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IS REALITY AN ILLUSION? - AN AGE-OLD QUESTION

We can't deny the fact that we've, at one point in our lives, been puzzled by the big questions of life such as " who are we? Why are we here? are we alone in the universe? What is the source of consciousness? etc", questions that haven't been satisfactorily answered by philosophy, religion and science. The closer we get to tackling such problems, the further away it seems. "Is reality real?" is a question that has been there for as long as human beings have existed but never seems to be solved, though we can't deny the fact that since the inception of science we've made significant progress in understanding the world around us and phenomena we describe as reality. Reality here is used to mean objective reality. Most scientists define objective reality as what would still exist as an inherent part of the universe even if there were no creatures to perceive it. Reality as we perceive it doesn't merit the above definition.

If a tree falls in the forest and no-one is around to see it, does it make a sound? According to quantum theorists the tree might not even exist until it's observed. So is our world and reality as we perceive it just an illusion? Is our life some form of virtual reality? René Descartes, a French philosopher, once stated "cogito ergo sum" I think therefore I am. He was seeking for an indisputable reality and therefore concluded that his thought was an undeniable truth of his existence. This suggests a doctrine of philosophy known as phenomenalism, that reality is a product of our subjective experience.

That said, is what we call reality real? Definitely no. Reality as far as human beings and other creatures inhabiting earth are concerned is a mere fabrication of our perceptions, in other words the brain is the creator of reality which is truly different from what would be described as an objective reality. How could the brain an organ hidden in the vault of the skull a dark place that has no direct connection to the external world create our reality? The answer might be simple the brain is the receiver of all crude sensory info from the environment through the peripheral neural systems. It's the ultimate destination of information from the external environment.

One perfect example to support the fact that we don't perceive the real world as it is is this; it's an undeniable fact that light travels faster than sound, why is that when a dog barks we see the dog and hear the sound simultaneously despite the two stimuli reaching the sensory systems

and ultimately the brain at different times? Through years of research, scientists have tied this to a neural process called "binding". In simple terms the brain conceals information from the environment from our conscious awareness of it, till (in this example) it synchronizes the visual perception of the dog and the auditory perception of its barking such that when the information reaches our conscious perception it seems as though the two events happened simultaneously. Isn't this a perfect example of our brain single-handedly creating our reality?

The rubber hand illusion is another perfect example of our brain completely converting unreal info into reality. In this experiment a participant has one of their hands placed on top of a desk and the other one placed underneath the desk and replaced by a rubber hand. When the two hands (the real one on top of the desk and the rubber hand) are simultaneously stroke by a brush the brain incorporates the rubber hand as a real body part of the participant such that they flinch when the rubber hand is threatened by a knife. In this two examples, it seems like the brain keeps us in a sought of persistent virtual reality that we completely have no knowledge about.

If a human eye can only see between 430-770THz and ear can only detect sound between 20Hz and 20kHz, ranges that make up only a fraction of sound and total light frequency, it means alot is happening in the universe that we can't perceive. Should we still comfortably say that what we perceive as reality is all there is? It is for these reasons that human beings have invented tools and methods to help delve into the mystery of what we call reality. Our senses make up the taste, odours and colours we experience which are mere fabrications of our senses rather than part of an objective reality. Will the blue color of the sky still exist if humans didn't exist to perceive it? Does a whale still view a blue sky as being blue? Definitely no. This brings us to a profound realization that reality is relative at best. This has led to humanity adopting a type of reality called "model dependent reality" this means we create hypotheses and work to prove them right and whatever law that works is described as real. How would we explain a situation where more than one scientific laws describe a single phenomenon and all seem to be real? The brain receives crude sensory information from the environment and through a series of processes meaning is constructed. It's therefore sensible to agree with Anil Seth, a neuroscientist in Sussex university that reality is a hallucination of our brains and that our collective hallucinations creates what we call reality.

Evolution has shaped us with perceptions that are necessary to keep us going, for example, through evolution we've learnt to keep away from dangerous stimuli, we have to take our perceptions seriously but that doesn't entitle us to take them literally. Reality as we've known it is transperspectival meaning multiple perspectives have to be taken into account in order to create meaning, this wouldn't define an objective reality. Just as Albert Einstein, regarded by

many as the greatest scientist of all time stated, "reality is an illusion, albeit a persistent one".