supposed that I inwardly see a number of *different* consciousnesses. And this supposition is senseless].[96]

In the above passage, I think that Jones is quite correct in his judgement of supposing to introspectively pick out different consciousnesses. Introspection of one's experiences is sometimes seen as analogous to observing or perceiving an external object. It will be seen that in the latter case, there is a clear distinction between the act of observation and

the object which is observed. However, with introspection, there is no distinction between the act of observation and the thing observed, or between the perception and the perceived.[97] The reason for this is that one is attempting to subjectively perceive what only exists in a subjective mode, or to put it another way, one is trying to use one's subjective consciousness to observe that very same subjective consciousness. With introspection, it seems that all one can observe are the "contents" of one's subjective consciousness, and not the consciousness itself.[98] It is somewhat similar to the fact that the view from a periscope cannot include a view of that same periscope in its own field of view,[99] or of Wittgenstein's example of how the eye itself is not included in the field of vision that it has. Therefore, in relation to Jones' example above, one would need one's consciousness to be able to "pick out" one's own consciousness in the first place. Having said this, it is interesting to note that in the above examples, both the periscope and the eye could appear in their respective fields of view, if a mirror is placed in front of them. They would then see themselves in the reflection from the mirror. However, this is not the case for consciousness. If I look in the mirror, I will not observe my own consciousness, but only my objective body which I believe is responsible for my consciousness.[100] The reason for this is that my consciousness is intrinsically subjective in its existence, it can only be apprehended from my subjective point of view. This leads me to think that just through the fact that I am apprehending a certain conscious experience, then I am quite entitled to claim that this is "my" consciousness. It will be

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[96] Philips (1995) p.239.
[97] This point is made by Searle (1992) p.97.
[98] This is perhaps why Hume was only able to observe "bundles" of perceptions when he carried out an introspection of his mind.
[99] This example is from Gunderson (1970) p.300.

seen that I have used the words "I" and "My" quite liberally in the preceding sentences concerning which is "My" consciousness. There appears to be no way round this. Just as there is no distinction in the subjective realm between perceiving and perceived, there seems to be no distinction between ownership and apprehension of that same subjective realm. Therefore, to misquote Descartes, it might be a case of "I think, therefore this is my consciousness".

However, even if the above discussion is not seen as convincing in arguing against the criticisms of epistemic solipsism and privileged access, it seems to me that these arguments are all attacking the concept of first-person conscious experience at a level which is above the level of the actual experience. What I mean by this can be illustrated by the distinction made between the phenomenal and psychological in Chalmers (1996). With this distinction, the conception of the phenomenal is seen as primitive, as something which is felt in a "raw" kind of way. However, the conception of the psychological is seen as causal in nature, it is in effect a judgement made by the subject on his phenomenal consciousness.[101] An example of psychological consciousness, would be the exclamation "I have a pain in my shoulder", made by the subject. Chalmers puts great importance on this distinction between the phenomenal and psychological, claiming that the former is the "hard" problem of consciousness. If one accepts this distinction, it can be seen that most of the Wittgensteinian attacks on the concept of privileged access refer to the psychological concept of consciousness. The phenomenal consciousness of a

[100] Despite this, perhaps this is why we talk of "reflecting" on our own thoughts, giving the impression that we are actually considering our thoughts in an objective manner, using our consciousness to examine the thoughts as if they were objectively reflected in front of us.
[101] Chalmers (1996) pp.11/12.

subject is indeed private and privileged, even if the psychological judgement on that consciousness then enters into the objective and public world. To illustrate this, imagine that I have a pain in my right foot. At the primitive, phenomenal level, it is feeling like something to me to experience this pain. Only I know that at this particular moment in time I am having this subjective experience, it is private as only I have the direct, privileged access to the sensation. I am not introspecting the sensation, I am just experiencing it, and it is feeling like something to me as I am experiencing it (even though I cannot describe it). However, if I then make a psychological judgement on my phenomenal experience, and make a statement of the type "I am now experiencing a pain in my right foot", this brings "me" and my "pain" into the objective world. It is at this point, that awkward questions can be asked, such as "Who are you referring to when you say 'I'?", or "What are you referring to with the term 'pain'?", etc. It can be seen that Wittgenstein's arguments are attacking the psychological conception of experience, when the subject of the experience is using psychological terms to describe his experience of pain. However, the actual phenomenal experience of the pain itself, is at a different, more primitive level than the psychological, and so is, at least I think, impervious to Wittgenstein's arguments against privileged access.

I think that this distinction can also be applied to Wittgenstein's private-language argument and his beetle-in-the-box analogy. With the latter, this is usually understood as showing the difficulties involved in believing that each person has a private "something", which also has a public name. The analogy shows how it is not possible for all the private somethings to actually give any meaning to the public name for the somethings,

there appears to be an unbridgeable gap between the private and public worlds. There does seem to be a similarity between Wittgenstein's beetle-in-the-box analogy and what Chalmers calls the "paradox of phenomenal judgement".[102] In the former, the private "something" is seen as irrelevant to the meaning attached to the public name of the something; while in the latter, the judgements about consciousness can be psychologically analysed separately from the consciousness itself, which has the result that the consciousness is explanatorily irrelevant to the judgements about that consciousness.[103] Taking all this into account, it can be seen as very tempting to just decide that there is no inner, private, "something", which accompanies the public, psychological conception of our perceptions and sensations. However, I am of the opinion that we are indeed in a similar situation with regards to perceptions/sensations as is outlined in the beetle-in-the-box analogy. We have no idea what each other's "pain" actually feels like, even though we have the public label of "pain" which refers to our individual, private, phenomenal experience of "pain". I would say that I don't think that Wittgenstein's analogy does translate exactly to the reality of the situation of human sensations, i.e., while the analogy seems logically sound, I am not so sure whether it is empirically sound. For example, if we have ten people, each claiming that they have a pain in the back, it is quite possible that some of those people will be lying, that is, they are not experiencing any phenomenal sensation of "pain". I suppose that this would be the equivalent of the empty matchbox in the beetle analogy. However, I do not think it makes sense to then claim that for the others, their inner "pains" could also be either something or nothing, and so decide that the inner something then drops out of the

[102] Chalmers (1996) p.177.
[103] Chalmers (1996) p.177.

picture. It seems to me quite realistic to take the view that most people, when they say they have a pain, are indeed experiencing some sensation at the private, phenomenal level of consciousness. The question is then how this private, phenomenal experience comes to play the role it does in the public, psychological conception of "pain". I have no really convincing answer to this question. I can only think that if a group of people are each privately experiencing certain phenomenal sensations, for which there is no public label, then it is only through a method of intersubjective agreement on discussions of their private sensations and any corresponding behaviour, that they eventually produce an objective, public conception and label for all these private sensations, even though they do not know what each other's sensations actually feel like in the first-person (I continue the discussion of these points later).

I believe that this is the case with subjective experiences of a more physical nature. For example, I happen to have a large cluster of floaters which appear in front of my left eye, forming a rather irregular, blackish shape. Now, these floaters are a subjective, experiential fact for me, the shape they form can only be apprehended from my particular point of view. Of course, the concept of "floaters" is not a logically private object for me, other people can also have "floaters" in front of their eyes. However, the point is this, before I knew the public-label for my floaters, I was still experiencing them. The experience of seeing that blackish shape in front of my left eye did not come into existence only when I found out the objective identification of what that blackish shape was. It seems as if there is a logical privacy of experience for my floaters and I, even though the concept of "floaters" is not a logically private object. Of course, the case of

floaters is importantly different to that of sensations, in that it is possible for the former to be analysed in an objective manner, which the latter cannot be. This is because the subjective experience of floaters is actually produced by cells or other debris which are contained in the vitreous humour of the eye, and which I suppose are capable of being observed by some suitable ophthalmic device. However, I think that this situation is still analogous to subjective experiences in general, that is, sensations, perceptions, thoughts, etc. There would still be the subjective experiences even though they might not have objective ascriptions, they would still feel like something to the person who was having them. For example, imagine a prehistoric caveman witnessing a solar eclipse, and the feelings that he might have had as a consequence of this event. Now, it is quite possible that the objective ascriptions of "fear" or "wonderment" for what he was experiencing may not have been in existence then, but that does not mean he was not having experiences similar to those that we would later give the public-names of "fear" and "wonderment" to. Of course, Wittgenstein does not deny that we have inner, subjective, experiences, but he thinks that these inner experiences are also affected by the outer environment that surrounds us, which includes public language and behaviour. Now, I think that Wittgenstein may be right about this. The natural, instinctive, feelings that we subjectively experience may well be moulded or refined by the way we learn about these feelings, and how we publicly discuss and apply the concepts in question.[104] So, it could well be that the caveman's subjective feeling of "fear" would not quite be the same as a modern-day human's feeling of "fear", with the modern human's subjective feeling of fear possibly being more focussed and definite than the caveman's feeling of fear (by

[104] In connection with this point, Nagel himself states that "They [mental concepts] are not pure first-person concepts: To try to detach their first-person application from the third-person results in philosophical

focussed and definite, perhaps I mean that the modern human would know and understand that his feeling was one of "fear" to a greater extent than the caveman, due to the former's more complex and structured environment, e.g., well established teaching and language concepts). However, I still think that even though there might not be a well defined language-structure in the environment of the caveman, we would still be able to recognize that he was experiencing a feeling of "fear", even if this primal "fear" might be much more fuzzier and less well refined than the modern version is. The caveman would still have a subjective experience that was private to him, it would feel like something to the caveman. Perhaps what I am trying to say is that I think that experiential knowledge is antecedent to propositional knowledge, and necessarily so.[105] If there were not the subjective sensations of pain, then there could not be the objective concept of pain, as it would have nothing to refer to. Now, it might be argued that the concept of pain might refer to one's behaviour alone. However, it seems to me that one's pain-behaviour would in turn also be dependent on the subjective sensations that one felt. If this was not the case, then what would be the reason for one's pain-behaviour in the first place? After all, I don't think that Wittgenstein is denying that we have sensations, or that we can introspect these sensations. It is the conclusions that we come to after our introspection of a sensation, that he is attacking. He might quite happily allow that one introspect a sensation to find the qualitative character of that sensation, that is, what it felt like to oneself. Therefore, I am not denying that the public concepts we form of our subjective experiences might well mould or refine those experiences in some way, but I think that there is still an ineliminable subjective element to our experiences, to which we only have

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illusions...". Nagel (1998) p.341.

access in the first-person. I am also not denying that in the ordinary, everyday world, people would still believe that they did "know" what everyone else was feeling.

However, I am not going to get bogged down with the philosophy of Wittgenstein, as this is a deep and confusing area of thought (at least it is for me). The idea that epistemic solipsism might necessarily be involved in an explanation of the subjective aspect of human consciousness was just an idea that I thought was quite reasonable, considering the situation that we find ourselves in. I am sure that Nagel does not believe this for one moment, and this is a dissertation about his ideas on philosophy after all. Nagel was of the opinion that his subjective points of view were types and not tokens, and so the situation of epistemic solipsism would not be reached, as each human could understand or know what another human was experiencing. Indeed, as I hope to show in the next section, Nagel's conception of the "what it is like" of subjective, phenomenal consciousness, seems to escape any conflict with the philosophy of Wittgenstein.

Nagel's "What it is like" and Wittgenstein

The arguments of Wittgenstein which are normally used against Nagel's views on consciousness are the private-language argument and the beetle-in-the-box analogy (from the *Philosophical Investigations*), both of which deal with the topic of privacy of experience/sensation, and how this relates to our public use of sensation words. The reason for my belief that Nagel's "what it is like" generally avoids these arguments of

[105] This point is made by Magee, in Magee/Milligan (1995) p.31. Nagel makes a similar point in claiming that thought is antecedent to language. Nagel (1997) p.38.

Wittgenstein, [106] is that the latter's treatment of the topic of privacy of experience seems to revolve around what results or conclusions can be gained from introspecting one's own sensations and perceptions. For example, Wittgenstein's private-language argument involves the introspection of one's sensations, followed by an inner ostensive definition of a sensation as being, for example, a "pain". There then follows the problem of being able to check whether one is using the definition of "pain" in a correct manner, without being able to publicly verify this point. It turns out that one cannot verify this private use of a definition for a sensation, and so it is not possible to have a legitimate private language for one's own sensations. Wittgenstein's point here is that the proper use of a language requires that certain rules are adhered to. The above argument is meant to show that one does not have the same justification for labelling an inner sensation as one does for labelling an external object. For example, if one calls an external object a "bucket", then this designation of the object can be verified by considering whether it resembles the common description of a bucket. By this method, one should be able to decide what is a bucket and what is not. Therefore, if a person suddenly started calling his grandmother a "bucket", one could quickly conclude that he is incorrect with his designation, as his grandmother would not bear a resemblance to the common description of a bucket. However, when one introspects a sensation, and then tries to treat it as an internal, private object, by designating it a name, there is no way of verifying if one is using this inner-name correctly, as there is nothing independent of the sensation by which to check correct usage. With the beetle-in-the-box analogy, Wittgenstein imagines that everyone

[106] Among the philosophers who think otherwise are L. Nemirow (1980) on p.476; K. Wider (1990) on p.494; and Marie McGinn (1997) on p.119. Of course, Wider thinks that Nagel's views conflict with Wittgenstein's arguments because she is of the opinion that his views lead to epistemic solipsism and privacy of experience.

has a box, and that each individual person knows what is in their own respective box, but does not know what anybody else's box contains. Each person then calls the something in their box a "beetle", then he/she claims that they know what a beetle is, only by referring to the something that they have personally labelled a "beetle" in their box. The result of this would be that each person could have something completely different in their respective box, which they had called a "beetle". There might not be anything at all in some boxes. Wittgenstein's aim was to show that in a situation like this, the word "beetle" would have lost any public meaning it had in referring to a particular something, and that a person would not really know what the something in his box was . This was analogous to a person introspecting and naming a privately experienced sensation as if it was an object, which would result in the name one gave to the sensation losing its meaning, and the object (sensation) not really being identified by the person. This would mean that one could not have privately-named sensations that were only known to the person having them. It also showed the problem that these privately-named sensations would have in connecting to the public-name that was in use for the sensations.

Therefore, it can be seen that with both the private-language argument and the beetle-in-the-box analogy, introspection and naming of one's experiences plays a major role. However, with regards to Nagel and his "what it is like", I am fairly certain that this conception does not involve any introspection and inner naming. Nagel is concerned with the conscious, phenomenal, experience of a human, that is, what it subjectively feels like to be a human, living a life. It will involve perceptions, sensations, and thoughts. There would be no conscious "inner" examining of one's perceptions and sensations,

they would just be experienced as they occurred, and would feel like something to the subject concerned. In saying this, I think that there is a distinction between experiencing a sensation and introspecting the experience of a sensation. For example, when one experiences the sensation of a pain, there is no effort to designate the sensation as a private object, by introspecting the sensation, and trying to "understand" or "define" the sensation, by this inner examination. One just has the sensation and apprehends its qualitative character. This is the same idea as the distinction that was made between phenomenal and psychological concepts in the previous section. The actual experience of having a perception/sensation is at the primitive, phenomenal level; it is a "raw feel" which has a certain qualitative character. However, when the experienced sensation is introspected and given an inner name, or if the person concerned declares "I have a pain", then this is at the psychological level, which can be analysed causally. As I stated earlier, I think it is at the psychological level that Wittgenstein's arguments start to operate on our experiences, while the phenomenal level of our experiences is "below" the psychological, and remain untouched by the arguments. The phenomenal consciousness of a creature is experienced subjectively, but at the psychological level, the creature's experiences are brought into the objective world, so to speak, with the ascriptions and descriptions that we give to them. It is at the phenomenal level of conscious experience that Nagel's idea of "what it is like" operates. After all, it is not just humans which Nagel believes have conscious experience, but other creatures as well, such as bats, which do not appear to have a structure of language or concept-formation comparable to humans. Nagel is not expecting the bat to be introspecting its experience of what the bat sonar feels like, the bat is just living its life, but it feels like something to the bat, while it is

living this life. Indeed, I think this shows up an important point. The point is that subjective, phenomenal experience will be present in conscious creatures, irrespective of whether they have linguistic or concept-forming capabilities.[107] Now, it so happens that humans have phenomenal consciousness and well developed linguistic/concept-forming capabilities, but having the latter does not mean that there is suddenly doubt about whether we have the former. If all the linguistic and conceptual capabilities disappeared from the human world overnight, is it really plausible to think that humans would no longer experience various subjective sensations and feelings in the first-person? I do not think it would. In the same way as the bat, it feels like something to be a human at a particular moment in time. For example, at the moment the computer looks a certain way to me, the sensation of sitting on a chair is feeling like something to me, etc. At no point am I inwardly examining these perceptions and sensations, I am just experiencing them as they are occurring. Indeed, this sort of phenomenal consciousness is mentioned by Wittgenstein in *PI* 275, where he talks of looking at the blue of the sky in a spontaneous manner without any feeling of "pointing-into-yourself, which often accompanies 'naming the sensation' when one is thinking about 'private language'". Wittgenstein is of the opinion that this mood occurs when one has no philosophical intentions, and this seems a good way of putting it. Nagel's "what it is like" just involves how the conscious experiences of a subject feels or appears to that subject, as that subject goes about living his/her life in an unphilosophical manner.

