



JUSTICE FROM NOWHERE: ETHICO-POLITICAL OBJECTIVITY IN THOMAS NAGEL AND JOHN RAWLS

Hatice KARAMAN¹

Abstract

The question regarding the relationship between ethics and politics has always occupied the minds of philosophers and political theorists. Thomas Nagel is one philosopher among others who clearly draws a close link between the ethical and the political. Accordingly, Nagel's inquiry on the issues of objectivity and subjectivity is providing the readers not only with ethical but also political insights regarding the matter. On the other hand, John Rawls's ideas of an "original position" and a "veil of ignorance" in their relation to his understanding of political justice, similarly, interrogate the possibility of an alternative perspective for an objective standpoint that recognizes and encompasses individuality while offering a model for a political community which is founded upon impartial principles. Although Rawls's discussion is mainly contractual and strictly political, certain aspects of his works on political justice and liberalism might be reconsidered in an investigation which also engages with issues in morality and ethics. Therefore, the present study will attempt at reading Nagel's discussion of objectivity and impartiality from an ethico-political standpoint which juxtaposes 'the view from nowhere' with Rawlsian "veil of ignorance". For this, relevant arguments of both philosophers will be explored in a comparative manner while highlighting potential parallelisms between the two.

Keywords: Ethics, Political Justice, Nagel, Objectivity, Rawls

HİÇ YERDEN ADALET: THOMAS NAGEL'İN VE JOHN RAWLS'UN DÜŞÜNÇESİNDE ETİK-SİYASAL NESNELİK

Öz

Etik ve siyaset arasındaki ilişkiye dair sorular tarih boyunca kuramcılarının zihinlerini meşgul etmiştir. Etik ve siyasal olan arasındaki ilişkiyi en açık şekilde dile getiren filozoflardan biri de Thomas Nagel'dir. Buna göre denilebilir ki Nagel'in öznellik ve nesnellik üzerine soruşturmaları yalnızca etik alanında değil, siyasal düşünce bakımından da önemli noktalara değinmektedir. Öte yandan liberal siyaset kuramının önemli isimlerinden olan John Rawls'un başlangıç durumu ve bilgisizlik peçesi önerileri de siyasal adalet anlayışı ile ilişkili olarak benzer şekilde teklifi tanıyan bir nesnellik düşüncesine işaret eder. Her ne kadar Rawls'un sözleşmecî düşüncesi özellikle siyasal bir tabandan yükselmiş olsa da tarafsız ilkelere dayanan bir cemiyetin olanağını sorgulayan, siyasal adalet ve liberalizm üzerine çalışmalarının belli başlı uğrakları etik ve ahlak alanındaki bir soruşturma kapsamında yeniden değerlendirilebilir. Bu çalışma, bu noktalardan yola çıkarak, ilkin Nagel'in tarafsızlık ve nesnellik kuramını etik-siyasal bir pencereden okumayı hedeflemektedir. İkinci olarak Nagel'in 'hiç yerden bakış' anlayışının Rawls'un 'bilgisizlik perdesi' fikri ile bir arada yeniden

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Hatice Karaman, Yeditepe Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, hatice.karaman@yeditepe.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0003-1682-3709



düşünülmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Buna göre her iki filozofun ilgili tartışmaları karşılaştırmalı bir biçimde ele alınırken söz konusu tartışmalar arasındaki belli paralelliklerin de altı çizilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik, Siyasal Adalet, Nagel, Nesnellik, Rawls

Introduction

In *The View from Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel calls the possibility of conjoining the subjective standpoint within objectivity into question while expounding that objectivity is, indeed, grounded in the subjective perspective of an individual. Nagel's arguments on the objective self and impartiality are of great significance, especially when they are considered together with his further ideas on ethics that are structured upon the basis of the objective self. His discussion in ethics – it would not be wrong to include politics here since Nagel (1989) also states that “there can be no ethics without politics” - evolves around the duality of agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons, in other words, personal and impersonal reasons (p. 188). Nagel attempts to pose a compound model for morality, which juxtaposes subjective and objective reasons. The core of Nagel's understanding of impartiality “lies in the coexistence- in the way each individual looks at the world in general, and at the social world in particular- of a personal Standpoint (a view from inside everyone's particular self), and the impersonal Standpoint” explains Verza , defining the view from nowhere, as “reachable by an effort of abstraction from our particular position in the world; a view which enables us to detach ourselves as elements of the global context” (1999, p. 227). Nagel's notion of the objective self and centerless view, ‘a view from nowhere’, as he names it, attempts to define objectivity without excluding the subjective standpoint. The possibility of a harmony between the subjective and objective, enables Nagel answering to the most substantial questions of ethics such as “why a person should care about others? or why should a person act morally, independent of any religious or doctrinal motives?”

