

Perception and reality essay sample



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Introduction

This paper will attempt to argue against the common misconceptions about reality and perception. It will try to explain that perception and reality are interconnected, and that our five human senses are not the sole basis of reality, they are just instrumental to an additional process of perception that will bring the truth in our lives.

This paper will briefly discuss the historical progression of human apprehension of the world he exists in. From Plato to Quantum Physics, the paper will clearly show how our perception can change the way we view the world.

Admittedly this topic is broad and the paper could not possibly cover all its aspects. The paper will only focus wherein it will show that the creation of our reality is significantly based on our perception, there are important aspects that were left out like the nature of consciousness and its role on perception. Although this will enhance the understanding of perception and reality, it is no longer a necessity for this concept to be elaborated further.

Some citations and explanations are self evident; other examples are very technical, if the reader would like to have a further understanding of the cited examples, a different reference might be needed.

I. What is Reality?

“ What is real? How do you define real?

If you're talking about what you can hear, what you can smell, taste and fee,

then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.” -Morpheus,
The Matrix

Reality in its simplest explanation is “ everything that exists.” It covers everything from atoms to the stars in a faraway galaxy and everything in between, including the everyday objects we encounter. Non-material objects like thoughts and ideas, love, purpose, meaning can also be ascribed some semblance of reality to them. However, all these and everything that exists can be said to only exist because we perceived them. So if everything that exists are only objects of our perception, what is real then?

More than 2000 years ago, some guy named Zeno presented a riddle that up to now baffled scientists and thinkers alike. It was called the “ The Arrow Paradox.” Zeno argued that the flight of an arrow is an example of motion. He stated that in any given moment of time, the arrow is either where it is, or where it is not, if the arrow is where it is, then it is not moving, if it is where it is not, then it cannot possibly be there, the arrow can only be where it is; thus, it cannot move and is always at rest, although in different locations in space. To understand this better consider the light bulbs we usually see as Christmas decors, there is a perception that lights are running from one direction to the other, but in reality, the lights just blink on and off in a sequential pattern so as to create the illusion that it is moving.

Here we have a paradox, on one hand; no one can refute what Zeno had claimed. That the arrow never moves. Logically speaking, no one has ever succeeded in disproving what he said. In other words, he was so correct in his analysis that no one can dispute them. On the other hand, our common

sense will undeniably tell us that the arrow is moving, thus the paradox. This paper was not meant to present a resolution to Zeno's riddle, (although there is a perfectly logical explanation based on our latest scientific knowledge, this paper will no longer tackle it.) the paradox was only cited to illustrate the dilemma of human perception, that the reality based on our perception is not absolute and varies as our perspective changes. Reality will always be dependent on what we perceive and how we perceive it.

II. The Nature of Perception

The most common model of perception is that what we see, hear, smell, touch and feel is what is real. These are input data sensors that go straight to our brain. The brain then interprets the vibratory information to construct images that evoke ideas and emotions to name a few. These images in turn are further conceptualized by assigning meanings to these mental constructs, completing the whole process of perception.

Without interpretation there is no perception, we commonly think that two different people looking at the same object would see the same thing. But it is possible that the interpretation of the brain will tell us that the two persons may not be seeing the same thing. A good example would be the case of a glass half filled with water, two persons may see the same sensory input that tells them that there is a glass and there is water in it, but if you ask them what they see, one may tell that the glass is half-full and the other may tell that the glass is half-empty. Why is this so?

The sensory inputs of our perception, when it goes to the brain, are filtered by the mind. So, the way those signals or inputs are constructed inside the

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brain are affected by various factors. The factors that affect our perception maybe our environment, culture, upbringing, experiences, beliefs, etc. there may not be a conflict to see a single object with nothing in the background, they would surely see the same thing. But imagine seeing everything and the relata of all objects all around us all at once. It is easy to imagine now how challenging to the brain the process of perception is.

However, though our naked perception is only limited, by the help of our instruments we are able to perceive a world that is totally different from what we commonly see, by the use of these devices, we were able to magnify the scale and scope of our perception. This enables us to see and imagine the worlds on both end of the spectra of the infinitely large and the infinitely small. With this capability, we were able to hold varying world views throughout our history. These world views are how we see ourselves and the world around us. It seems that for humans, bare perception and its interpretation are inseparable. Because of this, the nature of perception has an intrinsic illusory aspect, we believe that the things we see are actually what they are, although we can hold this to be relatively true, most of the time, it is not always the case.

There have been some serious studies to show that the universe is nothing more than a holographic representation of the brain (a hologram is a 3d image projected into space by the aid of lasers.). This theory will sure shake the very foundation of our sense of reality, and if true, then the illusory nature of perception is very possible. Why? Because what we see to be real is totally different from what a holographic universe will suggest. In other

words, we should always be prepared to at least accept a new world view based on the implications of the latest scientific knowledge.

III. The Role of Perception in Reality

The Allegory of Plato's Cave

Plato imagined humans living in an underground cave, with an opening where light enters as big as the cave a long way at the top. They've been there since birth, their bodies held in place by metal shackles. Their eyes are only limited to see what is in front of them because their bonds restrict them from turning their heads around. There is a fire burning behind them on higher ground. These men cannot see the fire or the objects behind them, only their shadows.