[107] Nagel makes a similar claim in connection with the contents of thought and language. Nagel (1997) pp. 38,53. Even though Nagel is here referring to thought-contents, I think that it is a similar case with one's phenomenal consciousness and language.

There have been other Wittgenstein-influenced critiques of Nagel's position, for example, from Norman Malcolm (with D. Armstrong)(1984) and Patricia Hanna (1990). The method followed by the Wittgensteinians is usually to examine the language used to describe the topic in question, to show how this use differs from ordinary usage, and then try to show that a confusion is involved with the meanings of the words that someone is using to discuss their topic.[108] For example, Malcolm questions what Nagel means by the phrases "what it is like" and "subjective character of experience". There is an ordinary usage of "what it is like", where (to use Malcolm's example), one could ask a lorry driver what it was like to be a lorry driver.[109] This would involve the lorry driver talking about what his job involved, how he felt about his job, etc. With regards to the "subjective character of experience", Malcolm asks what experiences are involved?, can we put this subjective character into words?, do I know what my own subjective character is like?, etc. Now, these are all worthwhile questions, especially if Nagel is using phrases in unusual ways. However, I also get the feeling that Malcolm is trying to bring everything back to the terms of language, to what can be expressed in propositions. He asks whether we can give a description of the subjective character of our seeing or hearing, and comes to the conclusion that we cannot.[110] For Malcolm, the result is that "these questions show that I don't know what I am talking about...Not only cannot I display the 'subjective character' of seeing or hearing to others; I cannot even display it to myself".[111] But Nagel is talking about conscious experience, "what it is like" to be a bat, just is the conscious experience that a bat has as it goes about its daily life. Similarly, the

[108] Wittgenstein gives an indication of the method to be used in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.53.
[109] Armstrong/Malcolm (1984) p.46.
[110] Armstrong/Malcolm (1984) p.48.
[111] Armstrong/Malcolm (1984) p.49.

"subjective character of experience" of a person, just is what that subject phenomenally experiences while he/she lives his/her conscious life, e.g. all perceptions, sensations, thoughts etc., that are apprehended from his/her own point of view. To put one's conscious experiences into words is extremely difficult, maybe impossible, but this does not mean that a subject's conscious experiences do not have a particular qualitative character to the subject concerned. Again, Malcolm wonders whether some sort of introspection of one's perceptions is involved, to get at the inner "content" of one's experiences.[112] But I am of the opinion that no introspection is involved with Nagel's idea of a subject's conscious experience, it is just how it perceptually and sensationally feels to the subject, as he lives his life as a conscious creature. For example, the subjective character of hearing a whistle being blown, just is what that sounds like to the subject concerned, with no philosophical intentions involved. Contra Malcolm, there is no introspecting of the subject's perception of the whistle, and an inward exclamation of the type "It is *this*" in reference to it. This phenomenal experience is hard to put into words, so hard in fact, that if one was following Wittgenstein's line that "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world",[113] one would be tempted to say that there was no such thing. However, I think that this outlook unfairly constrains my world to what can be described in words. The limit of one's world should be what one is capable of experiencing. By this, I mean that just because such-and-such cannot be adequately described through language (and so understood?), it does not mean that it is not part of my world. After all, the aroma of coffee is difficult to describe in words, but no-one doubts that it is part of the human world (not even Wittgenstein himself). Similarly,

[112] Armstrong/Malcolm (1984) p.49.
[113] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.6.

phenomenal consciousness is difficult to describe in words, but I am of the opinion that it is an integral part of the human world. Indeed, a human would necessarily require his subjective phenomenal consciousness in order to perceive the aroma of coffee in the first place.

With Hanna's discussion-article, "Must Thinking Bats Be Conscious?",[114] we get a similar Wittgensteinian attack on Nagel's position. This time the target is a private, accessible-to-me-only consciousness (which she calls p-consciousness). Hanna is of the opinion that the existence of a p-consciousness would lead one to solipsism, as one would not be able to say whether other people also had their own p-consciousnesses, and comes to the conclusion that this is an "untenable thesis".[115] Her reasons for thinking that the concept of a p-consciousness is untenable appears to be that it leads to a dilemma. On the one hand, for the claim to be made that consciousness is essential to thought, it needs a conception of consciousness that can apply to oneself and others, however, "...to give such an account is to abandon the claim that something *private* is required for thought".[116] The only other option is to stick with the claim that thought does have a private feature, which would mean that no general theory of thinking would be able to be constructed which applied to oneself and others, which would result in solipsism.[117]

However, as I have argued earlier, some may find epistemological solipsism untenable, but to me it just seems the natural outcome of the human condition. One does have a

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[114] Hanna, P. (1990) "Must Thinking Bats Be Conscious?" *Philosophical Investigations* 13 (4), pp. 350-56.
[115] Hanna (1990) p.354.
[116] Hanna (1990) p.350.

subjective, first-person access to one's own perceptions, sensations and thoughts, which is not available to other people. Others can only have a mediated, objective, third-person access to my sensations, etc., through behaviour, language, etc. I assume that this situation is the same for each human being, though of course I cannot prove this; this is due to the asymmetry which is inherent to the situation. Therefore, it seems to me that despite there being a private, first-person access to my consciousness, it does not stop me having a conception of each person having their own private, first person access to their own consciousness. The public conception of thinking/consciousness would, in my opinion, come about through intersubjective discussion and agreement on each person's own subjective experiences; probably utilising the objective, psychological statements that people made concerning their own phenomenal perceptions/sensations, and any consequent behaviour that was involved. So, contra to Hanna, I think that one can keep the conception of a private "something" that is related to thought for oneself, and still be able to have an idea that this situation is applicable to other people. However, Hanna comes to the conclusion that we do not have to accept p-consciousness and solipsism, as "we can give a public account of consciousness".[118] This "public account" turns out to be peoples' behaviour, which is seen as evidence of consciousness. She then ties this behaviour in with Wittgenstein's views on natural expressions of behaviour, claiming that consciousness is similar to pain, in that if "pain" is separated from its associated pain-behaviour, then it is not "pain" anymore.

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[117] Hanna (1990) p.350.
[118] Hanna (1990) p.351.

Now, it is tempting just to label this position as behaviourist, and go on to claim that we are no longer talking about Nagel's concept of consciousness, or indeed any form of consciousness, we are simply talking about behaviour. However, Wittgenstein's views on this topic (which Hanna is basically repeating) are not quite as straight-forward as they first seem. The first, and perhaps most important point to mention is that Wittgenstein's position is not strictly behaviourist. A behaviourist, such as Ryle, would claim that a person's so-called inner goings-on are shown completely in their overt behaviour; there is no accompanying inner processes to the outer behaviour. So, for example, a behaviourist would claim that a description of a person in pain just involves their outward wincing, crying, etc., and not any inner mental states that are said to accompany the outward behaviour. The behaviourist position is plainly an objective, third-person analysis, with no analysis of the subjective aspect being made. In contrast to this, Wittgenstein does not deny that we subjectively experience sensations, such as pains. From *PI* 304, when discussing the sensation of pain, he famously declares that "It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!". From what I can understand, Wittgenstein's view seems to be that even though there may be a subjective sensation which accompanies, for example, a cry of pain; when we ordinarily observe the cry of pain, it is a mistake to conceive of there being an inner something in addition to the cry of pain. Due to the language-game which we are used to using, when we see someone crying in pain, the idea of the pain-sensation is intimately wrapped up in our understanding of the pain-behaviour. Wittgenstein illustrates this point in *PI* 297, where he compares the case of a real pot, containing boiling water, with steam coming from it, with the case of a picture of a pot with steam coming from it. Wittgenstein believes that it would be a mistake, a confusion of

language games, to believe that the pictured pot must have something going on inside of it, to produce the steam. It is just what it is, a picture of a boiling pot, which is taken as such by an observer. Similarly, with a person crying in pain, it would be a confusion to think of an inner something that is separate from the cry of pain. Due to the language game which we are used to, when we see the pain-behaviour, our understanding of this concept encompasses the pain and behaviour together. Just as we see "a boiling pot", so we see "a person in pain". From this, it can be seen that it could be claimed that if pain is not accompanied by the requisite pain-behaviour, then, according to the language-game that is in use, the "pain" is not "pain" as we usually understand it. I think that Wittgenstein does have a valid point on this issue. It could be said that he is attempting to take a middle-path between outright behaviourism and claims that only private mental processes are involved in sensations, consciousness, etc. With one's conscious experiences of, say, pain, there is an inner something that one is aware of, but this inner something is shaped by the outer, public, concept that is utilised in our language game. So for Wittgenstein, a description of a person's pain would involve inner and outer aspects combining together to form the concept of pain that we are used to (although Wittgenstein would probably claim that we could not properly refer to the inner aspect, as we can to the outer aspect). Therefore, while a behaviourist takes a strictly objective view of mental states, Wittgenstein allows that there is a subjective element to the concept of mental states, although it is the objective element that is important in shaping these concepts.

However, it still has to be said that there is no logical connection between consciousness and behaviour, even though humans may have formed a linguistic/grammatical connection through habit and human nature (perhaps something akin to Hume's ideas of association through constant conjunction and human habit). This basically means that one could still be having conscious experiences but displaying no observable behaviour.[119] For example, one could be in pain, but still not exhibit any behaviour which is normally associated with pain. Now, a Wittgensteinian could still claim that this "pain" would not be "pain" as we understand it through our language-game (due to the lack of pain-behaviour). However, I think that the important point is that one would still be experiencing a subjective, private, something, even if one could not refer to it as definitely as one can to an external object. This subjective sensation might need to have an objective, third-person identification to refine it (to objectify it for meaningful public use in the world), but it does not alter the fact that I am experiencing the sensation in the subjective, first-person. I take consciousness to be similar to this; third-person ascriptions of "evidence" of consciousness (i.e., behaviour), do not account for the consciousness itself. It seems to me that Wittgenstein did not lose sight of the existence of the subjective element in relation to sensations and consciousness, but that later Wittgensteinians seem intent on concentrating only on the more definite objective elements. This example of Hanna's seems to point to a thread that is present in the strategy of Wittgensteinians on dealing with various philosophical problems. If an aspect of a philosophical problem is proving difficult, or even impossible to solve, simply alter the aspect until it takes a different, but solvable form, and, amazingly, the problem will

[119] John Searle states that, "...as far as the ontology of consciousness is concerned, behavior is simply irrelevant. We could have identical behavior in two different systems, one of which is conscious and the

have vanished. With the present example, it can be seen that the idea of a private, subjective consciousness is problematic, so Hanna simply alters this troublesome aspect of consciousness to an aspect that concerns behaviour. By this alteration, it can be seen that the problem of consciousness is no more, as one's behaviour is objective and capable of being publicly verified. Perhaps I am just being mischievous and tongue in cheek with the above suggestion, or am I?

Qualitatively Different Subjective Viewpoints of the Same Type

Therefore, it appears that each living person has their own, individual, perceptual/ experiential, point of view on the world, which they keep until they die. Nagel talked of humans as having the same type of point of view, however, this does not mean that every human has the same qualitative point of view, or that these individual viewpoints are unchangeable. The subjective point of view which I have been discussing is a perceptual/experiential one, so, if there is a change in one's sensory organs, there will be a corresponding change in one's point of view. A person who has all his sense organs working normally will have a different point of view, from, for example, someone who is congenitally blind or deaf. Further to this, if someone loses their sight or their hearing, then their subjective point of view on the world can be said to have changed. Earlier in this chapter, it was seen that with two perceptually similar humans, it was not possible to imaginatively know what each other's perceptions and sensations were actually like. Of course, one could still imaginatively take up the other person's point of view, and just assume that it was probably similar to one's own, so some approximation of another's experience could be said to be possible. After all, it would be very difficult to go about

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other totally unconscious". Searle (1992) p.71.

one's life, surrounded by other people, without assuming that everyone else had similar experiences to one's self. However, what about the situation concerning others who have radically different perceptual points of view to oneself, people who are blind or deaf, or both. Would it be possible to even get a useful or approximate idea of what their points of view are like?

This problem, and others are discussed in *Sight Unseen*, a book by Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan. The book consists of a series of letters that are exchanged between Magee and Milligan, the latter of whom has been blind since shortly after birth. They try to understand each other's viewpoint on the world, and generally discuss problems of knowledge, and how this concept differs for each of them, due to their different sensory abilities. Magee makes the claim that the position of an unsighted person to a sighted person, may be similar to the position that a human with all his sensory faculties might find himself, if compared to someone who had extra-sensory capabilities, as well as the ordinary ones.[120] In a sense, humans would appreciate that they were limited in how they apprehended reality, limited by the sense organs which they possessed to access that reality. On this latter point I agree with Magee. One's subjective point of view on reality is limited to the sensory capabilities that one possesses. For example, our eyes are only receptive to certain wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum, while our ears can only detect sound within certain upper and lower limits. These biological limits control how much of the external world one can naturally access, although detectors can be built to artificially access the naturally unreachable parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, e.g., ultraviolet, x-rays, etc. If some humans suddenly started developing a new sense organ,

in addition to their ordinary ones, then it could be claimed that this situation would be similar to that of unsighted and sighted people. However, we seem to be dealing with one situation which is really existing, and another situation which is only hypothetical. In reality, humans maximally have five sensory modalities (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste), and these are integral in the description and definition of a human being. Now, a person who lacks one or more of these sense modalities, knows that it is a fact that other people do possess these lacking sense modalities, and would know that their point of view on reality was more restricted than other peoples'. Having said this, I think that to hold this latter view, one's subjective point of view would have to change after one had experienced the sensory modality for some time, before losing it. For example, if one lost their sight after many years of possessing this modality, then one would certainly appreciate how one's access to the external world had been reduced. Whereas, if one was congenitally blind, perhaps one would not have the appreciation that one's access to reality was curtailed. Put another way, if one's subjective point of view is radically decreased from what one is used to, then one will notice this, because, in effect, one will then have a new, changed, subjective point of view on the world. However, if one is a congenitally blind person, one's subjective point of view will not have changed at all, it is the same point of view that one has always had, so one might not appreciate the lacking of a sensory ability in such a dramatic manner. By this, I mean that one will not have had the experience of what the lacking sense can provide, and so cannot immediately recognize how one's current point of view on reality is curtailed. For example, Milligan states that "What I am immediately inclined to say is that my experience furnishes me

[120] Magee/Milligan (1995) pp.xiii/xiv.

daily with a great deal of evidence that others can do things which I can't". [121] Now, this shows that Milligan, who has basically had no experience of seeing in his life, cannot identify exactly what he is lacking in his viewpoint on the world. All he can deduce is that other people can do things which he cannot, which then leads him to conjecture that they have some sensory access on the world which he does not possess.

However, notwithstanding this point, the position of an unsighted person to a sighted person is one of existing reality. In contrast, the comparison of a human with all his senses to one that has an extra sense, is not reality, and I do wonder whether if it was reality, it would be the same position as that of unsighted to sighted. Magee mentions that other creatures have sense abilities that humans do not have, e.g., the bat and its sonar, but that humans do not consider themselves as handicapped by lacking this sense modality.[122] Now, could it not be claimed that the reason for this is that a human would consider a bat as a different creature to himself, and so having different capabilities from a human. Part of the identification of human beings would be the normal sense modalities that humans possess. However, if humans started being born with, say, an extra sense organ on the tops of their heads, for receiving infrared wavelengths, would average humans consider themselves as handicapped in comparison? It could be argued that the average human would consider these "extra-sensory" humans as different creatures to himself, like the case of the bat, and so consider that the new sense modality was not "extra", but "different" to his own modalities. This situation would be in contrast to that of an unsighted human and a sighted human. The former would not

[121] Magee/Milligan (1995) p.9.
[122] Magee/Milligan (1995) p.19.

consider the latter as a different creature to himself, due to the sighted human's capacity for visual perception. The capacity of sight is one of the normal sense modalities that are possessed by humans, so in the case of an unsighted and sighted person, I believe that the sighted person would be viewed as having an "extra" modality, one which the unsighted person lacked. It could be said that the subjective point of view of a human goes towards the identity of that human. If something is added to (but not subtracted from) that subjective point of view, then it stops being a subjective point of view of a human, and becomes the point of view of something else. So it is a possibility that humans would not feel handicapped if faced with "extra-sensory" humans, they might just feel that these "new" humans had a "different" point of view on the world. In consequence, it is not clear-cut that Magee's initial claim of similarity in the situations between humans/extra-sensory humans and the unsighted/sighted is correct.