In his review of Rawls's, *A Theory of Justice*, Nagel stresses Rawlsian understanding of justice; ‘justice as fairness’ in particular, and his contractual approach in general. Although he argues that Rawls's presumptions of the contract method are quite powerful, his claim is that the original position Rawls designates does not provide a justification for his theory of egalitarian liberalism but only serves to it:

I have attempted to argue that the presumptions of the contract method Rawls employs are rather strong, and that the original position therefore offers less independent support to his conclusions than at first appears. The egalitarian liberalism which he develops and the

conception of the good on which it depends are extremely persuasive, but the original position serves to the model rather than to justify them (Nagel, 1973, p. 233).

In Rawlsian theory, the original position and the veil of ignorance have vital significance in terms of impartiality for determining the principles of justice to designate a fair society with just institutions. Liberty and equality are the two basic principles of the theory and Rawls respects the two as indispensable for a well-ordered society. When Nagel's questions and investigations about ethics and justice in *What Does It All Mean: A Very Short Introduction To Philosophy* and *The View From Nowhere* are taken into consideration, Rawlsian theory seems to coincide with his concerns. In addition, Rawls's attempt to impartiality in the original position can be assessed in accordance with Nagel's understanding of objectivity and the objective self. Therefore, this paper intends to explore the correlations between Nagel's idea of view from nowhere and Rawls's original position. To this end, an examination of Nagel's objectives and assertions regarding objectivity will serve as a starting point.

1. Objectivity and The Objective Self

Thomas Nagel's *The View From Nowhere* is a book about a single problem as he describes himself. This targeted problem in the book is "how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included" (Nagel, 1989, p.3). For Nagel, objectivity is not the truth but a method of thinking and viewing different aspects of life. It is an attitude towards life and each time it arises from subjectivity since it is only possible when a subject detaches from himself. In his work, Nagel discusses the non-absolute objectivity in its relationship with subjectivity, with its limits and tries to put forward a reconciliation of subjective and objective viewpoints. As he admits, it is not an easy task, but it opens potential perspectives for mediating on ethics, self, science, etc. and developing a worldview:

The difficulty of reconciling the two standpoints arises in the conduct of life as well as in thought. It is the most fundamental issue about morality, knowledge, freedom, the self, and the relation of mind to the physical world. Our response or lack of response to it will substantially determine our conception of the world and of ourselves, and our attitude toward our lives, our actions, and our relations with others (Nagel, 1989, p. 3).

Nagel's understanding of objectivity is elaborated in the chapter *The Objective Self* of VN². In this chapter, Nagel (1989) poses two crucial questions: *How can TN³ be me? How can I be TN?* (p.55). Through these questions Nagel firstly stresses 'being someone' both objectively and subjectively.

² VN: Abbreviation for *A View From Nowhere*

³ TN: Thomas Nagel uses the abbreviation for his name.

The first question points at the objective view and intends to look for the possibility of locating a particular subjectivity among much other subjectivities none of which are centres. For Nagel, an objective view is a conception of the world as it simply is from no privileged perspective. It contains every subject or every individual with their physical and mental histories and thus their subjective standpoints. It “is the world, conceived from nowhere within it” (Nagel, 1989: p.56). Nagel questions whether this totally centerless point of view does include the subjective and indexical proposition ‘I am TN’ which can only be true if uttered by TN himself. He states that this proposition ‘I am X’ is one of the most fundamental things that one could say about the world. All the experience and information of the world is achieved via the subjective self. I am X constitutes a fact about the world even when it is centerless:

If it is not a fact about the centerless world that I am TN, then something must be said about what else it is, for it certainly seems not only true but extremely nontrivial. Indeed, it seems to be one of the most fundamental things I can say about the world. I shall argue that it provides a clear example of the ineliminability of indexicals from a complete conception of the world, and that it also reveals something about each of us (Nagel, 1989: p.57).

