

Does reality exist outside the mind essays examples

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The foundation for human consciousness is the mind. All of human perception and knowledge is processed through the mind; without the mind-- without the brain-- human beings would not be able to understand the world in the way that they do. Humanity is arguably unique in its understanding of the world; it has names for physical things and concepts, whereas other beings are incapable of this level of understanding. However, because the mind is so important for humanity's understanding of the world, it begs the question of whether or not the mind is the only way for humanity to understand the world. Solipsism-- the view that only the individual can ever be known to truly exist-- is a philosophical concept that has been present for many years. Despite being unfalsifiable, solipsism is a philosophical idea that must be rejected based on both rationalism and a lack of functionality.

Solipsism hinges on the concept that the only mind one can know truly exists is one's own mind. The idea of "other minds" is one that was philosophically first addressed by the philosopher Husserl (Plato. stanford. edu). Husserl noted that there was a problem with philosophy: that the philosopher had no way of knowing if he could truly verify any knowledge outside his own mind.

Husserl termed this concept "Continental Philosophy;" the concept of whether or not an individual could ever be aware of his or her outside reality.

The researchers at Stanford University write, "In Continental Philosophy, perhaps Husserl can be credited with establishing the problem of other minds as serious and challenging. Nor, insofar as it can be located, can it be claimed to be generally treated as an epistemological problem or as a conceptual problem. Continental Philosophy has also in various ways taken positions that either insist on our capacity to directly experience the other,

or take issue with the idea that there is a radical asymmetry between our experience of ourselves and our experience of others. Husserl can be seen as attached to the former. He seemed faced with the problem that his transcendental philosophy led to solipsism " (Plato. stanford. edu). In practice, this means that the concept of an objective world was something that Husserl could not justify philosophically in his mind. By taking this epistemological position, Husserl acknowledged that there may be no objective reality outside his own mind, or outside one's own mind in general. However, this acknowledgement raises more questions than it provides philosophical answers. It leads directly to a nihilistic form of philosophy-- there is certainly no point in engaging in philosophical reasoning if one considers the world to be an echo chamber of one's own mind.

When asking the question of whether reality exists outside one's own mind, the question is not necessarily a question about the physical world. Some philosophers address the issue of whether the materialistic experience is a real one, while others focus on the more metaphysical questions of existence. When an individual interacts with another individual, these philosophers say, how can that individual know that anything that is happening is not inside his or her own head? There is truly no way to validate anyone else's consciousness except one's own (Gleiser). Solipsism is a highly controversial philosophical theory because it necessarily invalidates the one founding principle of most modern philosophy: the fact that the philosopher can rely on the existence of other consciousnesses in the world (Gleiser). Solipsism argues that one cannot, but this is not a reliable argument; all relevant philosophical distinctions must be drawn from the

acknowledgement that individuals share a common physical experience, if not a common metaphysical experience. There can be no discussion about the nature of reality without first accepting that reality is, in fact, shared between individuals.

Solipsism may deny the existence of other minds in the world, and this is a fundamental flaw in the rationality of the philosophy. To some individuals who subscribe to this theory, the metaphysical reality of solipsism is that they cannot validate the reality of other minds, and therefore must deny their existence; personal experiences are highly private and subjective, and therefore they cannot be known to anyone but the individual to whom they occurred. To these types of people, experiences can be known only by analogy unless they are one's own, and therefore must be denied. This basis for philosophy, many solipsists would say, is a fundamentally flawed basis. Without the capability of proving that "I" exists, then all further philosophical arguments become largely invalidated. Assuming all observational evidence to the contrary is untrue, if the solipsist theory is correct, it does not invalidate how true and real the world feels, and will not change how the mind reacts to stimuli.

He goes on to suggest that solipsism makes three fundamental presuppositions that are often overlooked in other realms of philosophy. These are fundamentally important in the perception of reality, and the idea that reality cannot truly be shown to exist. The first presupposition is that the individual can be shown to exist. An individual has knowledge of his or her own experiences, thoughts, and past actions (Talbot). These experiences are necessarily and importantly private to the individual. However, Talbot goes

on to suggest, the individual does not necessarily have the conceptual ability to link between his other mental experiences and the physical experiences that he or she has in the world. Essentially, the individual could conceivably be the old stereotype of a “brain in a vat”-- that is, an organ creating its own experience of reality. Despite the fact that these are true presuppositions regarding the nature of experience, logically, it does not follow that humanity must reject shared experience as untrue; although it cannot be proven. The absence of proof is not the same as proof of absence, which is a fundamental flaw in the solipsist philosophy.

Solipsism is a philosophical construct that is difficult to argue against, but there are many who do so and do so effectively. One such argument suggests rational thought prohibits us from accepting solipsism as a foundational philosophy. As a theory, solipsism is not falsifiable, since it is built on the presupposition that one can know things only about oneself and one's experiences, and can know nothing about others.

Many great thinkers spoke out about solipsism and its lack of rational basis. Although solipsism is philosophically sound in some ways, it does not serve to further the purpose of understanding humanity's perception of reality. According to Stanford University, Bertrand Russell, one of solipsism's most outspoken dissidents, writes: “As against solipsism it is to be said, in the first place, that it is psychologically impossible to believe, and is rejected in fact even by those who mean to accept it. I once received a letter from an eminent logician saying that she was a solipsist, and was surprised that there were no others. Coming from a logician, this surprised me. The fact that I cannot believe something does not prove that it is false, but it does

prove that I am insincere and frivolous if I pretend to believe it" (Plato. stanford. edu). Rather than arguing against the foundational tenets of solipsism, Russell merely comments that even if solipsism is true-- a philosophical stance he cannot accept-- it serves no purpose to the rational observer, who is, by his or her nature, present in the physical world that he or she perceives (Plato. stanford. edu).

Rationality is the most effective argument against solipsism. Logic does not rule out the idea that there is no reality outside the individual's mind, but it does effectively nullify its importance in the practical world. Russell was correct in his assertion that his perception of reality is so very real to him that it would be disingenuous to pretend as though he does not perceive reality as truly " real." Even if all of humanity is merely a construct of the mind, the individual perceives them as very real, and therefore must at least marginally accept them as such. If they refuse to, they are ignoring the input given to them by their own senses, and are thus ignoring all rationalism and logic.

No matter how effective the argument for solipsism, there can be no effective argument against, either, because the philosophy is, at its face, entirely unfalsifiable. On a philosophical level, it is a fascinating question to ask, but for the purposes of most individuals, it is not a practical question. Reality does exist, whether it is a reality created within an individual's own mind or outside of it. Whether or not reality truly exists-- that is, whether it exists outside the individual's mind or consciousness-- is an academic question, not a practical one, and should be addressed as such.

References

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