Magee and Milligan then go on to discuss whether a congenitally blind person can understand or have any concept of what "seeing" is like. Milligan is of the opinion that blind people can have some conception of what seeing is like for sighted people, and that the meanings of some visual-terms can be the same for blind and sighted people. For example, he claims that the word "see" means roughly the same for unsighted and sighted people, i.e., as "having a kind of awareness of things dependent on the functioning of the eyes..."[123] However, Milligan comes to the conclusion that there is something in the conception of seeing and the use of visual-terms that sighted people are aware of, and that blind people can never be aware of. Magee agrees with Milligan on this point, and goes further. He claims that blind people can only ever be acquainted with conceptual or

propositional knowledge about the visual world; while the realm of direct visual experience or perception, will always be inaccessible to blind people.[124] An example of what Magee is referring to could be the following. Consider someone asking "Do you know what the Eiffel Tower is like?" A blind person would be able to have access to propositional knowledge about the Eiffel Tower, that is, knowledge that can be put into propositions or sentences. For example, a tour-guide could be vocally informing tourists about details concerning the Eiffel Tower, or the blind-person may have a braille-version of a travel brochure (also, the blind person could use the other sense modalities that he did possess, such as touch, where he could touch and feel various parts of the tower). Similarly, a sighted person could also have propositional knowledge about the tower, by also listening to the tour-guide or reading the travel brochure. However, what the sighted person could also have, is direct visual perception or experience of what the Eiffel Tower is like, just by looking at it. It is this knowledge of visual experience that Magee believes blind people will never be able to have. Magee also thinks that this difference means that the conception of seeing and the use of visual-terms will always have different meanings for sighted and unsighted people. For sighted people the concepts and terms will always have a visual experiential content to them, which will be lacking with unsighted people. I tend to agree with Magee on this, a sighted person's subjective point of view will be different to that of an unsighted person, leading to a difference in their respective characters of experience (in Nagel's terms).

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[123] Magee/Milligan (1995) p.13.
[124] Magee/Milligan (1995) pp.30/1.

To finish this section, I will consider whether it is possible for a sighted person to adopt the point of view of an unsighted person, or vice versa. Not surprisingly, considering the conclusions that were reached earlier, I do not think that this is possible. It seems to me that we are individual, subjective, points of view, which each human can never escape from. To know what another person with the same type of point of view is experiencing, involves making an assumption based on one's own experience. The probability is that one's own subjective character of experience will be similar to another's subjective character of experience, as the same viewpoint type is involved, but one will not be able to know for certain (i.e., to access the subjective first-person experience of the other person). Therefore, with the experiences of a sighted and an unsighted person, this adoption of respective points of view seems a non-starter, as the same viewpoint types, have in addition, perceptual differences between them. The subjective characters of experience of the sighted and unsighted persons will be radically different, so it seems that even to make an assumption of the other's experience is not feasible. Now, this might well be doubted. For instance, it could be claimed that all one has to do is close one's eyes to adopt the point of view of a congenitally blind person. Indeed, this might seem easier than a sighted person trying to adopt the point of view of another sighted person, as visually perceiving the external world could involve many types of variations on what is visually apprehended, e.g., there might be differences in the intensity and/or clarity of various colours perceived by different people. However, with a blind person, surely one cannot get variations on visually apprehending nothingness, maybe variations of blackness at the most. The situation is, however, not that simple. There might well be a great difference between closing one's eyes after a lifetime of visual experience, and

with what is apprehended by a person who has never had any visual experience. Also, Oliver Sacks notes that in congenitally deaf people, parts of the brain that are normally used for hearing are reallocated for visual use, and so could not congenitally blind people have parts of their visual cortex reallocated for auditory use?[125] If this is the case, then it means that a sighted person's auditory capabilities might be different to an unsighted person's auditory capabilities. For example, a blind person might have the capability of forming auditory "images" of sounds to compensate for the lack of vision. Blind people might know the world through "pictures" supplied by their enhanced hearing, which are impossible to replicate in a sighted person. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult for a sighted person to even assume to have the point of view of a blind person.

Interestingly, Nagel considers a similar question in his "bat" paper, although this concerns a person who is both blind and deaf, and he comes to the conclusion that the blind/deaf person's point of view is inaccessible to a sighted/hearing person, or vice versa.[126] Having said this, Nagel still believes that the sighted/hearing person and the unsighted/deaf person each have a subjective character of experience, though these are radically different. He also states that intermodal analogies of the type, "red is like the sound of a trumpet"[127] will not avail in bridging the gap between these different points of view of, say, unsighted and sighted persons. In contrast to this position, Janet Levin (1986) believes that an intermodal analogy of the type "red = sound of a trumpet" is of use to a blind person, "as long as he is told what pink and orange and green are like as

[125] Sacks (1995) pp.132/3.
[126] Nagel (1974) p.170.
[127] Nagel (1974) p.179.

well".[128] Levin's reasons behind this conclusion are that "all sorts of experiences can provide the conceptual wherewithal for understanding what it is for experiences to be similar and different from one another along various dimensions – what it is for them to differ in intensity, compatibility, and cause and effect".[129] However, I do not think that Levin is correct on this point. It seems to me that to understand how one experience is similar or different from another, one has to know what the other experience is like. The analogy of "red = sound of a trumpet" and, say, "pink = sound of a piccolo flute" might seem quite reasonable to someone who can see and hear, as they can appreciate the analogy between colours and sounds. But to a blind person, all they have to work with are the sounds, they do not have any conception of how these sounds analogically relate to visual perceptions of colour. Therefore, they cannot compare the sound with the supposed analogical colour, and so appreciate the similarity or difference between the experiences. Once again, it seems that one cannot escape from the individual subjective point of view that one has, while living a life in the world. During one's life, that perceptual point of view might change, so changing how one experiences reality, but it is still one's own subjective point of view, despite the changes which might occur to it. The link between subjectivity and a point of view seems essential, and unbreakable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Nagel's concept of a subjective point of view has been examined. It was seen that this concept was of central importance to Nagel, as he believed that it was only from a creature's own subjective point of view that it could apprehend its own conscious

[128] Levin (1986) p.486.
[129] Levin (1986) p.486.

experience. This apprehension of the subjective facts of the creature's conscious experience then went towards building up the creature's subjective character of experience, or what it was like for the creature to live its life. I think it is fair to say that if a creature is conscious and experiencing the world, then Nagel would consider that creature to have a subjective point of view on the world. As Nagel did not elaborate on the details of a creature's subjective point of view, I took the liberty of setting forth what I thought that concept involved, specifically for a human. It seemed sensible to conclude that the point of view in question was a perceptual/experiential one, which involved the "input" from a human's sense organs of the external world, and what this was like to the human concerned. This would include what such-and-such looked like, sounded like, tasted like, smelt like and felt like to the person. It seemed that the point of view in question was an individual or token one, with each human being having their own point of view. However, if this was the case, then there was the real possibility of there being the problematic consequences of epistemological solipsism and privacy of experience with Nagel's position, as pointed out by Kathleen Wider. However, it seems that Nagel was aware of the danger of this, which resulted in his declaring that the points of view he had in mind were "types" and not "individual" ones. In this way, Nagel hoped to avoid the charge of solipsism being made against him. But, as we saw, it seems that the "type" of subjective point of view, was unable to escape the "individual" subjective point of view. One could not get away from one's own subjective point of view, to take up another's subjective point of view, even though the beings concerned were physiologically similar. So it did seem as though Nagel's theses of points of view and the use of the imagination had the consequences of epistemic solipsism and privacy of

experience. However, I am of the opinion that any theory of the mind/consciousness that dealt with subjectivity in a realistic manner (i.e., that did not try to explain the subjectivity away or just ignore it), would probably have a solipsistic element contained in it. Therefore, I personally take the view that the consequences of Nagel's theses on consciousness are not to be seen as being untenable, worrying, to be avoided, etc. It seems to me the logical outcome of the reality of the situation with which we, as individuated beings, are faced; and an indicator that Nagel is taking the subjective aspect of consciousness seriously. Nevertheless, I must stress that this was just my opinion, and that Nagel would probably not agree that his concept of subjective points of view would naturally lead to epistemic solipsism.

Despite this, it seemed as though Nagel's "what it is like" of phenomenal consciousness did not conflict with the arguments of Wittgenstein. These arguments mostly revolved around the introspection and inner designation of sensations as if they were outer objects, which Wittgenstein proved was a faulty way of thinking. However, with Nagel's "what it is like", there does not appear to be any introspection of one's sensations and perceptions, one just experiences the sensations and perceptions as they occur, with no philosophical intentions involved. It could be said that Nagel's conception of "what it is like" took place at the phenomenal level of experience, whilst Wittgenstein's arguments only came into force at the psychological level of experience. If this distinction was accepted, it seemed as though Nagel's phenomenal consciousness was at a primitive, subjective level, which passed under the difficulties posed by Wittgenstein's philosophy. In the final section of the chapter, the question was raised of whether humans, who had the same

viewpoint type, but had qualitatively different individual points of view could adopt each others' viewpoints. The answer reached was negative, it seemed as if one could not escape the individual, subjective point of view that one possessed, to apprehend another person's point of view. This has been a recurring theme of the chapter, it is the importance and intrinsicality of the link between subjectivity and a point of view, a connection which Nagel believes is so important, if we are to achieve a full explanation of consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW

What is the Objective Point of View?

In attempting to answer the above question, it will be useful to compare the properties that an objective point of view has with those that a subjective point of view was seen to possess in the previous chapter. Nagel's conception of the intimate relationship between subjectivity and a point of view basically meant that the point of view in question was intrinsically connected to the subject that possessed that point of view. That is, it was a subjective perspective that could only be apprehended by the conscious, experiencing creature who held that perspective. In contrast to this, an objective point of view is one which should be available to various subjective points of view, and not just a particular one. In this case, there is no intrinsic connection between the point of view and a subject. Even though the objective point of view could be adopted by many subjects, it does not specifically belong to any one subject, but is equally available to all of them.[130] To illustrate this, consider several people each giving blood, one after the other. Later, one of these people exclaims "Blimey, I didn't realise that giving blood was so painful!". Now, this claim would involve a subjective element, in that it would be connected with the particular viewpoint of an individual. Of course, having made that statement, the fact that the person experienced pain whilst giving blood could now be claimed to be an objective fact of the world, as he did indeed experience the pain that he referred to with his exclamation. However, it is still essentially subjective, as it was only from that

person's subjective point of view that the pain concerned could be experienced, not from any other point of view (this might be slightly tautological, but I am trying to emphasize the intrinsic nature of the relationship between an experience and a subject). Now, contrast this with the claim that each of the people who gave blood, gave exactly one pint each. This would involve an objective viewpoint, in that it was not intrinsically connected to a specific individual's viewpoint, but was a fact that could be checked from various points of view.

Indeed, the description of the objective point of view that I have given, is almost identical to the normal, everyday meaning of the expression "objective point of view". However, while Nagel might not disagree with the above description, it is fair to say that the objective point of view he has in mind is more scientifically oriented, particularly to the objectivity of the physical sciences, i.e., physics, biology, chemistry.[131] In relation to this, Nagel has also put forward his conception of how the process or development of physical objectivity takes place. He has done this on a number of different occasions, and the following description is a sort of amalgamation of these different versions.[132] The starting point is an individual or particular point of view, which in my case would be my point of view, which I shall call MD. My point of view would involve all the perceptions, sensations and conscious mental states in general, that make up my subjective consciousness. I think that Nagel would say that this is my "subjective self", in that I am directly aware of the reality of my subjectivity, and also which specific

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[130] Nagel (1974) pp.172/3.
[131] Nagel (1986) pp.7/8, Nagel (1994) p.220.
[132] These versions are contained in Nagel (1979a) p.206, Nagel (1986) p.14, Nagel (1994) p.220, Nagel 1997) pp.81,82.

physical body that subjectivity is connected with. From this individual viewpoint, the move towards greater objectivity is achieved by abstracting away from the viewpoint concerned, and indeed away from a specifically human viewpoint altogether. This movement away from a general human viewpoint, means that the human perception of the world, i.e., what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, etc., is left behind. This movement away from the species-specific viewpoint of humans is made possible by realising that there is a mind-independent reality which need not be the same as the perceptual appearance of that reality which is available to humans. In this way, greater objectivity is arrived at by moving away from the human appearances of reality, to a view which does not include any species-specific appearances at all.[133] This is the objective point of view of physical science, it is a view of reality that is not contained anywhere in that reality, it tries to view reality as it really is, not as it appears to any perceptual apparatus. This is what Nagel calls "the view from nowhere". This view will include everything that the universe contains, including our world, with all the humans and other creatures that it contains, indeed, it will also contain a human called MD. But this objective viewpoint is of a centreless world, the viewpoint is not from MD's perspective, it is not from any perspective. MD is just another human among millions of others, all of whom have viewpoints, but that are all contained in the objective point of view of physical science, which has no definitive centre to it.[134] Nagel's conception of the

[133] This process is also described by E. Schrodinger, who states that, "By this [objectivation] I mean the thing that is also frequently called the 'hypothesis of the real world' around us. I maintain that it amounts to a certain simplification which we adopt in order to master the infinitely intricate problem of nature. Without being aware of it and without being rigorously systematic about it, we exclude the Subject of Cognizance from the domain of nature that we endeavour to understand. We step with our own person back into the part of an onlooker who does not belong to the world, which by this very procedure becomes an objective world". Schrodinger (1979) p.127.

[134] This "view from nowhere" is similar to the Total Perspective Vortex, which is mentioned in the late Douglas Adams' *The Hitch-Hikers Guide To The Galaxy*. This fiendish device works by showing some

development of physical objectivity could be viewed as a series of concentric circles, with the further out circles containing a more objective view than the inner circles. Indeed, the outer circles would contain everything that was in the inner circles, but the contents of the inner circles would now be viewed as appearances to the outer circles, the latter of which would be viewed by science as having a more accurate viewpoint of physical reality.[135] I think that science would call the viewpoint of the outer circle "more accurate" because it would, at least at that moment, not contain any "appearances" of reality, it's viewpoint would be the nearest approximation to "how things really were", not from anyone's specific point of view, but from the objective point of view. Of course, this might change in the future, with the present outermost circle being included in a "new" outer circle of objectivity, which would mean that the "old" outer circle would now be considered to contain "appearances" of reality, and so not be the most "accurate" viewpoint of reality anymore. This process of increasing objectification could well be continuous, and possibly have no end-point.

In relation to Nagel's conception of objectivity, Biro (1993) has questioned whether Nagel has made a correct analysis of the objectivity that science strives for. Biro suspects that Nagel thinks that science aims for objectivity by describing the world in a language

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poor soul the entire view of all reality (it is has something to do with a fairy cake), which contains a little arrow labelled "You are here", to mark out the location of the individual concerned. This is usually enough to drive most people completely insane, though Zaphod Beeblebrox does come through this ordeal with his sanity intact. To find out how, you will have to listen to the radio-show, read the book, etc.

