

In-depth look at reality

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Abstract

Reality is highly important to us for we would prefer to live with reality rather than live with the imaginary world or the world of dreams, e.g., we would prefer ideas and concepts to be realistic, i.e., rooted in the real-life situation, rather than being merely theoretical and not practicable. Reality is apparently a slippery concept which is difficult to have a firm grasp on. Hence, there are many quizzical questions asked in this paper in order to be able to really come to terms with the very abstract, slippery concept of reality. There could be different ways of interpreting reality resulting in differing concepts of reality, which would be a problem as logically there should be only one true, valid, consistent concept of reality - the author posits such a concept of reality in the conclusion, a reasoned concept which is apparently more logically consistent.

Keywords: Physical senses; consciousness; existence; truth; actuality.

1 Introduction

As conscious, intelligent beings, we might question reality - whether something is real, imaginary or just hypothetical. Reality is intangible, abstract and we might wonder what it really is. How do we know or prove that something is real and not imaginary, hypothetical, illusory or just a dream? Here we attempt to grapple with these issues.

We proceed to describe or define reality. Reality is the sum or aggregate of all that is real or existent, as opposed to that which is merely imaginary. The term is also used to refer to the ontological status of things, indicating their existence. In physical terms, reality is the totality of the universe, known and unknown. Philosophical questions about the nature of reality or existence or being are considered under the classification of ontology, which is a major branch of metaphysics in the Western philosophical tradition. Ontological questions also feature in various branches of philosophy, including the philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of religion and philosophical logic. These include questions about whether only physical objects are real, i.e., physicalism, whether reality is fundamentally immaterial, e.g., idealism, whether hypothetical unobservable entities posited by scientific theories exist, whether numbers and other abstract objects exist, whether possible worlds exist,

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whether God exists, etc. Reality could be further defined as existence that is absolute, self-sufficient, or objective, and not subject to human decisions or conventions; a thing that is actually experienced or seen, especially when it is unpleasant; the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them; the state or quality of having existence or substance; the quality of being lifelike; or a thing that exists in fact, having previously only existed in one's mind. ^[1, 2, 5, 9]

2 Characteristics of reality

Those things that could be detected by the physical senses such as sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing could be regarded as real. For example, green is green as seen by the eyes and no one would dispute with one over this (unless of course if the person is colour blind which is a rare physical defect that is found in some people). The same applies to good smell or bad smell, tastiness or rotten taste, hardness or softness, loudness or softness, etc., in general.

Many have wondered: Is mathematics, which is an exact science, real or invented? In mathematics only the counting numbers appear real, e.g., 1 car, 10 persons, 100 flags, etc., which could be counted/measured, and geometrical shapes which could be seen/measured with the eyes such as roundness, squareness, length, width, etc., which no one would dispute over. The problem appears to be with abstract “objects” which could not be detected/measured/counted by the above-mentioned physical senses such as beauty (e.g., in a beauty contest some may think that the beauty queen is not a deserving winner and the second runner up should be the beauty queen, etc.), ugliness, intelligence, stupidity, good, evil, rightness, wrongness, logic, illogic, kindness, selfishness, etc., which are subject to subjective interpretation and also subject to disputes. Similarly many areas in mathematics which are very abstract and don't directly involve the above-mentioned physical senses also depend on subjective interpretation and are subject to disputes, e.g., the proof of a statement whose logical consistency is a matter of subjective interpretation with nothing to do at all with the above-mentioned physical senses. In mathematics, a statement which is obvious and needs not to have a proof is called an axiom. Other mathematical statements which aren't obvious need to have proofs to ascertain their validity. The interesting question here is what is obvious to one person might not be obvious to another person depending on their levels of intelligence; similarly the obviousness of the logical consistency of a mathematical statement or its proof to one person might not be so to another person. A simple example here: $6 + 6 = 12$ might be obvious to a person of normal intelligence but might not be so to a person whose intelligence is at the level of the mentally defective. ^[2-9]

This point may be considered: whether reality itself is real? Reality is a term used to denote that something exists. To a conscious, intelligent being like us something that exists is evidently something we are conscious of through our physical senses: what we see, hear, feel tactilely, taste, smell. Though we cannot see, hear, feel, taste, smell reality, reality is associated with the objects we could see, hear, feel, taste, smell, i.e., the objects we could see, hear, feel, taste, smell

are real to us, and, something we could not see, hear, feel, taste, smell aren't real to us (which could perhaps be called imaginary objects).