Nagel argues that the point of view of the ‘I’ does not account to a sole reality. On the contrary, it is one of the many other viewpoints from which the world is apprehended. A centerless conception of the world should be including all subjects and their consciousness equally. Yet Nagel discusses that no matter how complete this centerless conception is, the fact ‘I am TN’ will be excluded since there is no room for first person facts. On the other hand, it is already presupposed that the centerless view contains the entire world as it is and ‘I am TN’, although providing rather more subjective information, still reveals a fact about this world. The problem is as Nagel posits:

It includes everything and everyone, and what it does not include is not there to be left out. What is left out must exist, and if the world as a whole really doesn’t have a particular point of view, how can one of its inhabitants have the special property of being me? I seem to have on my hands a fact about the world, or about TN, which both must exist (for how things are would be incomplete without it) and cannot exist (for how things are cannot include it). (Nagel, 1989: p.57)

For Nagel, this problem could only be solved with the reconciliation of subjective and objective conceptions. As stated above, the indexicals cannot be eliminated from the world. Accordingly, Nagel objects to the semantic diagnosis or linguistic reduction regarding indexicals. In Nagel’s understanding, the elimination of indexicals for the sake of impersonal and objective truth conditions construes an important gap in the conception of the world. For him, the problem is not the possibility or impossibility of translating first-person facts into impersonal ones, but what



he problematizes is something further than “the person is X” which can be accommodated in the objective view. Nagel (1989, p.60) points to a deeper meaning in propositions such as ‘I am TN’ that “seems to say more about the world than the person speaking is called TN”. *This* problem is already related with the second question of Nagel ‘how can I be TN’, that is it evokes a discussion about subjectivity.

At this stage Nagel firstly stresses the references of TN as a subject among the others from an objective viewpoint. When the world is considered from a centerless standpoint TN is one unspecific, small, insignificant thing among the other contents of it. This impersonal point of view creates a complete detachment from the self or the subjective standpoint. Through this detachment the subject is capable of viewing the world entirely and without a particular perspective. Yet this time, he is the subject of this kind of conception of the world. Thus TN, who is seen as a minor content of the world among all others, is at the same time the specific subject who is considering it within a centerless perspective as it is. Nagel explains:

I am not saying that I individually am the subject of the universe: just that I am *a* subject that can have a conception of the centerless universe in which TN is an insignificant speck, who might easily never have existed at all. The self that seems incapable of being anyone in particular is the self that apprehends the world from rather than a standpoint within it. But there need not be only one such self (Nagel, 1989: p.61).

In this respect, for Nagel, TN is just a *window* through which he attempts to view and conceive the world. One aspect of the self does not have any connection to my perspective and standpoint in the centerless world. The abstraction of the objective self from the subjective self is possible with the use of that person’s experiences in imagining an objective picture. Therefore, the subject’s special relation with himself is irrelevant and the experience is treated indirectly, as if it was a data received from someone else. Objective self is not a distinct entity, but an aspect of a person’s viewpoint. It can be developed to different levels depending on people’s personal life stages, conditions of civilizations, etc. The basis of objectivity is to conceive of oneself as any content of the world among all others from outside. First step is stepping away of the perspective of the subject one thinks he is. The next is to conceive that person’s experiences with all the others and the conception of the world’s content as produced by the interaction of all these beings. This approach of Nagel also puts emphasis on intersubjectivity and recognition by others:

Because a centerless view of the world is one on which different persons can converge, there is a close connection between objectivity and intersubjectivity. By placing TN in a world along with everyone else, I pursue a conception of him and his point of view that others may share... (Nagel, 1989: p.63)

It is again necessary to point out that Nagel states that the objective self is not unique, but every person is one. The cognition of this provides Nagel an idea of objectivity that does not account for an absolute reality. Herein, the objectivity is a direction or a way of a universal conception of reality, which is never entirely complete. Hence, each person can be considered as an objective self as well as being an ordinary person. In addition, the objective self implies that in conceiving the world in a centerless way, the person is the subject of that conception. That is in Nagel's model of objectivity, the subjective and the objective are very closely related. This also argues for not eliminating indexicals as trivial facts regarding the totality of reality: "since the objective conception has a subject, the possibility of its presence in the world is there, and it allows me to bring the subjective and objective views together" (Nagel, 1989, p.64). Because of this relationship between the objective and subjective aspects of the self, 'I am TN' has a further implication than indicating that person is TN in the objective view:

The content of the thought that I am TN can be understood once the objective conception closes over itself by locating the subject that forms it at a particular point in the world that it encompasses. The objective self is the only significant aspect under which I can refer to myself subjectively that is supplied by the objective conception of the world alone –because it is the subject of that conception (Nagel, 1989: p.65).