[135] This process is similar to the way that a scientific theory is usually inclusive, in that it takes in the previous theory it replaces, and includes that theory in its objective view of the world. As Einstein states, "...creating a new theory is not like destroying an old barn and erecting a skyscraper in its place. It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views, discovering unexpected connections between our starting point and its rich environment. But the point from which we started out still exists and can be seen, although it appears smaller and forms a tiny part of our broad view gained by the mastery of the obstacles on our adventurous way up". Albert Einstein & Leopold Infeld, *The Evolution of Physics*, p.152: from Zukav (1988) p.45.

that is "accessible from all possible experience types and that the bat example shows that this aim cannot be fulfilled".[136] Biro then goes on to claim that science does not aim for this sort of objectivity, and that all the bat example shows is "that there may be facts inaccessible from a language correlated with an actual experience type (ours)".[137] With regards to this, I am not sure if Nagel does take this view on objectivity. He certainly believes that the "material" that science works with must be accessible to all possible experience types, and that this material must be dealt with in an epistemically objective manner, i.e., free from personal opinions, prejudices, particular points of view, etc. This is achieved by the process of objectification, which results in the objective point of view of science. Now, with regards to the bat's conscious experience, Nagel does think that this "material" is not available to any other experience types (including ours), apart from the bat itself. However, he also believes that science, with its objective point of view, which does not take the viewpoint of any experience types at all, will also have trouble in investigating the true nature of the bat's conscious experience. Nagel thinks that this is because of the intimate relationship between the bat's subjective point of view and its conscious experience; a viewpoint that science moves away from in its striving to be objective. Of course, another kind of objectivity is that which can be achieved through intersubjective agreement. For example, consider that three people are examining a bat on the table in front of them. They might intersubjectively agree amongst themselves that the bat has a brownish appearance to all three of them. Therefore, it could be claimed that while they were looking at the bat, it was an "objective" fact that each of them were subjectively having a brownish visual perception. However, I do not think

[136] Biro (1993) p.186.
[137] Biro (1993) p.186.

that this kind of objectivity is the same kind that physical science strives for. From what I understand, physical science aims for an objectivity which is mind-independent, i.e., not containing any subjective elements in its conception. It can be seen that intersubjective agreement necessarily involves a subjective element, and so is not mind-independent. Of course, in making this claim, I am not denying that intersubjective agreement does produce objective facts and judgements, or claiming that its judgements are "inferior" to those of physical science. I simply think that the "objectivity" of an intersubjective agreement is of a different kind to the "objectivity" achieved by science. The three men mentioned above could come to an intersubjective agreement that each of them was a conscious being, and this would be a perfectly correct, objective fact, about a certain state of affairs that was realized in the world. However, in trying to investigate the phenomenon of subjective consciousness, this is not the sort of objectivity that science would use. The objective viewpoint that science takes up is of the mind-independent variety, which I believe, is the kind that Nagel is referring to, when he claims that science will always abandon the subjective viewpoint in trying to explain various phenomena.

Another criticism of Nagel's conception, involves his belief that a species will use scientific instruments to obtain measurements, instead of their own perceptual apparatus, and in the process they will escape their species-specific way of gaining information about the world. In this way the information they gain by this scientific measurement will be information that is not species-specific, but available to other types of observers as well.[138] In criticising this position, Kekes (1977) and Foss (1993) point out that the scientific instruments and the output they produce will also be necessarily species-

specific, as they are built by a particular species for the specific understanding by that same particular species. However, I am of the opinion that Kekes and Foss have confused the issues here. When Nagel talks of a view as being species-specific, I take it that he is referring to the unaided sense perceptions of that species, that is, what they see, hear, smell, etc. In other words, species-specific means what that species can apprehend of reality using its normal sense modalities. Now, if, as physical science postulates, there is a way that things really are, this means that the species in question will only be perceiving appearances of a deeper reality that is beyond their particular unaided sense experience. Therefore to escape their specific sense experiences they build scientific instruments to obtain information that might well constitute this deeper reality. Now, it is quite obvious that the scientific instruments themselves have to be understandable to the species that built them, so the results that they produce come in a form that is understandable to that particular species. In this sense, the scientific instruments are indeed species-specific. However, it is what the instruments are actually measuring, this is the part that is not species-specific. I think that this is what Nagel is referring to, it is the objective part of reality that is available to various species, whatever their subjective sense experiences. The instruments are species-specific, but the data they receive from reality are not species-specific. For example, consider a gamma-ray detector built by humans. Now, humans cannot normally detect gamma-rays through their sense experience, but with this detector they can. When the detector gives its readings of the intensity of the gamma-rays, this is in a form that humans can understand, e.g., a reading of numbers between 0 and 9. However, consider if a Zeta Reticulan were to look at this human gamma-ray detector, and the output that it produces. It is quite possible that it

[138] Nagel (1979a) p.209.

would not understand the human design of the detector itself, and almost certainly he would not understand the human numerical output that it produced. But, this would not stop the Zeta Reticulans building their own gamma-ray detector with its own specific output of intensity values in the range of...whatever. The point is this, both the humans and the Zeta Reticulans would be trying to escape their species-specific sensory experiences by trying to detect "objective" phenomena that were not species-specific, i.e., in this case, gamma-rays.

Having said this, the conception of the process of objectification has been amazingly successful for the physical sciences, especially physics, where theories have been created that can account for most of the physical phenomena that our universe contains. So, where is the problem? Well, the problem arises when physical science, with its conception of objectivity, makes the claim that it can produce a complete understanding of reality. [139] It is this claim that Nagel is sceptical of, particularly in relation to the topic of subjective consciousness or the mind.[140] It will be remembered that the starting point for the process of objectification began with the subjective point of view of an individual, with all its attendant perceptions, sensations, and thoughts; that is, the subjective phenomenal and introspective consciousness of the individual. However, it was this "subjective self" that was left behind as the objective point of view was developed. In other words, the objective view of reality does not contain any subjective elements at all,

[139] As I am writing this, there is much speculation that science has discovered the part of the human brain responsible for religious revelation. Perhaps science might also eventually find the part of the brain responsible for making some people think that all there is in reality is objective in nature.

[140] This is in contrast to Nagel (1997) p.92, where he vigorously supports the conception of an objective reality. However, in this case it seems to me that Nagel is attacking subjectivist conceptions of reality that deny any objectivity whatsoever. In relation to consciousness/mind, Nagel is not denying that there is an

these are all left behind at the innermost concentric circle, as the process of objectification began.[141] The result of this is that all the perceptions and thoughts of the individual have been given the label of "appearances", and taken out of objective reality and relocated to the subjective consciousness or mind of that individual.[142] If I were to look at the world from the objective point of view of physical science, I would see the physical body that I call MD, but this would be my "objective self", a third-person view of MD.[143] My subjective self, or the "I" that has conscious mental states would be excluded from the objective picture of reality.[144] The effect is similar to that of viewing a figure in a shop security camera, and just for a split second, you do not realise that it is yourself that you are looking at. Therefore, the position is this. The physical sciences, using the method of physical objectification, claim that they can provide a complete understanding of reality. However, it can be seen that this is a dubious claim, as the subjective element of consciousness/mind is left out right at the start of the objectification process that is used by the physical sciences. Therefore, the method of physical science has an intrinsic incompleteness built into it, its inability to account for the subjective element of reality.[145] The fact that there is no subjective element in the outlook of physical science is viewed by some as not too great a problem. This is the view taken by Lewis (1979), who agrees that science cannot provide a complete description of reality,

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objective reality, he thinks that there is: it is just that this conception might not be able to capture all the elements that are in existence in the world, e.g., the subjective ones.

[141] In connection with this point, Schrodinger states that, "The material world has only been constructed at the price of taking the self, that is, mind, out of it, removing it; mind is not part of it; obviously, therefore, it can neither act on it nor be acted on by any of its parts". Schrodinger (1979) p.128.

[142] Nagel (1994) pp.220/1.

[143] A good discussion of these issues is contained in Malcolm (1988).

[144] Nagel (1965) pp.113/4. This is also similar to Wittgenstein's example of the book "The world as I found it", which would contain no reference to the subject of which the book was about. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.631.

[145] Nagel (1994) p.221.

but that what it does provide is not affected by the omission of the subjective element. Using an analogy, he talks of a map that would be incomplete if it omitted some railway lines, as this would have distorted the map's representation of the countryside. However, if the "location of this map" dot is left off the map, its representation of the countryside would not be affected at all.[146] When talking of the "location of this map" dot, I take Lewis to be referring to a subjective element that was left out of the "objective" representation that the map provides. Now, with regards to the point that Lewis is making, Nagel would probably agree with him; in no way has physical, objective, reality been distorted by the omission of subjectivity. However, the problems start occurring when science takes the view that all there is in reality is physical and objective. This is when science tries to produce an objective map of the "location of this map" dot itself. It tries to explain subjective phenomena in an objective manner, with the result that these phenomena are distorted, as the property of subjectivity they possess is completely ignored or explained away. However, in the next section, a practical example of this conception of the objective point of view and the corresponding process of objectification will be given. It will then be shown why Nagel thinks that this method of physical explanation will falter with regard to the subjective element of consciousness/mind.

But, to conclude this section, a brief comparison will be made of Nagel's conception of objectification, leading to the "view from nowhere", with Spinoza's earlier conception of the *sub specie aeternitatis* (or the "view from eternity").[147] The first thing to notice is that both conceptions rely on ascending levels of knowledge, in order to reach their

[146] Lewis (1979) p.144.
[147] My discussion of Spinoza is influenced by Copleston (1959) pp.230-237, 244-247.

respective goals.[148] The lowest level of knowledge (i.e., inside the innermost concentric circle) for Nagel, was that of subjective, perceptual experience. The next level then treated these subjective perceptions as appearances, and put forward a more objective and scientifically correct portrayal of reality as it really is; and so on, until the ultimate objective point of view on reality, the view from nowhere, is reached. With Spinoza's conception, the intellect has also to ascend several levels of knowledge. The first and lowest level is that of ideas of sensation or imagination (*cognitio primi generis*). This level equates with Nagel's lowest level of subjective perceptions, and is viewed by Spinoza as involving sense perceptions. Spinoza judges the knowledge gained from this level as inadequate and confused, though it is still the way we get most of our information about the world. The knowledge gained from this level is confused, because, as with Nagel's lowest level, it also is judged to consist of appearances only. From this first level, Spinoza then ascends to the second level of knowledge (*cognitio secundi generis*), which is said to consist of the adequate ideas of scientific knowledge. It is this level which Spinoza sees as providing a truer picture of the causal relations making up reality. This level contains adequate ideas that go to form the common notions from which the fundamental principles of mathematics and physics are discovered. It is difficult to decide whether Spinoza's movement from the first to the second level of knowledge is entirely similar to the objectification of Nagel's conception: the latter of which results in a more scientifically accurate view of the reality behind the appearances, that objective physical science strives for. There is certainly a similarity between the two conceptions, in that the first level of sense perceptions and everyday reality is left behind

[148] The concept of ascending levels of knowledge to reach some ultimate knowledge of reality is an age-old theme in philosophy, e.g., Plato and his theory of the Ideas or Forms.

by both, and they enter a more abstract level dealing with the generalities of the physical sciences. However, it is debatable whether both conceptions then have the same scientifically "accurate" view of reality. Nagel's conception certainly involves this view, but I am not sure whether Spinoza's conception does as well. It is not certain that Spinoza's adequate ideas of the second level are analogous to a process of objectification, and having a view "more faithful to reality". Although, I suppose that in moving from specifics to generalities, one might employ a method of "stepping back" so to speak, to get a more overall picture, but I am not sure about this. In addition to this, even if one granted that Spinoza's second level did provide a view "more faithful to reality" than the first, his other conception of how we are able to conceive reality, either under the attribute of thought or extension, would seem to complicate matters. The view one had of reality would depend on which attribute we were using to do the viewing, one would not have the single more "accurate" view that Nagel's conception postulated. The only tentative reply that I can come up with on this point would be that even though there is a dual aspect with which reality can be viewed under, there is still only one under-lying system of causal connections making up reality. There are not two systems, one made up of bodies, for example, and another made up of minds, they are two aspects of the single system. Spinoza also believed that the order and causal connections of reality would be the same, whether one viewed reality under the attribute of thought or extension. Therefore, it might be said that despite the dual aspect component of Spinoza's conception, one might still have some kind of "objective" view of a single reality, however, this is a debatable point.

Spinoza's third and final level of knowledge, is called intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*). It is from this level that reality can be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, which involves viewing the whole infinite causal structure of nature, all in one intuitive observation. Spinoza considered God and Nature as the same thing, so this all encompassing view was the equivalent of seeing everything as contained in God. This of course points to a major difference between the general philosophies of Spinoza and Nagel. Whereas Spinoza's view from eternity was intimately connected with his theistic framework of reality, Nagel's view from nowhere does not presuppose the existence of God, or have any religious overtones. I suppose that the presupposition of Nagel's conception might be that science considers that everything in reality is contained in objective reality, i.e., the view from nowhere. However, despite this, Spinoza's concept of *sub specie aeternitatis*, does seem very similar to Nagel's conception of the view from nowhere. This latter conception could also be considered as the ultimate viewpoint of all objective reality, from which all causal connections, objects, and individuals can be seen to fit together in the cosmic scheme of things. However, I think there is one important difference between the two conceptions. With Spinoza's "view from eternity", the viewpoint of the person who has this intuitive view is included in the overall view. By this I mean that the subjectivity of the person who has the "view from eternity" is included in the conception. With the "view from eternity", one is supposed to subjectively comprehend how one's own insignificant existence is interconnected with the rest of reality. In contrast, Nagel's "view from nowhere" does not include the person's subjectivity in its conception. The person who has the conception may well include his own objective body in the overall view (i.e., under the mode of extension, as

Spinoza would say), but the conception will not be subjectively centred on that body. The view will be somehow outside of reality, looking *in* at it objectively, rather than looking *out* at it subjectively (as with Spinoza's conception, I think). To clarify this point, imagine if all of reality was contained in one of those snow-globes (the type that you shake and the snow gets scattered about in the liquid that the globe contains). With Nagel's "view from nowhere", this would be outside the snow-globe, objectively viewing the globe and all of the reality that it contains. However, with Spinoza's "view from eternity", this would be from the inside of the snow-globe, subjectively viewing the reality that it contains and how one is connected to it. I am not sure whether I have explained the above point very clearly, however, there is a final conclusion that one could come to concerning the two conceptions. As mentioned earlier, whereas Spinoza saw everything as contained in God, physical science seems to see everything as contained in the objective "view from nowhere"; therefore it might be ironically claimed that the "God" of physical science is objectivity itself.

Subjective/Objective Points of View and Consciousness

In explaining what he means by the objective point of view of science, Nagel uses the commonest form of scientific explanation, that is, a reduction. A reduction involves explaining one level of physical description in terms of an under-lying, more fundamental level of physical description, with the more fundamental level usually being causally responsible for the less fundamental level.[149] It can then be said that the reduced level of physical description is "nothing but" the more fundamental level of physical description. Examples of this are, water consisting of H2O molecules, sound consisting of waves

travelling through a medium, etc. To explore the idea that Nagel has concerning objective and subjective points of view, and how they relate to consciousness (as set out in his 1974 "bat" paper), I will first consider how science would deal with a particular physical phenomenon in the world. Let us say that the phenomenon is the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights), which is a colourful luminescence in the upper atmosphere above the North Polar regions. Before I start, I should make it clear that I will be making subjective/objective distinctions in the philosophical concepts of metaphysics and epistemology.[150] I will be taking metaphysics to be concerned with what is actually existing in reality. This is similar to ontology, which is usually seen as a sub-section of metaphysics, although the latter is usually seen as being more general in its outlook on reality. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I will be taking metaphysics to be basically synonymous with ontology. With regards to the concept of epistemology, I take this to be concerned with issues of knowledge, i.e., how we find out about such-and-such in the world. Having defined some of the concepts I will be using, I will now get back to the point in hand, which is how science would reductively explain a physical phenomenon such as the Aurora Borealis. The first point to make is that the phenomenon in question is metaphysically objective in nature, that is, it exists in the objective, external world, and does not depend on the mind for its existence. If there were no perceivers in the world, there would still be a physical phenomenon taking place. Having said this, the fact that the Aurora Borealis is known for what it is, that is, a colourful luminescence in the atmosphere, is due to visual perception by humans. The experience that humans have

[149] Nagel (1995) pp.98/9, Searle (1992) p.116.
[150] The reason I am bringing in the concepts of metaphysics and epistemology, is that a criticism of Nagel's views on subjectivity and objectivity, made by Foss (1993), uses these concepts quite heavily. I will be

of the aurora, portrays it as a colourful luminescence. This human sense experience of the aurora, is epistemically subjective, as it is intrinsically connected to the individual, subjective points of view of the human perceivers. In other words, the human perceivers' sense experience of the aurora would be species-specific; only humans would have that particular visual phenomenology of the aurora.