Paradoxically, something not real could also be considered real, i.e., the non-existence of an object could be considered a reality, in other words, it could be a fact that an object does not exist. That is, something could be really unreal.

Real objects which we could see, hear, feel, taste, smell are tangible objects, which are grammatically known as nouns. Objects we could not see, hear, feel, taste, smell could be regarded as intangible objects, which are grammatically known as abstract nouns, e.g., reality, non-reality, beauty, ugliness, intelligence, foolishness, honesty, dishonesty, etc.

Reality, which we cannot see, hear, feel, taste, smell, is evidently a creation (or concept) of the conscious mind. We created the term "real" to describe something we could see, hear, feel, taste, smell - something that exists. Paradoxically, as is also stated above, the non-existence or non-reality of an object (an object which we don't see, hear, feel, taste, smell and therefore non-existent or non-real to us) could also be regarded as real, i.e., the non-existence or non-reality of the object is a fact or a truth. ^[6]

Perhaps, broadly speaking, reality could be regarded as anything the mind is conscious of - sight, noise, feel, taste, smell, reality, non-reality, truth, falsehood, sense, nonsense, beauty, ugliness, existence, non-existence, life, death, tangibility, intangibility, visibility, invisibility, fullness, emptiness, consciousness, unconsciousness, intelligence, foolishness, happiness, sadness, anger, humor, imagination, dream, spirituality, nothingness, loneliness, weirdness, etc. Reality could thus perhaps be regarded simply as consciousness. By this definition, even if the world is devoid of consciousness as would be the case if the world is suddenly without conscious beings, this non-existence or non-reality of reality could still be regarded as a reality by some possibly existent other-worldly, perhaps godly, conscious being who is conscious of this non-existence or non-reality of reality, i.e., this non-existence or non-reality of reality is real to this conscious being.

The above is one way of interpreting reality. There could be other ways of interpreting reality, e.g., someone might argue that reality is just an invention of the human mind and if the mind (perhaps the mind of an animal, which has lower intelligence) could not conceive reality or think of it it would not exist.

Reality may in reality be just a creation, invention or concept of the intelligent human mind. It is indeed doubtful if reality exists in the non-human mind, e.g., the mind of an animal such as a dog, cat or horse.

3 Probing further into reality

Reality is existence, fact, truth. As intelligent beings, we are always concerned with reality or the truth and abhor lies, fakeness, falsity. But we are also not averse to using falsity and lies to deceive others in order to achieve our objectives. Who has never lied before? As the interpretation of reality apparently has a tendency to be subjective it would often be difficult to

differentiate between the real, the truth, and the unreal, the false. Here we probe further into reality.

One view is that reality itself is not static and is changing with time. What is reality now may be a different reality in future. The future reality depends on the present reality. We cannot be sure of reality.

Another view is that reality may be a fixed pattern waiting to be discovered, e.g., in the case of scientific research. However, the problem with science is that what is seen and considered real depends on how the scientist interprets what is seen. Some may think that nature is not really a fixed pattern. So is this fixed pattern of nature indeed real or not? ^[1]

We intelligent beings, especially scientists, attempt to see “order” or pattern where there is disorder, chaos or lack of order. When there is order or pattern in natural phenomena scientists are able to understand, explain them or predict them through reasoning or “cause and effect”. When there is disorder, chaos, lack of pattern in natural phenomena they are unable to reason thus or predict the outcome - they will apparently then try to look out for some order or pattern in this disorder or chaos and on seeing some order, pattern or predictability will feel some sense of control, understanding and relief. It might be a case of scientists “seeing” what they (at least subconsciously) wanted to see. In other words, scientific work might be a case of make-belief. This apparently explains why scientific theories are revised or even discarded from time to time with “new evidences” whose reality might be doubtful. ^[1]