In short, 'I am TN' encloses in this respect that firstly the subject of the impersonal conception of the world which contains TN along with other subjects, and secondly an ordinary person in the centerless conception who occupies no specific position. The integration of objective and subjective aspects of the self is possible as explained. In addition, by locating the subjective self in the world when viewed from nowhere, not as a center but as a subject or locus of one's own conception of it; Nagel also draws the path to ethics which will be discussed in the following chapter.

2. Ethics and Justice

As mentioned previously, Nagel evokes fundamental ethical questions. His intention is to demonstrate the reasons for choosing the acts that are morally right. The response to this, without doubt, would be crucial for any moral theory. The question why should someone care about other people, especially about the ones whom he has no relations at all? plainly points at the basis of ethical thinking, but it is rather difficult to answer. Therefore, the reconciliation of objective and subjective standpoints as well as Nagel's placing subjective self in the objective world is a significant step for his thought:

The basis of morality is a belief that good and harm to particular people (or animals) is good or bad not just from their point of view, but from a more general point of view, which every thinking person can understand. That means that each person has a reason to consider not only his own interests but the interests of others in deciding what to do (Nagel, 1987: p.66).

In the above quotation Nagel posits the functioning of the objective self. The detachment from one's subjectivity is vital for any ethical or moral consideration. The same argument would also be relevant in terms of Nagel's account of justice. In IP⁴, he specifically focuses on inequalities among people, which are produced by voluntary or involuntary actions and choices. This time, he interrogates the duties and responsibilities of governments for overcoming the inequalities. His basic suggestion is a redistribution of taxes in terms of equality of opportunities. Higher taxation for higher income, as Nagel (1987, p.82) offers requires a social consent especially of those who have higher income. Nagel provisionally argues for this, as there would not be any rejections or oppositions. For this, apparently what he counts on is the same principle of objectivity as an underlying bias as in ethics. In VN, he has a more elaborate focus on the problem, which he stresses by answering Williams' objections to impersonal morality with the claim that they demand too much that there is no room left for one's integrity. For Williams, the demands of an impersonal morality make a good human life impossible when a person conforms. This claim presupposes a distinction between a good life and a moral life. Nagel (1989, p.193) takes the distinction further by asking "which of them has priority in determining how is it reasonable or rational for a person to live? and includes rational life" in the frame. Since he agrees to Williams' putting emphasis on the importance and value of a good life or living well but opposes to reject impersonal concerns totally; he opts for this third aspect of life in order to overcome the clash. This approach of Nagel is can explicitly apprehensible since he has posited the objective or the impersonal standpoint as a significant aspect of the self.

Rationality, as suggested by Nagel here, is not schemed as requisitely producing a binary opposition that what is moral is rational and what is immoral is irrational. Living right is rational but this does not implicate that living well -even when it contravenes the demands of impersonal morality- is necessarily irrational. Nagel's intention is to offer a modification of impersonal morality demands to reduce the clash between the personal and impersonal via rationality: Moral reasoning must be applied to the question of how to draw rational conclusions from conflicts between impersonal reasons and personal ones (Nagel, 1989: p.201).

⁴ Abbreviation for *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*

Nagel considers impersonal morality as developing in two stages:

1. Recognition of the self objectively: At this stage a person concludes that his interests, happiness, or misery is not more important than any other person's. Once admitted, it leads to impartiality not only oneself and others, but also among all other persons.
2. Recognition of limits and reasonableness: Modification of the demands of impersonal morality based on tolerance and limits. A view from outside enables the recognition of the weight of impersonal reasons and their contrasts with personal ones. The modification should situate the impersonal demands to the extent of reasonableness.