The next step is where science comes in, a process of objectification is begun, to try to reach an objective point of view on the aurora. This is basically achieved by the building of scientific instruments with which to study the Aurora Borealis. The species-specific view of humanity is left behind, in order to describe the phenomenon in a manner not specific to any species. This is the epistemically objective point of view of science, which is not intimately tied to any particular point of view,[151] it is Nagel's "view from nowhere". Of course, as stated earlier, the design of the instruments and the output they produce are species-specific to humans, otherwise no-one would understand the results that the instruments were producing. However, the important point is that the object of the instruments' investigations is not species-specific. That science is able to change the point of view on the Aurora Borealis, and yet still be examining the same phenomenon, is due to the fact that the aurora is metaphysically objective. This means that it is not intrinsically tied to any particular point of view, even though it can be experienced from many subjective points of view. One can pass from a subjective to an objective point of view of it, and still know that one is describing the same phenomenon. However, with the gaining of the objective point of view, what has happened to the subjective

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examining Foss' arguments later, and so thought it would be useful to introduce the concepts he uses at this point, as it should make it somewhat clearer why I think Foss is mistaken in his criticism of Nagel.

experiences of the aurora? Well, these experiences are usually redescribed as subjective appearances, and located in the mind of the human perceiver. Science takes the view that these subjective appearances are not really part of the phenomenon in question, and so when it physically reduces the phenomenon to its more fundamental reality, the subjective appearances are left behind, unreduced, in the subjective points of view of which they are part.[152] Therefore, science reduces the phenomenon of the Aurora Borealis to its more fundamental reality: which is, that it is caused by an overloading of the Earth's radiation belts by high energy particles carried on the solar wind. This resulting overload causes some of the high energy particles to escape the belts and interact with gas particles in the atmosphere, which produces the emittance of radiation in the visible part of the electromagnetic spectrum, i.e., light. The light is viewed as an effect of the deeper particle interaction, with the former consequently being experienced by human perceivers. Another important point to mention about this process of reduction, is that it is intellectually transparent,[153] which means that the mechanisms of the processes involved in moving from one level of physical reality to another are clearly understood. There is a kind of necessity in the understanding of the interaction between the high energy particles and the atmospheric gas particles, in producing light.

Now it is time for the big question. Can science take an objective point of view on conscious experience, and reductively explain it? The first point to make, and perhaps the most vital, is that there does seem to be an intrinsic connection between one's conscious experience and one's own subjective point of view (as Nagel has repeatedly

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[151] Searle (1992) p.18, Kosso (1998) p.16.
[152] Nagel (1974) p.167, Searle (1992) p.115.

claimed since his 1974 "bat" paper). By saying the connection is intrinsic, I mean that consciousness seems to be built into the subjective point of view; conscious experience and subjectivity seem to be intertwined at a deep level of reality. This view has some interesting consequences. Firstly, it appears that the existence of conscious experience (i.e. perceptions, sensations, intentional thoughts, mental images, etc.) is metaphysically subjective. This means that experience has a reality which is subjective, in contrast to the Aurora Borealis, which had an objective reality. In making this claim, there might well be accusations of begging the question. By this I mean that the subjectivity of conscious experience is being assumed as part of the premise of an argument, when it still has to be proven that conscious experience is indeed subjective. In answer to this I can only say that I see it as an empirical reality of the world that one's conscious experience is subjective in nature. I do not foresee any major neuroscientific breakthrough that will suddenly prove that consciousness does not have the subjective reality we thought it did, but is in fact objective in nature. It is a fact of reality that one's conscious experience is intrinsically subjective in nature, even if it is probable that the production of that same conscious experience has an objective source. Therefore, if one's conscious experience only exists at one's subjective point of view, this also means that one will only be able to apprehend it, as it is, from that same point of view. This results in one's conscious experience being accessed in an epistemically subjective manner, that is, intrinsically tied to a particular point of view (one's own). Therefore, it seems that conscious experience is both metaphysically and epistemically subjective.

[153] Nagel (1995) p.106, Nagel (1998) p.342.

So, what happens when science then tries to explain conscious experience? Well, the process of objectification is begun, which will result in the objective point of view being taken on the phenomenon in question. This will involve moving away from any particular points of view, to gain an epistemically objective outlook on the phenomenon. But will this work for conscious experience? As Nagel stated in his 1974 paper, if one's conscious experience can only be apprehended from one's own subjective point of view (i.e. in an epistemically subjective manner), how is moving away from that point of view going to get us any closer to a "real" understanding of the phenomenon?[154] The reasons for this doubt are the following. Firstly, if conscious experience is metaphysically subjective, and can only be apprehended from the subjective point of view, how can one be sure that one is still addressing the same phenomenon from the objective point of view? With the Aurora Borealis, this was a metaphysically objective phenomenon, it existed in objective reality, not intrinsically connected to any one point of view. Therefore, when the subjective point of view on the aurora was abandoned, one could still be sure that the objective point of view was concentrating on the same phenomenon: the aurora was manifestly observable from both the subjective and objective points of view. This point could be put another way; even though there was a distinction between appearance and reality in the observation of the aurora, one could still be sure that both the appearance and reality belonged to the same phenomenon.[155] However, this state of affairs could well be doubted in relation to conscious experience. When one moves from the subjective to the objective point of view on experience, one cannot then judge the

[154] Nagel (1974) p.167.

[155] This could also be stated in Fregean terms: With an objective phenomenon, one can have knowledge of it at the level of sense, i.e., how it appears to a subject, but also be able to have knowledge of it at the level of reference, i.e., facts about how it actually is in the world, the reality behind the appearance. This is

subjective view as consisting of "appearances" of experience. This is because the appearance of conscious experience is actually its reality, there is no appearance/reality distinction to be made with conscious experience.[156]

Therefore, if one moves away from the realistic point of view on experience, that is, the subjective viewpoint, where can the objective point of view concentrate on? If it looks at neuronal interactions in the brain, how can it be certain that these neuronal interactions are the "reality" behind the "appearance" of conscious experience to the subject concerned?[157] With the objective reduction of the Aurora Borealis, there was an intellectual transparency to the mechanisms involved in the processes concerned. One could "see" how one level of physical description could then be reduced to a more fundamental level of physical description, which was causally responsible for the reduced level. However, even though it is quite likely that neuronal interactions in the brain are causally responsible for conscious experience, the mechanisms of the processes involved are intellectually opaque; it is not known how the physical brain produces subjective conscious experience. This is the famous "explanatory gap" between mind and matter.[158] With regards to the explanatory gap, there has been much debate as to whether it is an

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possible because the phenomenon in question has an objective existence, however, there may be problems with a phenomenon which has a subjective existence, as will be seen.

[156] Nagel (1974) p.174, Searle (1992) p.122, Alter (1999) p.8. It should be said that this point is similar to the point that Kripke (1971/72) had made in his "essentialist" argument against the identity theory of mind. Indeed, in his "bat" paper, Nagel acknowledges this in footnote 11.

[157] Again, in Fregean terms, consciousness cannot be viewed as being one way to the level of sense, but another way to the level of reference. It is not one phenomenon that can be viewed from two different points of view, rather, it appears that there are two distinct phenomena (consciousness and neuronal activity), which are viewed from two distinct perspectives, both of which are at the level of reference. The reasons for this are the subjective existence of consciousness and the explanatory gap.

[158] The phrase "explanatory gap" was first coined by Levine (1983).

epistemological or metaphysical gap, or even if there is a gap at all.[159] However, it seems to me that there certainly is a gap in our understanding in this area. Therefore, I think that the explanatory gap is definitely epistemological in nature, as it is certainly a lack of understanding in human knowledge that is responsible for our failure to explain how neuronal activity causes conscious experience. Taking this view does not commit oneself to dualism, one could still believe that conscious experience is a physical phenomenon, it is just that it is not known how it is produced in the brain. However, if one were to take the view that the explanatory gap is metaphysical in nature, then this would have ramifications for one's outlook on reality. It would mean that there was some sort of dualism in existence, involving the phenomenon of conscious experience. It might not necessarily involve a dualism of substances, such as Cartesian dualism does, but involve a property dualism. With this latter view, there is only one substance in reality, that is, the physical, but in producing conscious experience, the physical has given birth to a distinctly non-physical property. This is the view that Nagel himself supports.[160] However, whether one takes an epistemological or metaphysical approach to the explanatory gap, the fact that there is a gap, is enough to cast doubt on whether conscious experience is strictly identical to neuronal activity. Therefore, what we are left with are two phenomena, subjective conscious experience and objective neuronal activity, both of which appear to be radically different to each other, and that have no apparent intrinsic connection to each other. Of course, just because conscious experience appears to be so different to neuronal activity in the brain, it does not mean that they may not be identical

[159] See Levine (1993) for an epistemological view of the gap. See Chalmers (1996) for a metaphysical view of the gap. See Tye (1999b) for a view that the gap is just a cognitive illusion. See Block/Stalnaker (1999) for a critique of conceptual analysis in relation to the explanatory gap.

to each other in reality. This point goes back to an invalid objection to the Mind/Brain Identity Theory of the 1950's, which involved Leibniz's Law. This law stated that for two events to be identical, they had to have all their properties in common. Therefore, as the properties of a mental event were radically different to the properties of a brain process, it was claimed that they could not be identical. However, this objection was shown to be invalid, due to the fact that one must not confuse the properties of an experience with the properties of the object that is experienced.[161] For example, even though the Aurora Borealis may be multi-coloured and 20 miles across, it does not mean that my actual experience of the Aurora Borealis is also multi-coloured and 20 miles across. The Identity theorists were claiming that it was the experiential state that was identical to a brain process, and that state would not actually contain the properties of the object which was experienced. Therefore, Leibniz's Law was not a proper objection to the claim that a mental state could be identical to a brain process. However, having said this, there is still the problem of the explanatory gap, which suggests that there is a conceptual/logical difficulty in claiming that a physical process is identical to a non-physical process. Therefore, the fact that conscious experience and neuronal activity appear to be radically different to each other, and also that there is no transparency in the physical processes by which the latter might produce the former, means that there appears to be a difficulty as to whether the same phenomenon is being observed when the move is made from the subjective to the objective point of view (i.e. from consciousness to neuronal activity). And this basically means that the success of a physical reduction of conscious experience is to be greatly doubted.

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[160] Nagel (1995) p.n105. Although Nagel claims he prefers the term "dual aspect theory" rather than the term property dualism to describe his viewpoint.

I think that this is true even though one can get empirically reliable correlations between neuronal activity and conscious experience. For example, a subject could be shown an image of such-and-such, which results in a certain part of his brain producing a frenzy of neuronal activity. This correlation could occur every time the subject is shown an image of some kind. Would the neuroscientist conducting the experiment be entitled to claim that he had objectified some of the visual phenomenology of the subject, that is, what it is like for the subject to see the image in question? I don't think it would. It seems to me that all we have in the above example is a correlation between two objective, physical phenomena, that is, the image and the neuronal activity. The phenomenal character of the subject's experience is not being accessed at all. Consider another example, this time the neuroscientist has a probe with which he presses part of the subject's brain, thus causing neuronal activity to take place in that area. While this occurs, the subject tells the neuroscientist what he is experiencing, e.g., "I can see blue flashing lights", "I can hear the fade out of the piano notes at the end of The Beatles song *A Day In The Life*", etc. Now, surely this must be viewed as objectifying some of the subject's conscious experience. Well, possibly. But it will again be noticed that all we have is a correlation between two objective phenomena, that is, the neural activity and the verbal report of the subject.[162] The phenomenal character of the subject's conscious experience is still not really being accessed by the neuroscientist, even though we might grant that the neural activity does appear to be correlated with some inner, subjective experience. The problem for neuroscience is that, at the present time, the process by which neuronal activity produces conscious experience is not understood; therefore there isn't any

[161] Smart (1959), Searle (1992) p.38, Heil (1998) pp.80/1.
[162] Chalmers (1996) p.115.

necessity in the correlations between neural activity and consciousness. This results in the correlations always appearing empirical and contingent. Now, some philosophers such as Flanagan (1992) view these neural correlates of consciousness as a quite satisfactory way of showing that consciousness is dependent on neural activity in the brain. Indeed, he believes that philosophers such as Nagel are putting an "impossibly high standard on intelligibility"[163] in connection with consciousness; that is, Nagel wants a scientific explanation of how it is that objective neuronal processes seem to produce the subjective phenomenon of consciousness. However, it seems to me that one either explains a phenomenon or one does not explain a phenomenon. Correlations certainly play a major role in scientific explanation. With the example of the Aurora Borealis, scientists must have noticed correlations between the intensity of the solar wind and the intensity of the auroral displays in the night sky. Then, due to a process of inductive reasoning, they could claim that the solar wind was probably the cause of the Aurora Borealis. However, if the scientists then claimed that they had explained how the Aurora Borealis came about, I think that we would be correct to say that they had not yet produced an explanation, but had just come to an inductive conclusion about the probable cause of the aurora. To have an explanation, they would have to give a physical description of the mechanisms of the processes that took place, probably at an atomic or molecular level, that linked the phenomenon of the solar wind with the phenomenon of the Aurora Borealis. I think that the same applies to an explanation of consciousness. One cannot claim to have explained how neuronal activity causes consciousness, just by inductively noting the correlations between neural activity and consciousness. From the correlations, one could claim that neuronal activity probably was causally responsible for

[163] O. Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered*, p.115: from Davies/Humphreys, eds. (1993) p.34.

consciousness. But to have an explanation of why neuronal activity causes consciousness would require the same physical description of the mechanisms of the processes involved, as in the case of the Aurora Borealis. I do not think that asking for this type of explanation is putting an "impossibly high standard on intelligibility", in relation to consciousness. It is just asking for the same sort of scientific explanation that is applied to all other phenomena that come under the scrutiny of physical science. If someone says to this that consciousness is not like any other phenomenon, then this may lead to rather awkward questions for the materialist, such as why consciousness is different from other phenomena. This in turn may lead one to question whether consciousness is actually a physical phenomenon, and to thoughts of some sort of dualism. The bottom line is this, if consciousness is a physical phenomenon, then it should be capable of having a physical explanation. Having said that, even if there comes a time when the physical mechanism of the production of consciousness is understood, this will still only objectify a part of one's conscious experience. Only the subject will have direct access to his own subjective character of experience, despite the neuroscientists being able to explain how the phenomenon of consciousness arises. The upshot of all this, comes back to Nagel's 1974 "bat" paper. Even if one had all the objective, physical and neurophysiological information about the bat, one would still not know what it was like to be a bat. Only the bat would have the subjective point of view required to experience its inner life. Humans would be unable to access the subjective character of experience of the bat. This is the epistemological point. However, the metaphysical point would be that there is a subjective consciousness that is existing in reality, even though, in the scientific sense, it is a subjective reality and not an objective one.[164]

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[164] Nagel (1974) pp.170/1, Searle (1992) pp.116/7.

Having stated what I think is Nagel's position on subjectivity, objectivity and consciousness, it is now time to look at criticisms that have been made against his views on these topics. One critic who has specifically targeted Nagel's views is Jeff Foss, who did so in a shortened form in a 1989 paper,[165] and then elaborated on these criticisms in a 1993 paper.[166] In the latter, Foss accuses Nagel of conflating a metaphysical version of the subjective/objective distinction with the epistemological version of the subjective/objective distinction.[167] Foss claims that this conflation then leads Nagel to erroneously decide that physical science will be unable to obtain an objective analysis of the subjective character of experience of a being, because the being's experience is necessarily subjective.[168] Having sketched out Foss's argument I will now look at it in more detail. Foss makes a subjective/objective distinction in relation to the concepts of metaphysics and epistemology, similar to the distinction I made at the start of this section. He then goes on to say that the consciousness of a subject is metaphysically subjective, as it essentially involves a metaphysical subject.[169] However, for Foss, this does not mean that science is unable to obtain an objective view of the essence of consciousness. He argues that science aims for epistemic objectivity, that is, an "undistorted and accurate"[170] view of reality. Therefore, just because one's consciousness is metaphysically subjective, that is, it exists subjectively, it does not mean that science will be unable to adopt an objective point of view on that consciousness, as

[165] Foss, J. (1989) "On The Logic Of What It Is Like To Be A Conscious Subject". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 67, pp. 205-20.
[166] Foss, J. (1993) "Subjectivity, Objectivity and Nagel on Consciousness". *Dialogue* 32, pp. 725-36.
[167] Foss (1993) pp.728/9.
[168] Foss (1993) pp.728/9.
[169] Foss (1993) p.735.
[170] Foss (1993) p.735.

science aims for epistemic objectivity, and not metaphysical objectivity. As Foss' argument was quite obscure, I will try to clarify it in what follows.