It should be best for the scientific to keep an open, objective mind about scientific theories whether these scientific theories are created by themselves or others and be prepared to revise or discard them when the reason against them are evident. Nothing should be cast in stone. Our intelligent mind is apparently far from perfect when even the apparently most highly intelligent could not agree among themselves on what should be the facts or truths. Reality, fact or truth could be just a case of subjective interpretation. ^[1]

What students learn from the science textbooks have to be taken for granted to be the truth, for even if they doubt or know that the textbooks are wrong they would not be able to pass exams if they did not present these “wrong truths” in the exams. For every one of us, the practical problem could be that if we keep doubting the “scientific truths” and frequently dispute them nothing much productive could be achieved. So everyone just go along with the “truths” until they are strongly proven otherwise. This appears to be the problem of reality, fact or truth. ^[1]

In science, the peer review or consensus among peers confirms the validity of a scientific truth. Here it is assumed that these peers are highly intelligent and know what they are talking about. Who are best in the position to judge the intellect, competence, objectivity and passion for truths of these peers who determine what the scientific “truths” are? It is apparent that everyone takes for granted that these scientists are highly intelligent, competent and have a passion for the truth. It appears that in an important way it is the scientists who determine or confirm reality, or, facts for society as a whole. ^[1]

Could reality be regarded as the way the physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch interpret the surrounding or environment?

On a more fundamental level, since the physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch are felt by the brain or consciousness, could reality be regarded as the way consciousness or intelligence interprets the environment, the interpretation varying from person to person depending on their levels of intelligence and even their varying cultures, which implies that

when consciousness does not exist, e.g., when the person is dead, reality would not exist (at least to the unconscious/dead person)?

Can we say that reality is an abstract entity used to describe existence, fact or truth which we experience with the physical senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch, and become aware of with our conscious mind, with the experience more or less similar among all conscious, intelligent beings - reality requiring a certain level of intelligence to comprehend while beings of lower intelligence such as animals may not know or be aware of reality? Thus, can we say that reality may not be real (as it's not directly experienced by the physical senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch, which have been described as the condition for reality) but is just an invention of the intelligent mind, or, even an illusion? Can we say that as reality is an abstract entity (never heard, seen, smelt, tasted or touched), if it exists it exists only in the mind or consciousness?

Another view is that there are at least two kinds of reality, one which we could observe and experience with our physical senses (the 10% or so of the iceberg above sea level which we could see), and, the other part of reality which is beyond the reach of our physical senses (the 90% or so of the iceberg below sea level which is out of our sight) which we have to discover/deduce/reconstruct? Can we say that the aim of science is to discover new realities (from the 90% or so of the iceberg below sea level which is out of our sight) then? The reality which we see may actually be very little, e.g., about 10% of the actual reality. ^[1]

Perhaps a practical way to confirm the reality or existence of an object is to get several people to view and describe the object; if the descriptions of the object by these people are by and large similar the object is real. A person who views an object might sometimes think that his senses might have been wrong and had deceived him, i.e., he becomes doubtful of the reality of the seen object, e.g., the color or size of the object, or even whether the object is really there. Similar descriptions of the object by other people viewing it would clear his doubts and confirm for him the reality of what he has seen. Viewed from this angle, the saying "reality or existence is that something our mind is conscious of when it is experienced with our physical senses, and, once the object is out of our consciousness it is not real and does not exist" does not make much sense; here we should be concerned with the mass consciousness of the object of the many people encountering the object at different times and not just the consciousness of the object of one person at one moment of time. Would it not be ridiculous to apply this same reasoning and say that John is real/exists as long as others are conscious of him and he would not be real/would not exist when others are not conscious of him? (John might have been forgotten but he is certainly not dead or non-existent.) Can we thus say that reality is the similar view, experience or conclusion of all the people who have experienced/observed the same object with their physical senses? This could be one of the many possible interpretations of reality. ^[1, 2, 5, 9]

4 Conclusion

Different interpretations of reality are presented in this paper. One might ask which of these different interpretations of reality is the valid one. Perhaps they are all valid interpretations when viewed from their respective angles. It would be difficult if not impossible to prove or affirm the validity of any of them. The moot point is also whether reality itself is real or just an invention or creation of the intelligent mind or consciousness as some might regard reality as an abstraction or conception of the intelligent mind or consciousness while some others who are more radical

might even regard it as an illusion. Apparently reality is a difficult, slippery concept which is hard to have a firm grasp on.