The shadows are their only idea of reality

Plato suggested in his allegory that the world our senses show us is not necessarily what it seems to be, our perception can fool us into believing what is actual.

A long time ago, the world was believed to be flat, by common sense, that's what our eyes would tell us, and then later on, when men circumnavigated the world, they imagined and started to believe that the world was round, there was a change in perception, and later on, when our astronauts saw the world in outer space and satellites took pictures of the globe, they confirmed that what was previously believe that the world is flat was false. As another example, our senses will tell us that the earth is still, but actually, it spins at a specific velocity around its axis.

Reality as a paradigm of our Perception

To further understand the evolution of our beliefs and perception, let us discuss the various world views and beliefs human beings had throughout its history.

In the Newtonian era, more than 200 years ago, the prevailing world view was that everything was mechanical and deterministic, that the world is governed and follow very specific physical laws and the that universe was made out of solid spherical objects with independent existence that interact with one another. Now this paradigm was radically altered by the discovery of Einstein's theory of Relativity. The era of relativity told us that these objects had no independent existence of its own, that the existence of one object is dependent on the existence of another. This idea becomes clear when we try to define something. For example, what is energy? We define energy as the product of mass and motion, if you will notice, energy can only be defined by relating it to mass and motion, and the same goes with mass and motion, nothing can be defined and understood without referring to each other.

By the late 20th century, when scientist began to understand quantum mechanics, a more radical world view has been realized. It was so radical because it states that objects have no cause. The subatomic particles, which are the building blocks of everything we can see, come out of nowhere randomly and spontaneously. It is so weird that people have not fully understood the implication of this new scientific discovery. Einstein who understood the implication of quantum mechanics made a comment that if

quantum theory is correct, there is no objective reality at all. Today quantum theory is the most successful theory man ever conceived. And for sure for better or for worse, our perception of reality will never be the same again. The most common interpretation in the implication of quantum mechanics for example is that perception and objects are inseparable from one another. This idea further proves that perception plays a major role in our reality.

IV. Perception becomes reality

Perception is reality. By now, It is clear that there are levels of perception brought about by different points of views. The levels of this perception therefore have corresponding levels of reality. Using the example of a flat earth perception, imagine that you went back in time to the medieval ages and told a peasant that earth is not flat but round, what would you think he would say? He would probably gather his neighbours and a laughed at you and dismissed you as a loony. There is no way you could possibly convince these people unless you take them to a space ship and show them the world from outer space. It was so obvious to them that the world that they feel and see is flat.

Another example on how we perceive objects, science will tell us that objects are composed of subatomic particles but when broken down further it was revealed that 99. 99% of it consisted of empty space, yet we perceive objects as something as a solid figure with form and colour. We are not denying that there is validity and truth to what we perceive. These examples were only to demonstrate that reality actually changes when there is a shift

of a higher level of perception. In other words, there are many points of view that create our reality.

It is not the case that all we can see is all that there is. It is the most common mistake to consider that the limit of our perception is the limit of all that can be perceived. The human mind and its ability to perceive is very limited and it can only comprehend a tiny fraction of what is really out there. The false sense of confidence and the high regard we uphold our beliefs actually obscures us to perceive reality as clear as it can be. An open mind, especially on the area of beliefs on our world, shaped about by our limited perception, can be very useful in shattering even the most persistent illusions we hold about the world and ourselves. There is a serious and profound consequence to our perceptions being influenced by our reality and of held reality influenced and altered by our new way of perceiving things. To understand the dynamic relationship between the two is great advantage.

V. Conclusion

Phenomenal reality is personal truths brought about by one's beliefs and ideas about the world. Each one of us tends to think we see things as they actually are. that we are objective, but this is not the case. We see the world not as it is, but as we are – or how we are conditioned to see it. Our behaviors, attitudes, mindsets and relationship towards the world and other people are profoundly affected by how we perceive things.

A case of a believer of a particular religion who held a particular belief system that there is only one god and it's his god is the true one god, then tends to treat others' beliefs as false. These attitudes rather convinced the

believer that those people are ignorant and are being deceived by their own religion. Worse, he is also very inclined to consider these poor people as something inferior. Now, imagine that human beings can believe that there is only one God, manifested in many ways, and in various belief systems. Imagine the implications of this new way of perceiving things, instead of focusing on endless arguments brought about by their differences, they can acknowledge and tolerate each other's beliefs.

The energy and resources that is used once to affirm, protect and propagate their faiths are now available to to spend in truly worthwhile activities that will truly uplift the human conditions. Imagine the peace and harmony brought about by focusing on shared similarities rather than difference. There is a great potential for this new world view. Our latest knowledge in science, our knowledge in philosophy and religion are already here to tell us that we are one, all that is needed is a “ shift” of perception and we can create a world where everyone can truly live in prosperity.

Whether collectively or in a personal level, we are responsible for our lives, we create our reality based on our perception. What is important is what we are conscious about. It is my contention that raising or even changing one's level of perception gives him the ability to create a life with quality. For better or for worse, perception makes or breaks us.

“ When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities... He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water,

and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven... Last of he will be able to see the sun.” —Plato, The Republic