Let us now examine the conclusions that Foss has come to. Firstly, he thinks that consciousness is metaphysically subjective, as it essentially involves a subject. I do not think that Nagel would disagree with Foss on this point. Secondly, Foss claims that science aims for epistemic objectivity, to achieve an accurate view of reality. Again, I do not think that Nagel would disagree with Foss on this point either. Therefore, where do their opinions divide? I think it is at the following point, where Foss states that:

> If the two senses [metaphysical(m) and epistemic(e)] are kept distinct, then Nagel can be seen as fallaciously inferring the subjectivity(e) of some essential part (or any complete account) of the "subjective character"...of consciousness, from the essential subjectivity(m) of the subjective character of consciousness (i.e., what it is like for the subject(m)).[171]

Here, Foss is claiming that because consciousness and its subjective character is metaphysically subjective, Nagel infers that the view on consciousness and its subjective character is essentially epistemically subjective as well. This is the conflation that Foss thinks Nagel is guilty of. The way that I think Foss is viewing this conflation will be given in the following interpretation of his position, this will be followed by the reasons why I believe that his idea on this conflation is mistaken. Foss could be claiming that because consciousness and its subjective character is metaphysically subjective, then there will naturally be an epistemically subjective view on this consciousness, that is, what it is like for the subject concerned. However, this is the relativized and distorted view that one usually has from an epistemically subjective point of view. This does not

[171] Foss (1993) pp.728/9.

stop science taking an epistemically objective point of view on consciousness, to search for the reality behind the relativized view. For example, consider when a subject looks at the Aurora Borealis, it appears from the epistemically subjective point of view of the subject to consist of streams and bands of different colours. However, when science takes an epistemically objective point of view on the Aurora Borealis, its reality is then revealed, which concerns interactions between high energy particles and gas particles in the upper atmosphere. Couldn't this be the same for consciousness? As I stated earlier in this section, however, I do not think the case of consciousness is as straightforward as that of the Aurora Borealis. The important difference is that one's consciousness is metaphysically subjective (a point which Foss accepts), while the Aurora Borealis is metaphysically objective. One can have a subjective, relativized view of the aurora, and then switch to the objective, non-relativized view of the aurora, and still know that the same phenomenon is being observed in both views. This is because the Aurora Borealis has an objective existence, which can be accessed from various points of view. However, with consciousness, its reality is subjective, and it can only be accessed from one point of view, the subjective point of view of the person concerned. This epistemically subjective viewpoint on consciousness is not a relativized and distorted view on consciousness, it is the only authentic view one can have of consciousness, due to the latter's metaphysically subjective existence. Therefore, as I see it, *the essential reality of consciousness is contained in the epistemically subjective point of view.* It is this fact that produces the situation of epistemic solipsism, which was discussed in the last chapter. One can only know that one's own mind exists in a first-person manner, because one has that epistemically subjective access to it, that no-one else has (with regards to *your* own

mind). Of course, each person probably does have that epistemically subjective access to their own respective minds, but that access is individual and specific to each person. This is what creates the other-minds problem, only the person whose mind it is, can know that that their mind is existing, because only that person has that specific access to it (This is all I will say on this troubling topic here, as I do not wish to be embroiled in it again). Therefore, to then adopt an epistemically objective point of view on consciousness/mind, will be to move away from the subjective point of view on it, to where? If one starts to look at neuronal interactions in the brain, it is not certain that this will provide the "reality" behind the subjective view on consciousness. The subjective character of experience and neuronal interactions are two completely different phenomena, while the mechanism of the process by which the latter might produce the former is also completely unknown. The upshot of this is that the epistemically subjective view on consciousness and its specific character is the only view from which we apprehend what consciousness really is. Therefore, contrary to Foss, the epistemically subjective viewpoint is the only viewpoint we can adopt on the reality of consciousness. If any other viewpoints are adopted, there will always be doubts about whether we are referring to the same phenomenon as viewed from the subjective viewpoint.[172]

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[172] In addition to this, there is a second interpretation of Foss' position which is altogether more strange. This has Foss claiming that the subjective/objective distinction of metaphysics has some formal laws that dictate what the metaphysical subject and object consists of. For example, at one point he states:

> Nor is there anything in S-O(m) itself concerning the ontological status of the subject(m) and the object(s)(m). The subject(m) may be a Cartesian thinking substance, a Sartrean *neant* or a functionalist instantiation of a program. The object(s)(m) of the thought may be as physical as the king of Spain, as abstract as the King of spades or as unreal as the present king of France. Foss (1993) p.729.

I must admit that I am puzzled by the above passage. Perhaps Foss is taking the metaphysical to be more formal and generalized than the ontological aspect. The ontological aspect deals with phenomena that are actually existing in this world, while the metaphysical aspect is more elevated and deals with all sorts of possible realities. Personally, I have taken the metaphysical to be roughly equivalent to the ontological,

Materialism and Subjective Consciousness

Materialist Theories of the Mind

Therefore, it is Nagel's opinion that when science adopts the objective point of view on the mind/consciousness, it will move further away from the only point of view that has a realistic access to that consciousness, that is, the subjective point of view. However, this objective outlook on reality is not confined just to the sciences such as neurophysiology. It has also permeated many areas of philosophy, in particular, the philosophy of mind. This was one of the main reasons why Nagel wrote his 1974 "bat" paper, he was attacking what he saw as the "reductionist euphoria"[173] of the time, concerning theories purporting to explain the mind or consciousness. These theories were all objective and materialist in nature, and Nagel believed that they led to false or incomplete analyses of the mental and its concepts. For a theory to be described as objective and materialist, this usually meant that the theory in question had a particular outlook or attitude to certain concepts and phenomena. For example, in being objective, this meant that the theory would probably not include any subjective elements. All the elements of the theory could be analysed from the third-person point of view, and so the theory was basically a theory of other peoples' minds, not of one's own mind. In being materialist in nature, this meant that the theory contained a causally closed view of the mind, that is, there were only going to be physical causes and physical effects contained in it. Therefore, as one can

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meaning that when I talk of the metaphysical, and the subjective/objective distinction thereof, I am referring to empirical phenomena in the world that either have an objective or a subjective existence. For example, my subjective consciousness is a metaphysically subjective reality, whilst the body that I call mine is a metaphysically objective reality. If Foss is complicating things by claiming that the metaphysical subject/object can be anything whatsoever, then I think that he is trying to use formal qualifications to obscure what is actually existing in the world in which we live, i.e., a subjective reality and an objective reality.

[173] Nagel (1974) p.165.

imagine, this view was going to have a damaging effect on something as immaterial or non-physical in appearance as one's mind or consciousness. Some brief examples of objective/materialist theories of mind will illustrate these points.[174]

What could be termed the "classic" materialist theory of mind, was that of behaviourism. The basic principle of this theory was that there were no mental states, only behaviour. Reference to mental states was analysed away and reduced to reference to behaviour or dispositions to behave. For example, to say that a person desires/wants a pint of beer, means that he is disposed to leave the pavement that he is walking along, enter a pub, walk up to the bar and ask for a pint of beer. I called behaviourism the "classic" materialist theory of mind, because it seems to contain everything that any materialist could wish for. Firstly, the theory is completely objective and third-person in its application. There are no problematic subjective elements to it, all the elements are objective and available for public scrutiny. It is also firmly materialistic, as there are no non-physical appearing beliefs or desires to be dealt with. However, it can be seen that because behaviourism is third-personal in its approach, it is always describing someone else's mental states in terms of their behaviour, never one's own mental states. If one were to apply it to oneself, that is, in the subjective first-person, the effect would be quite bizarre. For example, you would realise that you wanted a pint of beer, only when you entered the pub, walked up to the bar, and asked for a pint of beer. This might have come as a great shock to you, if you only thought that you were out for a quiet stroll in the evening air. The problem for behaviourism is that if all one's mental states are reduced to behaviour, then one does not have any mental states such as beliefs and desires, that

[174] For a good discussion of these issues, see Searle (1992) Ch.2.

actually cause or are responsible for your corresponding behaviour. In the subjective first-person, it is quite obvious that one does have mental states such as desires and beliefs, whatever one considers these states to be in reality.

Now, a behaviourist could argue that the beer example given above was too simplistic and also unrealistic, in that the person would realise that he wanted a pint of beer better than anyone else, as he would know his own dispositions to behave better than anyone else. However, this then raises some awkward questions for the behaviourist. Presumably, if a man was walking along a street and suddenly had a disposition to behave in a way that resulted in the gaining of a pint of beer, when he first had the disposition, i.e., before any observable behaviour occurred, this disposition could well be described as a subjective and private state, as only he would be aware of his own disposition. This then leads onto the question of what exactly a "disposition" is. The usual behaviourist answer is that a disposition is similar to the property of fragility that, for example, a wine-glass possesses, which means that when it is dropped onto the floor it usually breaks. The wine-glass is then said to have the disposition of being fragile, which means that when it is dropped it usually breaks. This explanation of what a disposition is does not seem very convincing to me. Firstly, it seems to be disanalogous to the case of a conscious human being having a disposition. After all, the wine glass has the disposition of being fragile in relation to an external observer; the wine-glass itself doesn't realise that it has this disposition, in fact it doesn't realise anything. In contrast to this, consider a man having a disposition to obtain a pint of beer. The first thing to notice is that due to the man's own subjective consciousness, he himself realises that he has this

disposition. It is not an objective, third-person disposition, but is a subjective, first-person disposition. There need not be any overt behaviour in relation to this disposition, the man could simply stand still and decide that he wanted a pint of beer. An external observer would only be able to come to the conclusion that the man had a disposition to stand still. Therefore, it would appear that a disposition is something subjective, different in kind from behaviour, but that was causally related to the consequent behaviour. It seems that behaviourism has simply taken what would normally be described as a "mental state" and redefined it as a "disposition", and then tried to obscure this fact by fusing the latter with objective behaviour. This is quite a rational strategy for behaviourism to take, if it tries to be more sophisticated. The reason for this is that it will have to admit the existence of certain private, subjective, states, if it is to approach some semblance to the reality of the situation. However, this runs contrary to the main purpose of behaviourism, i.e., the reduction of mental states to overt behaviour or dispositions to behave. Therefore, behaviourism must somehow try to obscure this inconvenient situation it is faced with. It seems to me that if behaviourism tries to be more sophisticated, then some element of subjectivism will always start creeping back into the picture. A further problem for behaviourism was that it seemed impossible to reduce all mental states to behaviour or possible behaviour. The way one behaved seemed to be inextricably linked to further mental states, e.g., beliefs and desires. For example, if a man has the disposition to behave in a way that will result in the gaining of a pint of beer, he will also have many background-beliefs which are linked to his overt behaviour, e.g., that beer is sold in pubs, that walking through a doorway is the usual way for entering a building, that standing at the bar will facilitate being served by the bar-person (although

this belief is sometimes mistaken) and so on. However, to get back to Nagel's point about a theory of mind such as behaviourism, it can be seen that because behaviourism was objective and materialist in nature, then subjectivity and conscious experience were left out of the analysis completely, as he had stated.

One more good example of what Nagel was referring to, is contained in another objective/materialist theory of the mind, which is called functionalism.[175] There are several different varieties of functionalism, however, they all seem to have the following point in common: the description given to a mental state of an organism depends on its causal relations to input stimuli, to other mental states, and to the output behaviour.[176] So, for example, my belief that the ice-cream van is approaching, is based on my auditory perception of the ice-cream van's distinctive, jingly tune, which, together with my desire to buy an ice-cream, results in me leaving my house and heading for the street as quickly as possible. It will be seen that as with behaviourism, part of the definition of the mental state still depends on one's objective behaviour. However, one advantage of functionalism over behaviourism is that it does involve mental states, so that there is not the problem of outward behaviour having no causal relation to the mental states which are responsible for that behaviour. Having said this, functionalism does create problems for itself, especially if it was trying to portray itself as a complete theory of the mind. This is because in functionalism, mental states are defined completely by their causal relations, and do not involve any other factors. The result of this is that there is no room

[175] It must be noted that functionalism does not necessarily have to be a materialist theory, as the causal relations in a system may be realized by non-physical components. However, the realizers in most functionalist theories are nearly always physical in nature.
[176] Searle (1992) pp.40/1.

in functionalism for the qualia or qualitative character that some mental states also have, and for subjective consciousness in general. In fact, subjectivity could be completely removed from the equation, as the causal relations could be objectively worked out and studied. This means that functionalism is an incomplete or partial theory of mind. Worse still, it leaves itself open to criticisms that threaten its credibility as even a partial theory of mind. The reason for this is what Block (1978) calls its "liberalism". One criticism of the earlier type-identity theories of mind was that they were "chauvinistic" in their outlook. This was because it was claimed that only brains of the sort that humans possessed could be capable of having minds. This was one problem that functionalism did not have, as it thought that a system having a mind or mental states simply depended on the system's causal relations between input, inner functioning, and output.[177] It also did not matter what the system was composed of, it could have been made of anything. These aspects contributed towards the so-called "multiple realizability" of functionalist theory. However, the resulting liberalism engendered by multiple realizability, meant that functionalism could assign a mind or mental states to any number of bizarre systems that it was hard to believe were conscious, just so long as the causal/functional relations in that system had the correct organisation.[178] An example of one of these so-called "absent qualia" cases is Block's thought experiment involving the entire population of China being connected up, so that their functional organisation was identical to that of the human brain. In a case like this it would be hard to credit the connected-up population of China with an inner subjectivity or consciousness, that was gained solely because of their particular functional organisation. This factor seems to point to the conclusion that a

[177] Searle (1992) pp.41/2.
[178] Levine (1997) pp.380/1.

system's functional organisation is independent of the phenomenon of conscious experience. As well as cases of "absent qualia", cases of "inverted qualia" are also conceivable. These latter cases usually involve two beings having the same functional organisation but receiving different qualia, e.g., where one person has a qualitative sensation of red, the other person has a qualitative sensation of blue, etc. This seems to point to the possibility that functional states do not determine what qualitative states a being can apprehend.[179] Therefore, these criticisms show that functionalism's version of the mind is a completely causal/functional structure, with no thought given to subjectivity or consciousness. This means that functionalism, despite the merit of including "mental states" in its organisation, is an incomplete theory of the mind.