After all the different ways reality could be interpreted are expounded, which all appear to have some merit of their own, the author posits that reality could actually be consciousness which is able to comprehend, physically sense, e.g., see, hear, taste, smell and feel through touch, feel emotions, carry out reasoning activity and create concepts and ideas; without consciousness to firstly create the abstract idea of reality, reality would be non-existent, i.e., if consciousness does not exist the very concept of reality, which is an abstraction or conception that has no physical property created by consciousness (also known as mind) itself, could not exist either. Thus it could be stated that reality is consciousness; the existence or even non-existence of reality or consciousness as an idea or concept could be understood by consciousness which must first exist in order to understand it and think of it or about it. In other words, a conscious mind which exists creates the concept of reality, and, if the conscious mind, or consciousness in short, does not exist reality could not exist. This interpretation of reality is apparently more logically consistent and makes more practical sense compared to the other interpretations of reality.

The following reasoning explains further this point about reality being consciousness: First, reality is not a physical, tangible, solid object like a tree, a hill or a chair which could be witnessed by the physical senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and feel through touch. In fact, reality is an abstract and intangible concept or idea created by and originating from consciousness. Second, consciousness is also abstract and intangible like reality, which is an important similarity apparently implying oneness of consciousness and reality. Third, if consciousness which carries out thinking, reasoning and conceiving of concepts and ideas is non-existent, reality which is an abstract and intangible concept or idea conceived by and originating from consciousness would also be non-existent. That is, consciousness which is the creator and originator of the abstract and intangible concept or idea of reality must exist first before reality could exist; without consciousness there could never be reality. Fourth, anything that exists is a reality, i.e., existence is reality. Fifth, as consciousness exists it is a reality. Sixth, as consciousness is also the physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feel through touch, consciousness is able to sense through the physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feel through touch whether a physical object such as a tree, a hill or a chair exists and is a reality. Seventh, as consciousness, being the creator and originator of other realities, must first exist before other realities could exist and since consciousness which exists is reality itself, consciousness must be the first reality that precedes all other realities, all realities being abstract and intangible concepts or ideas that are created by and originate from consciousness which is itself abstract and intangible. That is, without consciousness, which is the first reality, there could never be other realities. Eighth, consciousness thus embodies all realities and is the one true, consistent reality, i.e., consciousness is reality itself in the most general sense.

Clarifying further, reality is a concept, which is abstract and has no physical or tangible property; a concept is the product of consciousness or mind; if there is no consciousness there would not be reality as is stated above, i.e., consciousness must first exist before it could form the concept of reality; reality, being a product of consciousness and without physical property, exists only within consciousness and not outside consciousness, e.g., in the external physical world; in other words, reality is a thought of consciousness which would be conscious of it (reality); therefore, reality is consciousness itself, i.e., consciousness which thinks of reality and is conscious of reality. Reality refers to the actual existence of a thing, e.g., a person, a physical object such as a table, a non-physical object such as a concept, e.g., reality and consciousness

which are both intangible concepts. Consciousness could be conscious of itself as well as reality, and could regard itself as a reality. Consciousness thinks of or is conscious of the concept of reality (the state of existence) itself and the realities of other objects, both tangible and intangible, i.e., consciousness could think of reality itself as a concept and reality as the existence of other tangible and intangible objects (apart from reality itself), which is a subtle point. Falsehood, imagination, dreams, lies, other negative objects, etc., could also be realities to consciousness or mind as long as they exist, for reality is existence.