Since Nagel agrees that demands of impersonal morality might be overwhelming, Nagel states that impersonal standpoint is not just one and only aspect of a person and morality should also take the personal aspect into consideration:

[...] even though morality has to emerge from an impersonal standpoint, that standpoint must take into account the kind of complex beings for whom it is being devised. The impersonal is only one aspect of their nature, not the whole of it. What is reasonable to ask of them, and what is impersonally expected of them, should reflect this (Nagel, 1989: p.202).

Sacrifice of living well for the sake of impersonal good or supererogatory is also not defined as irrational by Nagel. In addition, he mentions another approach that he calls personal conversion. It is the total change of a lifestyle in the way to be devoted to impersonal values at the cost of excluding all personal ones, being totally induced by a truth of a certain morality. For Nagel, this is rather a radical transformation of lifestyle. Instead, he suggests the political alternative. Accordingly, he concludes in his "Ethics" chapter:

A theory of how individuals should act requires a theory – an ethical theory, not just an empirical one – of the institutions under which they should live: institutions which substantially determine their starting points, choices they can make, the consequences of what they do, and their relations to one another. Since the standpoint of political theory is necessarily objective and detached, it offers strong temptations to simplify, which it is important to resist. A society must be in some sense be organized in accordance with a single set of principles, even though people are very different. (Nagel, 1989: p.188)

As explained in the quotation above, Nagel argues that it is one of the most significant duties of politics to provide 'the harmony' of morality and living well via its organizations and institutions which can reduce the impersonal burden of people. Hence, "the clash between impartiality and the viewpoint of the individual is compounded when we move from personal ethics to political theory" (Nagel, 1987: p.215). It is possible to derive from this suggestion of Nagel that he offers politics as a functional and significant medium where the reconciliation of objective and the subjective selves



of individuals is represented and reflected. Consequently, with a concise revision of Rawls's theory of justice, Nagel's argument for this duty of politics will serve as complementary. Moreover, the idea that politics is necessarily objective and detached will be focused on terms of Rawlsian original position.

3. Original Position and Objectivity

Rawls has two fundamental questions in mind in his Political Liberalism: "how is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?" (Rawls, 2005: p.4). It is clear with the question that he contemplates a stable, well-ordered society which embraces a reasonable pluralism that is sourced by differentiating comprehensive doctrines of the citizens living in this society. Firstly, he attempts to assure the significance of liberty and equality and their respective weight, and he posits "justice as fairness" as the medium for the just arrangement. Accordingly, he proposes two principles of justice: Each person is equal and free. (1) Each person should have access to fair equality of opportunity regardless of socio-economic inequalities, therefore the least advantaged will be provided the greatest benefit which can also be named as the difference principle. (2)

For the common acceptance of these principles of justice, Rawls (2005, p.9) consults 'public political reason' of the reasonable citizens, their conception of justice which should be independent of personal comprehensive doctrines -religious or philosophical. For him "comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrines cannot [...] serve as the basis of society" (Rawls, 2005: p.10). Therefore, Rawls makes it very clear that the well-ordered society should be based on a political conception of justice and public reason in his political liberalism, on which he anticipates an overlapping consensus that will not be confronted by the citizens' comprehensive doctrines:

Political liberalism, then, aims for a political conception of justice as a freestanding view. It offers no specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself. As an account of political values, a freestanding political conception does not deny there being other values that apply, say, to the personal, the familial, and the associational; nor does it say that political values are separate from, or discontinuous with, other values. One aim, as I have said, is to specify the political domain and its conception of justice in such a way that its institutions can gain the support of an overlapping consensus. (Rawls, 2005: pp. 10-11)

For a shared acceptance of the principles of justice in a well-ordered liberal society to be established and stabilized with all its pluralistic elements, the political conception is vitally

significant from Rawls's perspective. Further, he suggests a unique way of recasting the terms of social cooperation, which is the 'original position'. The original position is designed to enable a fair agreement, and this can merely be achieved via 'veil of ignorance' in which the representative parties are ignorant of the social positions, race, ethnicity, gender, and the comprehensive doctrines of their clients. By this device of representation Rawls (2005, p.26) supposes to provide impartiality: "the conception of justice the parties would adopt identifies the conception of justice that we regard – here and now- as fair and supported by the best reasons". That is to say, the original position, with its very specific feature, the veil of ignorance, becomes the ground for the possibility of a political conception of justice, thus a fair social cooperation.