Materialism, Consciousness and the Future

As the above examples of behaviourism and functionalism show, subjectivity and consciousness usually get very short shrift in materialist theories of the mind. Indeed, Nagel is of the opinion that theories such as these will never adequately deal with what he thinks is the major component of the mind, that is, subjective consciousness. Despite the addition of further behavioural or functional concepts in these theories, they will never even approach an explanation of the phenomenon of consciousness.[180] As well as feeling this way in relation to philosophical theories of the mind, Nagel is of the same opinion with regards to neuroscience. He thinks that we need a huge conceptual advance in explanation to truly understand the mind-body problem, and not just more empirical data

[179] Levine (1997) pp.380/1.
[180] Nagel (1995) p.101.

from the usual methods of understanding.[181] In trying to understand the concept of how a mental event could also be a physical event, Nagel thinks we are in the same position as a pre-Socratic philosopher, who declared that matter is energy. There would be no way for the pre-Socratic philosopher to understand the hypothesis, let alone determine whether it was true.[182]

There have been criticisms of Nagel's position on this issue, in particular from Patricia Churchland (1996) and Kathleen Akins (1993). With Churchland, her main point appears to be that we do not really know what science will and will not be able to understand in the future, just because we cannot solve a particular problem at the present time.[183] She thinks that Nagel, and other philosophers such as Colin McGinn, are committing the nonformal fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantium*, or the argument from ignorance. This fallacy involves using one's present ignorance on a matter, as a premise for drawing a substantive conclusion on that matter.[184] For example, just because no-one has ever disproved the existence of God, it would be a fallacy to use this as a premise for claiming that God did exist. Conversely, just because no-one has ever proved the existence of God, it would also be a fallacy to use this as a premise for claiming that God did not exist.[185] Therefore, in Nagel's case, when he claims that he does not think that science will solve the "hard" problem of consciousness, because it had not been solved up until then, he is arguing from ignorance, to fallaciously reach the conclusion that science will

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[181] Nagel (1994) p.220.
[182] Nagel (1974) p.177.
[183] Churchland (1996) p.43.
[184] Churchland (1996) p.41.
[185] The position that one should take on this issue, is perhaps one of agnosticism (unless of course you are religious in the first place!). However, this point does have an interesting result. Just as it could be called a "belief" to think God exists, it could also be called a "belief" to think that God does not exist.

never solve the problem. Now, it is true that in his "bat" paper, Nagel does make claims such as the following: "Consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable",[186] and "Without consciousness the mind-body problem would be much less interesting. With consciousness it seems hopeless".[187] The first quotation above is quoted by Churchland in her paper, but is Nagel really saying that science will never solve the mind-body problem? In the dictionary (or at least, my dictionary), "intractable" seems to be defined as "being hard to solve" or "difficult". So Nagel could be construed as just claiming that consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really hard to solve or really difficult; not that it will never be solved. In addition to this, it seems to me that Nagel does give a reason for why he thinks the problem of consciousness is intractable. This is because, for Nagel, subjective consciousness can only be apprehended from the subjective point of view, whereas, science will adopt an objective point of view on consciousness, and so move away from the subjective view. Nagel is of the opinion that it is the subjective character of experience ("what it is like") that must be given a physical explanation by science, in order to properly understand consciousness. Now, one could of course disagree with Nagel's reasoning on this, for example, one could argue that the subjective character of experience need not be given a physical explanation, in order to have an adequate understanding of the phenomenon of consciousness. However, the point is that Nagel has given a reason for why he thinks consciousness is intractable; for why science has not solved the problem at the present time, and why it will find it difficult to solve in the future. So, he is not just arguing from ignorance, but is giving his reason for why he thinks there is ignorance, and might well

[186] Nagel (1974) p.165.
[187] Nagel (1974) p.166.

be ignorance in the future. Interestingly, it could similarly be claimed that McGinn (1989) is also not arguing from ignorance on consciousness, but is giving an explanation for this ignorance. In McGinn's case, his reason is his idea of cognitive closure, whereby we are prevented from achieving the conception of a psychophysical link by our very constitution, and the way that we have to form our conceptions and ideas.[188]

The message from Akins (1993), is mainly the same as Churchland's message. That is, just because we do not understand consciousness at the present time, we still do not really know what science will or will not be able to discover in the future.[189] She examines the strong intuitive feeling of arguments like Nagel's, which claim that there will always be some subjective residue, the "what it is like" part of a creature's consciousness, which science will never be able to reach. The intuition usually has it that science will only be able to explore the physical parts of a creature, the neurophysiology of the brain, the perceptive/representative apparatus of the creature etc. However, Akins' point is that the qualia of a creature does not exist on its own, apart from the physical parts of the creature. It is enveloped in the representational/conceptual apparatus of the creature as well, which goes towards making the qualitative character of the creature's experience what it is.[190] This is a fair point. However, one would have thought that Nagel's conception of the subjective point of view did consist of the creature's representative and conceptual environment, as well as the qualitative character of its experience. When

[188] McGinn (1989) p.350. Also in relation to McGinn, on several occasions in her paper, Churchland mentions the point that just because we do not understand a phenomenon, it is not a metaphysical problem about the phenomenon itself, a mystery actually existing in nature, but is an epistemological problem that we have. Churchland (1996) p.42. This is a valid point, but one that McGinn had also made several times in his 1989 paper. McGinn (1989) pp.362/3. Indeed, it could be claimed that this point was the main thesis of McGinn's 1989 paper.
[189] Akins (1993) p.272.

trying to adopt the point of view of the bat, it was not just the bat's qualia that would be apprehended, but the bat's own subjective environment would be included in the attempted adoption of the viewpoint. In his "bat" article, Nagel questions whether it makes any sense to talk of a human possessing the "internal neurophysiological constitution"[191] of a bat; because if one did, then one would not be a human anymore, one would be a bat, and so not be considering what it was actually like being a bat, one would just be living the life of a bat.[192] This statement occurred when Nagel was in his "difference of kind" mode of thought, in relation to what it was like to be a bat. That is, when he thought that it was not possible for a human to imaginatively take up the point of view of a bat. However, even if a creature's qualia do depend on its neurophysiology, and science can thus examine the neurophysiology, as it is physical, I am not sure that this will bring science much closer to the subjective consciousness of the creature.[193] This is roughly the situation that we have with human qualia at the moment. Explorations of human neurophysiology are getting deeper and more intricate, and yet the subjective element of consciousness that is involved with the neurophysiology is no closer to being directly examined.

So, what is the future for attempting to understand the phenomenon of mind or consciousness? In Nagel (1998) he put forward a challenge for the philosophical community. This challenge involved finding a method of showing how irreducible

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[190] Akins (1993) p.269.
[191] Nagel (1974) p.169.
[192] Nagel (1974) p.169.
[193] Alter (1999) makes a similar point on p.9.

subjectivity could be connected to the physical properties of an organism.[194] Nagel wondered if a conception was possible of how an objective, physical event, such as a brain process, could at the same time be necessarily essential to a subjective event which was apparently non-physical, such as a conscious mental state.[195] This challenge has already been taken up by Harre (1999), who has come up with a very clever conception of how to view the psychophysical link. Harre criticises the way Nagel has set out the problem of the psychophysical link, he thinks that it is wrong to keep using the substance-property metaphysics to frame the problem. He states that:

> ...the challenge, as I see it, will be to develop a metaphysical scheme in which both brain states and phenomenal experiences can find a place, but which does not perpetuate the substance-property metaphysics.[196]

Harre believes that the problem concerns the way that the psychophysical link is always conceived as a physical process/entity which is necessarily correlated with a mental process/entity. He feels that this view is hampered by the difficulty of conceiving the actual link between the physical and the mental, and by the fact that the psychophysical link always appears to be contingent, when we want it to appear necessary.[197] In answer to this, Harre adopts a new ontology to look at the psychophysical problem, based on the ideas of Niels Bohr and J.J. Gibson. Using this ontology, the psychophysical link is basically ignored, as Harre believes the situation can be viewed as affordances that are given to different perceptual systems. By this he means that a brain process can be viewed by the ordinary visual sensory organs, this is the affordance given to them, but that the same brain process can also be viewed by the subject, from "inside", so to speak,

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[194] Nagel (1998) p.338.
[195] Nagel (1998) p.342.
[196] Harre (1999) p.256.

an affordance given to his own proprioceptual system.[198] Using this method, Harre claims that the psychophysical problem then becomes a case of different affordances, which view the "whatever-it-is" from the material standpoint and from the subjective standpoint. He declares that:

> ...this metaphysics allows us to sideline any form of the identity thesis, that a molecular state is the same state as the correlated phenomenological state, and to sideline any form of the causal thesis, that molecular states cause phenomenal states. Both types of states are affordances of 'whatever-it-is' to different and distinctive modes of access.[199]

In this way, the "whatever-it-is" is viewed as neither material or subjective, but the actual way of observing it is distinguished by material and subjective modes of access. Harre's conception of the mind-body problem is certainly a radically different one, which was after all what Nagel was asking for in his challenge. However, I am not quite sure about it. The conception certainly does not solve the mind-body problem, something which Harre admits himself. But the question which is bothering me is whether, in the above example, we are getting different affordances of the *same* phenomenon or "whatever-it-is". Earlier in his paper, Harre refers to the fact that depending on the way we observe light, it can either take on a wave-form or a particle-form. If one observes light using the double-slit experiment, it shows its wave-like form, whereas, the particle-like characteristics of light can be shown if we perform an experiment which shows the photoelectric effect.[200] The problem was this. How could light have both a wave-form and a particle-form? It seemed impossible. It was Bohr who came up with the answer. The wave and particle characteristics of light were not actually properties of the light

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[197] Harre (1999) pp.257/8.
[198] Harre (1999) p.265.
[199] Harre (1999) p.267.

itself, they were properties of our interactions with the light.[201] Either the wave-form or the particle-form of light would appear, depending on which apparatus we used to observe the light. Using Harre's terminology, the double-slit experiment would give us one affordance of light, while the photoelectric experiment would give us another, different affordance of light. Now, this is all very interesting, but the point I wish to make is the following. With the two affordances that we are given, we know that they are both from the *same* phenomenon, that is, light. However, if we now follow Harre and make the same distinction for viewing brain processes and subjective states, are we certain that they are affordances of the same phenomenon or "whatever-it-is"? Harre takes the view that our sensory apparatus gives us one affordance of the "whatever-it-is", while our proprioceptive system gives us a different affordance of the "whatever-it-is". However, I think that it is not at all clear that we are referring to the *same* "whatever-it-is" in the both cases. Because of the explanatory gap in relation to physical states and mental states, Harre must be just assuming there is a connection between the brain process and the subjective state. Now, there is nothing wrong in doing this. But Harre is claiming that the phenomenon or "whatever-it-is" is providing two different affordances to the two different ways of observing that "whatever-it-is". In answer to this, it could well be claimed that there is in fact no identical phenomenon or "whatever-it-is" present during the two observations. From this, it could also be claimed that there are no different affordances being given by one and the same "whatever-it-is". It might be just a fact that if you observe a brain process, all you will see is the brain process, while if you experience a subjective state, all you are experiencing is the subjective state. They are

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[200] Zukav (1988) p.116.
[201] Zukav (1988) p.116.

two separate observations of two different phenomena, not two different observations of the *same* phenomenon (as in the case of light). This is a complicated point, but it might well be an issue for Harre's conception of the mind-body problem.[202]

Having said this, I believe the attempt to come up with a conception or thought experiment that shows the necessary connection between the mental and the physical is an extremely difficult proposition. At first glance, it might appear that examples of scientific discoveries and breakthroughs might give us a clue how it is to be achieved. For instance, the problem might seem reminiscent of how a thought experiment helped Einstein to produce his General Theory of Relativity. Briefly, Einstein wanted to have an explanation of a single phenomenon, as viewed from a uniformly moving frame of reference and as viewed from a non-uniformly moving frame of reference. Could one physical theory be valid for observers in the two different frames of reference, in explaining the phenomena that they saw in their respective reference-frames?[203] In relation to this, Einstein came up with a thought experiment that involved some people trapped inside a lift, whose cables had just snapped and which was plummeting towards the ground. To cut a long and complicated story short, from this thought experiment, Einstein came up with the insight that in a situation like that, it would not be possible to differentiate between "uniform accelerated motion and a constant gravitational field".[204] This was Einstein's principle of equivalence: that in certain situations, gravity is

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[202] However, it is interesting to note that Harre's conception of two different affordances of consciousness given by the "what-ever-it-is" is somewhat Spinozistic in character. Spinoza's idea was that the mental and the physical were two different aspects of one fundamental substance, which would be causally responsible for both aspects. It is also interesting to note that this Spinozistic conception of the mind-body relationship is the one that Nagel himself is inclined to favour, see Nagel (1994) p.222.
[203] Zukav (1988) pp.182/3.
[204] Zukav (1988) p.187.

equivalent to acceleration. This idea does seem quite similar to the problem that is before us, that is, how to view a physical process from one point of view, and conceive that this is equivalent to a subjective event viewed from another point of view. We just need to come up with a thought experiment like Einstein's, which will enable us to see the equivalence of the physical and the subjective. However, the situation is not exactly the same. Of course, Einstein's thought experiment that led to the development of his General Theory was a brilliantly unique insight, and if he had not come up with his conception when he did, it is not at all obvious or inevitable that the breakthrough would have been made by someone else.[205] But, having said this, in coming up with his thought experiment concerning the principle of equivalence, Einstein was still dealing with concepts that were in existence at that time, even though he conceived of them in a radically new way. Gravity and acceleration were known concepts, and were also both objective and physical phenomena. For Einstein to conceive of a new conceptual relation between gravity and acceleration was a tremendous achievement, but it was not conceptually impossible in principle.[206] Contrast this situation with that of conceiving a psychophysical link. A brain process is certainly an objective and physical phenomenon, and is conceptually understood as such, although, the mechanisms by which a brain process manages to produce a mental event are not known. In addition to this, the corresponding mental event is subjective and non-physical in appearance. These two concepts appear so radically different, that it does seem in principle, a conceptual

[205] With regards to Einstein and general relativity, Sir Roger Penrose states that "It is one of those theories which might not have been arrived at by anyone else. Often one thinks that there is this relentless march of science. It does not matter much who gets there. But I think Einstein's general relativity is an example where it was not part of this march of science...It was a highly original idea and a very profound one, and I could quite believe that it might not have developed even by now". Bragg/Gardiner (1998) pp.275/6.
[206] This was pointed out to me by my supervisor.

impossibility to come up with an intelligible and coherent relationship between them.[207] How is one supposed to conceive a relationship between an objective, physical phenomenon, and a phenomenon which only has a subjective existence and is non-physical, in that it does not seem to occupy physical space like other phenomena?[208] This leads me to think that Nagel may well be quite correct when he claims that a radically new conception is needed in order to conceive of a psychophysical link. It may take more than the steady, onward march of science in order to make the breakthrough on this phenomenon (in contrast to Churchland's view?). Indeed, if the new conception is not forthcoming, the psychophysical connection may remain undiscovered. However, if the equivalence of the mental and the physical could be conceived, I think that it might well change the way we look at reality. This is certainly what happened when Einstein conceived the equivalence of gravity and acceleration. This led him to view the orbits of planets, stars, etc, as explainable by conceiving of space-time as being bent and dented, with the planets and stars rolling around the edge of these dents in space-time.[209] This replaced the Newtonian view of planetary orbits, as involving forces acting on various objects from a distance. Thus, a new view of reality was born.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Nagel's conception of the objective point of view and how successful this conception would be in explaining the mind or consciousness. The objective point of view was reached by a process of objectification, which moved away from particular subjective points of view and from generally human points of view

[207] Alter (1999) comes to the same conclusion.
[208] Nagel (1998) p.339. Nagel refers to McGinn (1995) in connection with this issue.

altogether. It was by this process that the "view from nowhere" could be arrived at, which was the view from no particular point in reality, it was conceived as a view outside of reality, observing a mind-independent reality that was centreless. It was this objective point of view or view from nowhere that the physical sciences strived for. This viewpoint of physical science has been amazingly successful in explaining the workings of reality, that is, objective physical reality. The objective viewpoint was normally utilised in the commonest form of scientific explanation, that of a physical reduction on a phenomenon. In examining a metaphysically objective phenomenon, science could leave behind the subjective point of view on the phenomenon, placing these subjective "appearances" inside the mind of the observer, and not including these in the "real" scientific description of the phenomenon. Despite changing from a subjective to an objective point of view on the phenomenon (by taking up an epistemically objective viewpoint), one could still be quite sure that it was the same phenomenon that was being examined, as it was metaphysically objective. However, this was the big problem that science had when it tried to carry out a physical reduction of the mind/consciousness. It was seen that one's consciousness had a metaphysically subjective existence, that was also only available to the person concerned, in an epistemically subjective manner. Thus when science tried to move away from the subjective "appearance" of consciousness, by taking up an epistemically objective standpoint, it in effect left what was the actual reality of the consciousness behind. By then examining, say, objective processes occurring in the brain, one could not be sure that it was the same phenomenon (subjective consciousness) that was being examined from the objective point of view, due to consciousness having a metaphysically subjective existence. Therefore, it seemed as if

[209] John Gribbin: in Bragg/Gardiner (1998) p.281.

Nagel was quite right, and that it would be doubtful whether a normal physical reduction could be successfully carried out on the mind/consciousness. It was also seen that this objective point of view had been imported into most materialist theories of the mind. The result of this was that these theories always seemed to be partial or incomplete, as the subjective character of mind was usually omitted, with an objective, third-person view of the mind usually being put forward. Finally, it was seen that Nagel thought that progress on understanding consciousness would be extremely difficult within the current framework of science, and was of the opinion that a radically new conception of the mental and physical was required, in order to move forward.

MAIN CONCLUSION

In this main conclusion, the first point to make is that Nagel's overall work on consciousness has been very important and influential in its contribution to the philosophical debate on the mind/consciousness. With regard to his 1974 paper, "What is it like to be a bat?", which this dissertation has mainly concentrated on, it seems that it fully deserves to be called a "classic" paper in the history of philosophy. It was, and still is, a highly influential paper, which contains several themes and many interesting arguments and ideas. It was also a brave moment to publish the paper when he did, as not many philosophers at the time held, or at least publicly aired, the views that Nagel did. This was a time when optimism in materialist explanations of the mind, especially involving scientific reductionism, was very high (as can be seen with the number of relevant entries in the first footnote of his "bat" paper). It was intellectually brave to put forward arguments on why science might not be able to reductively explain the phenomenon of conscious experience, even though, of course, nowadays this is a more widely-held position (although, materialist positions on the mind/consciousness are still the most popular).