Elaborating further, reality is only an abstract thought or concept which originates from consciousness and is never a member of the external physical world; the existence, i.e., reality, of the external physical world is felt or confirmed by consciousness through the physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and feel through touch and without consciousness the reality of the external physical world would not be realized. Consciousness could also be consciousness of itself as the entity consciousness (first kind of reality), also as the entity that could be conscious of its consciousness of other entities regardless of whether these entities are abstract/intangible or tangible (second kind of reality), and, also as the entity that could be conscious of these other entities as they are or as they exist (third kind of reality) - three kinds of consciousness and three kinds of reality are described here with there possibly more kinds of consciousness and reality, consciousness and reality apparently being one and the same as is described above. Reality could therefore be regarded as the consciousness of the existence, i.e., reality, of an object regardless of whether the object is tangible or intangible, solid or abstract, e.g., the existence, i.e., reality, of a tangible, solid table or chair and the existence, i.e., reality, of an intangible, abstract truth or falsehood. In other words since reality is of the mind and mental, when the mind, i.e., consciousness, conceives of and is conscious of reality reality (as a conception) would exist, while when the mind or consciousness does not conceive of and is not conscious of reality reality (as a conception) would not exist.

This is a further generalization: Consciousness or mind originates in the brain which is physical matter. Without the brain there evidently would not be consciousness or mind. If the brain were diseased or damaged, consciousness, and thereby reality, would be adversely affected, e.g., loss of memory and reasoning power in a person suffering from dementia which is a mental disease or in a person whose brain has been damaged through, e.g., an accident. On the other hand, the brain of a person consuming drugs such as mental boosting drugs could have enhanced mental ability or consciousness, drugs such as anti-depressants could make the person feel better emotions, drugs such as cannabis, which are illegal in most countries, could bring feelings of high excitement and hallucinations, etc. That is, consciousness could be modified with drugs which affect the brain. Therefore, the brain from which consciousness, and thereby reality, originates could be regarded as the ultimate or most important reality. The brain could be regarded as the first, basic reality which gives rise to consciousness, which could be regarded as the second reality, which in turn conceives all other realities, with the concepts of reality apparently varying from person to person to some extent (which is manifested in the differing view-points and beliefs held by people) which depend on the quality of their respective brains and their respective environment which influence their thinking. Apparently, there could be different realities with differing cause-and-effect characteristics.

In answer to the question "What is reality?" it could be said that reality is the state of existence of a tangible or intangible object, which is witnessed by the consciousness or mind which owes its existence to and originates from the brain. This statement implies that if consciousness is not present to witness this state of existence, or, if the brain is dead, i.e., not

functioning, and thus consciousness is also dead and gone, this state of existence would not be known and would be as good as being non-existent.

The convoluted reasoning in this section represents an arduous attempt to come to terms with the apparently slippery, difficult concept of reality. It could be seen that reality, and, consciousness which could also be regarded as the brain itself which is the control unit of the physical body of the person and defines the person as an individual, personality or character, are so closely and intimately linked that they could be regarded as an unity, e.g., a conscious person would be aware of reality, i.e., to the conscious person reality would exist, while an unconscious person would be unaware of reality, i.e., to the unconscious person reality would not exist. The world of reality is apparently the world of consciousness. Consciousness is like the sheet on which reality, i.e., objects of reality, is painted, or, the film which captures reality, i.e., objects of reality. Reality is apparently also an object of intellectualization, which means that only a person with a sufficient level of intelligence would be able to understand its significance which would probably exclude animals with their lower level of intelligence and people who are intellectually challenged for whom reality would probably not exist. Finally it could be concluded that reality is just an abstraction or conception of consciousness which could be in response to some external or internal stimuli, which shows that reality is a part of consciousness as reality represents existence witnessed by consciousness, i.e., the existence of an object or objects which could be tangible or intangible witnessed by consciousness, i.e., consciousness is conscious of the existence of this object or objects, or, reality of this object or objects, reality and existence being synonymous as is described above; in other words, reality represents consciousness of any tangible or intangible object which exists, within consciousness itself. Reality being a concept within consciousness is thus consciousness itself.

We here sum up as follows for a precise explanation of reality: Reality consists of data obtained through our physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. These senses are the result of having a physical body which comprises the eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue, as well as other organs such as the lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, brain, etc., with their respective nerve cells and blood vessels which send messages to the brain, which interprets these messages as reality. Thus, without the physical body and the brain, in particular the brain - which is evidently the “master” that controls the functions of the various parts of the physical body, there would not be any interpretation of reality. That is, without the brain (a part of the physical body), or, consciousness (which equates with the interpretation of reality), there would not be reality. As convoluted as all this appears to be, this is all the basis of reality.

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