Considering a closed society of a constitutional democracy which is liberal, Rawls constructs his theory over the idea of justice as fairness, a political conception of justice; and determining the terms of social cooperation and its stability is strictly built upon this idea. The fact of pluralism welded by the variety of comprehensive doctrines in the society is embraced via this political conception of justice ensured through the original position. Since political liberalism, as a theory in its completeness, is standing over the political conception of justice; each element of it becomes linked to that: when Rawls (2005, p.11) mentions morality, it can be understood that he refers to political values. This understanding of the political rooting from the conception of justice, branches to the conception of value, conception of citizens, even to the conception of reasonable. It is the most significant aspect of Rawlsian liberalism that it sets the boundary between the personal and the public although in a sense that it promotes a compromise with personal philosophical or religious beliefs and the political or public sphere.

In his initial discussions, in the earlier work, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1999, p.10) presents a conception of justice that he calls "justice as fairness". His conception of justice as fairness has two basic principles:

1. The principle of greatest equal liberty
2. (a) The principle of (fair) equality of opportunity
(b) The difference principle (which promotes the privilege of the most disadvantaged in terms of providence) (Rawls, 1999: p.107.)

The principles of justice are thought to be accepted by free and rational persons in a hypothetical initial position, which is called the original position, as the basis for a well-ordered

society and its institutions. In the original position Rawls imposes some restrictions of knowledge to the parties in order to ensure that the agreements are fair. The original position “is a state of affairs in which the parties are equally represented as moral persons and the outcome is not conditioned by arbitrary contingencies or the relative balance of social forces” (Rawls, 1999, p.104) Therefore, the parties are behind ‘a veil of ignorance’ deprived of specific knowledge so that they must decide in favor of the whole society instead of their personal motives. The parties are deprived of the knowledge regarding their:

- (a) social statuses, economic conditions, intelligence, strength, etc.
- (b) conception of the good, life plans, even specific psychological tendencies
- (c) society’s economic and political conditions, level of civilization and culture
- (d) generation.

On the other hand, the parties know “that their society is subject to the circumstances of justice and whatever this implies, [they also presumably] know the general facts about human society. They understand political affairs [and other] general facts” which will not influence their decisions in the direction of personal good and which will not produce contingencies of advantage or disadvantage for the parties (Rawls, 1999, p.119). “The veil of ignorance rules out information that, Rawls contends, is morally irrelevant to decision on principle of justice” (Freeman, 2003, p.11). Behind the veil of ignorance, in other words with the restrictions of knowledge, which is specifically subjective, Rawls attempts to provide impartiality. The representing parties in the original position are by this way, detached from their subjective selves, to put in Nagel’s terminology. Objectivity in Rawlsian model of the initial status quo is gained via the veil of ignorance. The detachment from the personal viewpoint conducts the representative to advocate for general good. The representative in the original position is required to initiate himself as the objective self. He evaluates the principles of justice for a society in which he is contended indistinctively, among many other members of it. Namely, the representative in the original position and behind the veil of ignorance views the conditions of the society from *nowhere*. He is both the subject in the agreement process, but also has no specific subjectivity as the member of the relevant society. Viewing the society without a particular perspective, or from nowhere, the parties in the original position of Rawls, need to decide on the principles of justice impersonally. Therefore, Rawls’s original position constitutes a figurative model, for the objective and detached self as suggested by

Nagel. Yet Rawls conditions objectivity with a veil of ignorance instead of defining it simply as detachment. The objective point of view Rawls expects to achieve in the original position via the veil of ignorance is most remarkably declared in *Political Liberalism*:

...we must find some point of view, removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the all-encompassing background framework, from which a fair agreement between persons regarded as free and equal can be reached. (Rawls, 2005: p.23)

Rawls presents a revised account of justice in *Political Liberalism* in which the “division between the personal and the political, and the assignment of justice firmly to political category, has come to prominence” (Nagel, 2003, p.82). In this latter work, Rawls marks the political conception of justice more explicitly:

Political liberalism, then, aims for a political conception of justice as a freestanding view. It offers no specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself. As an account of political values, a freestanding political conception does not deny there being other values that apply, say, to the personal, the familial, and the associational; nor does it say that political values are separate from, or discontinuous with, other values. (Rawls, 2005: p.10)

This distinguished approach of Rawls to justice as a ‘freestanding’ and political conception is more concordant when juxtaposed with Nagel’s claim that considers politics as necessarily objective and detached. It is also significant with respect to the aims of Rawls in *Political Liberalism* since “in justifying a set of principles as just, liberal theorists have sought to demonstrate how their favored conception can be the subject of free rational endorsement within the constraints of what is morally permissible” (Sleat, 2015: p.235). The distinction of Rawls between political conception of justice and comprehensive doctrines can as well be redefined as the distinction of personal and impersonal in accordance with Nagelian ethics. In addition, Rawls stresses the possibility of reconciliation of the political and personal motives, as does Nagel, for the objective and the subjective reasons:

Citizens usually have both political and nonpolitical aims and commitments. They affirm the values of political justice and want to see them embodied in political institutions and social policies. They also work for the other values in nonpublic life and for the ends of the associations to which they belong. These two aspects of their moral identity citizens must adjust and reconcile. (Rawls, 2005: p.31)

Conclusion

There are several parallelisms between the contractual political theory of John Rawls and Nagel’s approach to ethics that is constructed upon his understanding of objectivity. Yet, it is also crucial to annotate that “there are several very important dimensions across which Rawls’s project and Nagel’s have very different scope” (Thomas, 2009, 220). On the other hand, at different stages,



these two approaches support and render each other more comprehensible. The reconciliation -of the personal and impersonal, objective and subjective, political and non-political- is crucial for both philosophers. This attempt for such reconciliation also forms the distinctive qualities of both theories. Nagel's idea of objectivity and the objective self is enriched with its correlation to the subject, which leads to a combined approach in his ethics. Nagel's ethical suggestions are neither solely dependent on agent-neutral nor agent-relative reasons that he offers a more moderate and *reasonable* notion of morality. Furthermore, his definition of the objective self as 'not unique but many' allows a pluralistic standpoint both in terms of science and society. In a similar manner, by considering the individual with both political and non-political aspects of morality Rawls argues that each person might have his own comprehensive doctrine preserved separately from the political conception. This again enables a pluralism in which the political standpoint is independent from each of the many other doctrines. Consequently, reading Nagel's work from a more political point of view such as Rawls's political liberalism and with a focus of justice provides a more exposed apprehension of his arguments.

References

- Freeman, S. (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, T. (1973). Rawls On Justice. *The Philosophical Review*, 82(2), 220-234.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2183770>
- Nagel, T. (1987). Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 16(3), 215–240. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265265>
- Nagel, T. (1987). *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nagel, T. (1989). *The View From Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1999). *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*. USA: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2005). *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sleat, M. (2015). Justice and Legitimacy in Contemporary Liberal Thought: A Critique. *Social Theory and Practice*, 41(2), 230–252. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24332279>
- Thomas, A. (2009). *Thomas Nagel*. Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing
- Verza, A. (1999). Impartiality in the Liberal Theories of Rawls and Nagel. *ARSP: Archiv Für Rechts- Und Sozialphilosophie / Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy*, 85(2), 222-232. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23681324>



Makale Gönderim Tarihi/Received Date: 14.04.2023
Makale Kabul Tarihi/Accepted Date: 18.06.2023
Yıl/Year: 2023, Sayı/Issue: 11, Sayfa/Page: 1-14

www.toplumvekultur.com
[Araştırma/Research](http://www.toplumvekultur.com)
<https://doi.org/10.48131/jscs.1283423>

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış Bağımsız

Yazar Katkısı: Hatice Karaman %100 katkı sağlamıştır.

Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı: Çalışma için destek alınmamıştır.

Etik Onay: Bu makale, insan veya hayvanlar ile ilgili etik onay gerektiren herhangi bir araştırma içermemektedir.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı: Çalışma ile ilgili herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Peer Review: Independent double-blind

Author Contributions: Hatice Karaman contributed 100% to the study.

Funding and Acknowledgement: No support was received for the study.

Ethics Approval: This study does not contain any human or animal research that requires ethical approval.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest with any insütution or person related to the study.