In looking at what Nagel meant by the use of the phrase "what it is like", it was seen that there were several strands of thought involved with this phrase. In my opinion, the first strand involved an epistemological problem for humans (though Nagel himself denies this), in that Nagel wanted to know what it was like for the subject himself to have his own experiences, i.e., what it was like for the bat to be a bat. He came to the conclusion

that this was impossible to know, a human would have no idea what the conscious experience of the bat was like, as this was only perceivable from the perspective which the bat itself occupied. The two points of view, that of the bat and the human, were so radically different to each other, that the latter could have no conception of what it was like to be the former. This conclusion also had a metaphysical consequence, Nagel thought that there were certain facts in the world that were beyond the understanding of humans, i.e., the subjective facts of the bat's character of experience. Science could objectively examine the bat's neurophysiology etc., but would not be able to examine the bat's own subjective character of experience, as it had the wrong point of view with which to achieve this. However, Nagel also seemed to give a second, less severe, interpretation to his phrase "what it is like". This involved the claim that it might be possible to achieve a conception of what it was like to be a bat by using the imagination, a possibility that Nagel had earlier seemed to rule out. The problem had now changed into one of human conceptualisation, it did not involve what it was like for the bat to be a bat, but whether it was possible for a human to imaginatively gain a conception of what the bat's subjective point of view might be like. Therefore, it seemed as if the problem was not now beyond human understanding, but was something that could be intellectually approached, with varying degrees of success, depending on how accurate the conceptualisation of the bat's point of view was. In examining this situation, I used the distinction put forward by H.O. Mounce, between a "difference of kind" and a "difference of degree". The first interpretation of the "what it is like" phrase, which involved what it was like for the bat to be a bat, would be an example of a difference of kind. This meant that the question at issue was completely beyond human understanding,

and no amount of intellectual effort would be able to bridge the gap involved. However, with the second "conceptual" interpretation of the "what it is like" phrase, this would be considered as a difference of degree. This would mean that the question at issue was not totally beyond human understanding, but could be amenable to some sort of intellectual effort, to gain a modicum of understanding. Therefore, when Nagel changes the problem from being totally incomprehensible to being partially comprehensible (a fallacy which Mounce thinks many philosophers are guilty of), it can be seen that he has also changed the essence of the original problem, with the result that the two problems are importantly different.

This importance comes to the fore when the Ability theory of Laurence Nemirow and David Lewis was considered. It was my opinion that Nagel's second "conceptual" interpretation of his "what it is like" phrase may well have influenced the development of the above-mentioned theory. With Nagel claiming that "what it is like" involves the use of imaginative abilities to gain a certain conception, it is not a great leap to come to the conclusion that the Ability theorists do, that "knowing what it's like may be identified with knowing how to imagine". However, even though it is not a great leap, it does have great significance for Nagel's views on consciousness. Instead of there being subjective facts of experience (e.g., of the bat), which are beyond scientific investigation, there are now only imaginative abilities that the subject possesses, which should not be expected to fall within the remit of physicalism (which only claims that all the facts/information in the world have a physical nature). The subjective consciousness of the bat itself has been completely ignored, and the problem is now one of how a human could imaginatively

adopt the point of view of the bat. However, it was hopefully shown that the main arguments of the Ability theory are dubious, to say the least. For example, to know what it is like to see the colour red, certainly involves more than just the gaining of abilities to imagine, remember, recognize, etc., the red colour. One knows what it is like to see red, as one is perceiving the red, it is a subjective, experiential fact, that red looks a certain way to the person concerned. While the perception is going on, it is a case of "knowing that" red looks a certain way, not a case of "knowing how" to imaginatively conceive of the red colour. After the experience of seeing red, it is quite feasible that one does gain certain abilities to imagine red, remember red, etc., although even this possibility could be open to doubt. It could be that the Ability theorists have played on a confusion with the definition of "ability". One could take the view that mental capacities such as imagination, recognition, and so on, are already present, in an *a priori* fashion, in the mind, which then utilises the experiential information which is gained during sensory perception. It could then be claimed that what is gained during an experience is not an imaginative ability, but the "raw material", which is then used by the innate imaginative abilities. Be this as it may, it seemed to me that the Ability theory had conflated the meanings of "knowing such-and-such" and "*imaginatively* knowing such-and-such", with the result that the importance of the actual experience is played down. However, it appears that Nagel's subjective facts of experience cannot be so easily replaced by subjective abilities, as the Ability theorists wish. Therefore, it is still possible that there are subjective, experiential facts, which are only available to the subjective point of view, and which an objective science will not be able to access.

With regards to Nagel's concept of a subjective point of view, it was seen that if a creature was conscious and experiencing the world, then, according to Nagel, it would have a subjective point of view. It was only from its own point of view that a creature could apprehend the subjective facts of its own experience, which then went to make up its subjective character of experience. I think it is fair to say that Nagel sometimes referred to the subjective point of view (of, say, a human) as an individual one and sometimes as a type. That the subjective point of view was a token or individual one seems to me the most natural and sensible interpretation, however, if one took this option it was seen to have the problematic consequences of solipsism and privacy of experience (as predicted by Kathleen Wider). I believe that it was for this reason that Nagel decided that the subjective point of view would be a type and not a token. In this way, two humans would "know" what each was experiencing, due to the fact that their points of view were of the same type, which in turn, was due to their physiologies being similar. However, it was shown that one could not really escape completely from the "individual" to the "type" of point of view, if, for example, one tried to use the imagination to do this (it would still be the case that one would only definitely know what one's own experience was like): the result seemed to be epistemic solipsism. However, in my view, this was a plus for Nagel's views on consciousness (although he wouldn't agree), as it gave an accurate picture of the reality of the situation that individuated beings are faced with. Indeed, it made me think that any theory of mind/consciousness that took subjectivity seriously would be faced with the problem of some form of solipsism, as it is an inescapable fact that we each only experience our own subjectivity in the first-person manner. I also thought it was phenomenal consciousness that Nagel was referring to,

when he talked of one's conscious experience being apprehended from the subjective point of view. The phenomenal consciousness of a creature involved what it felt like to be that creature just living its life, without any philosophical intentions or introspection of its own perceptions and sensations. It was for this reason that I also thought that Nagel's conception of "what it is like" would not conflict with arguments of Wittgenstein, such as the Private Language argument and the beetle-in-the-box analogy. Both of these arguments seemed to involve introspection of one's sensations or perceptions, which then led to confusion and error. However, Nagel's phenomenal consciousness seemed more primitive than this, at a lower level than the introspected, psychological consciousness of Wittgenstein's arguments, and so would be unaffected by them.

Nagel's ideas in relation to his "what it is like" conception and the subjective point of view have influenced my own views on consciousness. In what follows I will give my own views on the possible position and status of consciousness in the world. I am not claiming that these are also Nagel's views on consciousness, but it seems to me a natural extension of his views that have been put forward so far. Firstly, I think that consciousness is a biological and subjective phenomenon. Certain organisms have the property of consciousness through some process which occurs in their brains. I take it that this is a natural development, even though it is quite mysterious to the organisms themselves. Consciousness is always subjective, at least on the Earth, because each organism has its own respective brain in its own respective body. Therefore, each organism has the subjective point of view on its own conscious experience. I am not claiming that only human brains produce consciousness, many other creatures on the

Earth certainly have their own individual brains in their own individual bodies. It seems to me quite reasonable to assume that they have their own subjective points of view as well (perhaps the bat's subjective consciousness is not as complex as a human one, due to the differences in size and complexity of the respective brains). I am also not claiming that brains producing consciousness have to look like terrestrial brains. In other parts of the universe there might well be exotic creatures with organs that appear radically different to ours. However, they might also have their own neuronal-type processes going on in certain organs of their bodies, that gives them subjective consciousnesses of their own. The point is that the phenomenon of consciousness has a uniquely biological origin; indeed, one might say that consciousness is *biologically* realizable. So, for instance, even if a Zeta Reticulan happened to be a silicon-based creature (in contrast to us carbon-based creatures), it could still have conscious mental states, as it was still a biological entity. Therefore, at least from the viewpoint of this part of the universe, I see the inclusion of a biological element as a necessary condition for the production of consciousness. Having said this, the biological element is of course not a sufficient condition for the production of consciousness. There are biological organisms of which it would be somewhat doubtful to say that they possessed a subjective consciousness, e.g., amoebas and others of the Protozoan phylum. It would seem that a certain level of biological development and complexity would have to be achieved in order to be fairly certain that subjective consciousness was present. I do not believe that the preceding view is being overly chauvinistic with regards to the presence of consciousness, but is only being realistic. The multiple realizability of functionalism seems to liberal in its views on what can be said to have conscious mental states, whilst the panpsychist view of

consciousness, which sees consciousness as somehow intrinsic to reality, meaning that everything has psychical or mental elements contained in it, seems to be highly implausible; although, this could just be a lack of imagination on my part. Therefore, I believe that the idea that computers, robots, etc. may eventually be built that possess their own subjective consciousnesses, is highly improbable. No matter if a robot contained a silicon chip replica of a human brain, which was exactly like it, both structurally and functionally, I do not believe that there would be something it was like to be that robot (although of course, I wouldn't know this for certain, due to the factor of epistemic solipsism!). Even though the silicon chips were behaving like neurons, they would still not actually be neurons. Even though it might be claimed that the silicon chip complexity was equivalent to the neuronal complexity, the former complexity would be of the wrong sort (i.e., there would be no biological component) for consciousness to occur. Of course, it must be said that just because something might be considered "implausible" or "improbable", it doesn't necessarily mean that it is not actually the case. I am only putting forward what I think is the situation.

Whether one considers the above views as feasible or not, it is undeniable that human beings are one set of creatures, each of whom, possesses their own subjective consciousness. The question then addressed, was whether an objective science could offer an adequate explanation of such a subjective phenomenon as conscious experience. In his "bat" paper, Nagel is of the opinion that science will find it very difficult to provide a satisfactory explanation of the mind/consciousness. His reason for thinking this involves what is probably the most memorable argument from that paper, i.e., if one's

consciousness can only be apprehended from the subjective point of view, and science methodologically takes up an objective point of view to explain phenomena, how is it going to provide an explanation of consciousness by moving away from the only viewpoint from which it is perceivable? I examined this argument using the commonest form of scientific explanation, that of a physical reduction. When examining a metaphysically objective phenomenon (one that had an objective, mind-independent, existence), it seemed as if the reduction worked well in providing an explanation of the phenomenon. Science would begin the process of objectification, by moving away from the subjective appearances of the phenomenon (the epistemically subjective viewpoint), and take up an epistemically objective viewpoint on it, which was the theoretical "view from nowhere". In doing this, science was able to abandon the epistemically subjective "appearances" of the phenomenon, and place those in the mind of the perceiver. In this way it then reached the "reality" behind the appearances, normally involving sub-atomic interactions which provided the mechanisms for the production of the phenomenon. Also, there was usually an intellectual transparency in how the under-lying physical interactions came to produce the phenomenon in question, one could "see" how the phenomenon came into existence from its sub-atomic origin. There is also a further point, one which I think is the most important: in moving from the epistemically subjective viewpoint on the phenomenon, to an epistemically objective viewpoint on the phenomenon, one could still know that it was the same phenomenon being examined from both viewpoints. There were not two different phenomena in each viewpoint, it was the same phenomenon that both the "appearance" and the "reality" belonged to. The

reason one could tell this, is that the phenomenon had a metaphysically objective existence, and was consequently able to be viewed from different viewpoints.

However, when the same process of scientific reduction was applied to one's consciousness, it was seen that there were grave doubts as to whether an adequate explanation could be provided of that particular phenomenon. The reasons for these doubts are the following. The first point to notice is that one's conscious experience is a metaphysically subjective phenomenon, i.e., it has a subjective, mind-dependent, existence. The consequence of this is that one's subjective consciousness could only be apprehended as it "really is", from the epistemically subjective viewpoint. The reality of the phenomenon of consciousness was only contained in the individual, subjective, point of view. Therefore, when science began the process of objectification, and took up an epistemically objective viewpoint on consciousness, it was moving away from the only viewpoint from which the consciousness could be apprehended for what it was. If science then examined objective processes in the brain, and tried to claim that the latter were the "reality" behind the "appearance" of consciousness from the subjective viewpoint, there would be immediate difficulties. For instance, one would not be able to know whether the same phenomenon of consciousness was being examined from the epistemically subjective viewpoint and the epistemically objective viewpoint. One would not know whether the "appearance" and "reality" belonged to the same phenomenon. The main reasons for this are that consciousness has a subjective existence and that there is no intellectual transparency in how, say, neuronal processes in the brain produces the consciousness (the explanatory gap). Therefore, it seems that the reality of consciousness

is contained in the epistemically subjective viewpoint, which is the result of the metaphysically subjective existence of one's consciousness. If the explanatory gap is then added to this situation, it appears that we have two different phenomena in the epistemically subjective and objective viewpoints respectively. Therefore, it seems that Nagel was quite correct in his assertion that it was doubtful whether a physical reduction of consciousness would succeed.

Indeed, I also suspect that Nagel is quite correct in thinking that we will need a radical change in our conceptual framework of thinking about how objective processes can produce subjective states. Personally, I cannot see how the explanatory gap will ever be bridged, or how the impasse between the subjective and the objective will ever be broken. Even if neuroscientists delve "deep" into the processes of the brain, and narrow down their search to, say, one particular process that occurs between the synapses, how will they really know that is the process that produces consciousness? One might imagine a situation where the neuroscientist was able to temporarily "switch off" the particular brain-process in a subject. If it could be determined that the subject then lost his conscious experience, until the particular brain process was "switched on" again, this would be a fairly certain indicator that the brain process in question was essential to the production of consciousness. But how is the determination of loss of subjective consciousness going to be made? The neuroscientist may very well have chosen the correct brain-process for causing consciousness, but I cannot see how he will ever prove it to any satisfactory degree. The consciousness will always have a subjective existence, which is not reachable by the objective methodology of the neuroscientist. I think that

the best that can be achieved will be a "fairly strong probability" that a process of such-and-such is responsible for the appearance of consciousness, but no more than this: the explanatory gap will never be officially closed. Of course, this problem is also connected with the situation of epistemic solipsism, which I tentatively thought that human beings are actually in. After all, we only consider that human beings are conscious creatures, because each of us, individually, knows that he/she is conscious, and then quite naturally we each generalize from our own particular case (whether this is valid or not). This was why I earlier thought that we would never actually know if it was possible to build a robot which had a subjective consciousness. The reason for this is fairly obvious, only the robot itself would actually know if it possessed the subjective consciousness in question. All we would be able to do is listen to its exasperated cries for recognition as a conscious entity, and decide whether to believe it or not. This all comes back to the point, I believe, that a creature can only apprehend its conscious experience from its own individual, subjective, point of view.

What conceptual change will have to be made to overcome the problem of relating the physical to the subjective, I don't really know. Nagel himself states that one cannot criticize the objective point of view for not containing any subjective elements, as it would not be an objective point of view if it did contain these elements, and vice versa. Problems only arise when the claim is made that what is contained in the objective viewpoint is all there is in reality, i.e., if a phenomenon is not contained in the objective viewpoint, then it does not exist, and must be an illusion. Perhaps it will involve ignoring the concepts of subjective/objective altogether, just for the psychophysical issue. The

problem may be framed in one, new, conceptualisation, that makes no distinctions of empirical reality, but includes everything in one section of space-time (like an underground railway map, with the different levels of tracks overlaid on top of each other). Then again, perhaps it won't. However, even if there is no conceptual or technological breakthrough, it does not necessarily mean that consciousness itself is a strange, non-physical entity that somehow emerges from the physical. Of course, it could be, perhaps the explanatory gap is metaphysical in nature. But it is just as likely that the explanatory gap is only epistemological in nature; that consciousness is actually a physical phenomenon, but one that is seen from a bizarre angle that we don't normally associate with physicality, and so is puzzling to us. I think that the main point of Nagel's "bat" article, and indeed of all his work on consciousness, is to show that even though consciousness may be puzzling and mysterious, and at present cannot be explained, there is no need to get worried or embarrassed about this. When that happens, the urge is then to try to get rid of the problem as quickly as possible; by ignoring it, or calling it something else which we do understand, or by denying that it exists at all. We should just admit that as well as an objective reality, there is also a subjective reality in the world, i.e., subjective consciousness; and, to paraphrase Schopenhauer, one must take into account both of these inner and outer realities, in order to solve the "riddle of the world". I think that this is a message which Nagel has consistently put forward over the years, in a very intelligent and accessible way.

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