

# What is really real? argumentative essay

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



The nature of what constitutes reality is a subject that has intrigued many philosophers in their time – the difference between reality and perception leaves a great deal of ambiguity as to whether or not the physical things we sense every day constitutes a true sense of the nature of the world. To that end, this paper seeks to explore the nature of reality, and whether we can truly know what is real. Works by Plato and George Berkeley will be used to cover these issues of reality and perception. Plato believes that life is made up of ideal Forms that we can never truly reach, and that we can never truly know whether or not we are looking at reality or fooled into thinking this is all reality is. Plato imagines people stuck in a cave. The cave is an allegory for the mind. Plato argues in the Republic that human beings are prisoners who only see the “ shadows passing in front of them” (qtd in Kessler, 2013, p. 382). It is difficult for human beings to grasp what is really real. Berkeley, on the other hand, believes that the mere perceiving of a thing makes it ‘ real,’ as we can only ever know the world through ideas rather than tangible realities. I will be arguing for Berkeley’s perspective over Plato’s, though both share similar perspectives; however, I favor Berkeley’s idea-based concept of reality over Plato’s slightly more cynical take on the subject. In Chapter Ten Section Three, on Platonic Dualism, Plato’s take on reality can best be expressed through his Allegory of the Cave – in it, a number of people are chained to a wall in a cave, forcing them to look nowhere but the wall in front of them (qtd. in Kessler, 2013, p. 380). To these people, that is the only reality they know; they are only able to see the shadows of figures in front of them made with light, and so they believe this is what human beings look like. As a result, this society has a certain number of

assumptions about reality based on what they see. However, one man is able to escape the cave and learn the true nature of the outside world, which is completely unlike anything he has seen before (ibid.). This is Plato's way of expressing his ideas about reality, in which mankind can never really know whether what they perceive is the true nature of things. To that end, we must never assume that we know what is really real.

Berkeley, meanwhile, in his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, reprinted in Kessler's textbook in Chapter Ten, Section Five, on Subjective Idealism, states that reality is heavily reliant on how we perceive it. Berkeley writes "esse is percipi" which basically means "to be is to be perceived" (qtd. in Kessler, 2013, p. 395). Ideas are the province of human perception, not physical objects – when we look at a thing, we mostly know how we sense it, what we think about it, and what we imagine it to be, not what it is. People must perceive the world around them in order to shape their reality, according to Berkeley, and so we must remember that what we see in the world is incredibly subjective. Objects, according to Berkeley, cannot really exist if they are not perceived, making human beings the sole creators of reality from their perspective. Someone who perceives the outside world has created his or her own reality, which is just as valid as any other's perception (which cannot be shared in the exact same way) (qtd in Kessler, 2013, p. 398).

While both have similar ideas (i. e. reality is filtered through human perception), Plato and Berkeley's opinions on the validity of that perception of reality differ. According to Plato, reality is an objective thing that can be measured and reasoned to be – for the people in the Cave, the sun is the

source of all light, and the only problem is that they have not been able to turn around and see it yet. The one man who does escape and see the sun becomes a philosopher, a man who can return to the others in the cave and enlighten them on the nature of an objective reality they are incorrect about. This is a very intriguing premise, and one that seems more sensible from an objective viewpoint. As human beings, we do (and should) continue to strive to learn more about our reality, and so Plato's perspective challenges us to not accept what we see as all there is.

However, Berkeley's perspective is a bit more holistic, and allows for greater freedom of subjectivity. As we perceive an object, Berkeley (like Plato) fully admits we may not perceive a thing the same way someone else would, but from his perspective that perception is as real as anything could be. Berkeley believes our perception shapes our world, not the other way around; if he were to see the people in Plato's cave, he would likely say that the shadows they saw in the cave constituted a valid reality that does not necessarily need to be corrected.

In conclusion, the way Plato and Berkeley look at reality are both fascinating in their approach to ambiguity, but I vastly prefer Berkeley's subjectivity to Plato's assertion of objectivity. This perspective permits a much greater freedom to deal with the reality that is in front of you, rather than engaging in the fruitless, and ultimately unattainable, search for objective truth and reality. Instead, Berkeley's theory gives us room to better explore our own reality and what it means to us.

## **References**

Kessler, G. E. (2013). *Voices of wisdom: A multicultural philosophy reader*. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.