

Number of the topic: 4

We live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion. The great task in life is to find reality.

~ Iris Murdoch, "Life, Reality, Tasks"

Sometimes we come across a fairy

Humans as conscious beings have always had an ambition (a need perhaps) to discover the true nature of the universe. Both philosophy and science are the most obvious examples of this drive for reality – to find out what there really is and how. In an article titled "Life, Reality, Tasks" Iris Murdoch presents finding reality as a great task in our lives, so something worth achieving and simultaneously so important that it becomes a crucial aspect of our existence. In this essay I will refer to *reality* as that which truly is what it is – the world we live in as it truly is.

In Murdoch's article, reality is put in contradiction to what is referred to as both *fantasy world* and *a world of illusion*. Those two phrases are used by the author synonymously. In this part of the essay, I will expand on why those terms cannot be used interchangeably referring to Rodger Callois's terminology and stating that fantasy and illusion differ from each other greatly. I consider that to be crucial process that must be undertaken to fully comprehend the given quote. In his essay on the uncanny (das Unheimlich) Sigmund Freud defines it as something that, while being present at some time before, got reviled while it should have stayed hidden. He used this term in reference to human psyche and traumas that reappear in unexpected ways during a lifetime but also acknowledged this phenomenon in literature. Using Freud's terminology Callois drew important distinctions between that which is fantastical and uncanny. He stated that fantastical (that corresponds with Murdoch's *fantasy world*) is something that is not considered fitting into existing circumstances. An example of that would be meeting a fairy on our way to a shopping mall – we have the knowledge that fairies do not exist, we know that kind of situation is not possible to happen yet it does; we are well aware of something being "off", not how it should be and there is absolutely no reasonable explanation for what is happening or, if there is, it was already proven to not be correct by any means. When something is uncanny (*a world of illusion*) on the other hand it awakens a feeling of ambivalence and perhaps fear in us. Let us again suppose that we meet a fairy on our way to the shops: we see a creature with wings, she is all glittery but also monstrous and scary. We double check and definitely still see what in every way seems to be a fairy. But we have no way of knowing that. Maybe it is someone dressed in a costume, maybe someone is trying to fool us. That may be true, but if it is, it is a very well-played joke. The not-knowing is what makes us so scared of that situation – its illusory character. As human beings we do not encounter fantastic situations (one may argue that people who believe in conspiracy theories or are religious when being met with something that seems unearthly have no doubts about whether it is real, but they fall on the other side of the spectrum, as they believe the elements to be fitting into the world surrounding them). What we do encounter, stemming from our curious nature of searchers for truth, is the

uncanny – ambivalent, that feels like it is just behind the border of what we are used to calling *the world*, that which should never be shown, which does not fully fit.

In the further part of this essay, when referring to Murdoch's words, I will be doing that based on contradiction that he draws between the uncanny and the reality, omitting the term *fantasy world* (the fantastical) which is not very relevant to this discussion and does not represent any part of existence of human beings. I will present a view that is contradictory with that of Iris Murdoch, arguing for a world of illusion being a part of the reality and that finding reality is not a sensible task.

On how to escape from a fairy and why it is nonsensical to do so

Reality, being the world, we live in as it truly is, was considered to be different things throughout the history. Not that long ago it was common sense that the Earth was the centre of the universe and had every other planet and sun circle around it and it was not until Copernicus stated otherwise that this was widely understood as the reality. It was obvious back then that the reality is (or at least that part of it) obvious; that we completed the task of finding it. When a paradigm is proven to be wrong humans' whole perception of the reality shatters. Then, as Kuhn thinks, another paradigm is formed and so on. What is reality then? Well, for many the reality is what is proven to be how it is, what is certain. For the sake of this argument, it is not of significant importance whether the way we prove things to be true is empirical, by verifying and falsifying or by reasoning. What does matter is that this always leads to making our existence poorer than it would be otherwise. By eliminating uncertainty (in a way similar what analytical philosophers tried to do in creating perfect language) we are always left with less of the world.

The world that is as it truly is ineffably contains the uncanny, the illusion within itself. We know that there is more than we can prove by the simple truth that we cannot for certain prove absolutely everything; even if we are so sure of our takes on the world at the moment, in hundreds of years by they may be fully disproven and we have no way of knowing that this will not be the case. Ergo, it is not possible to live in "reality" that is to be found because reality also contains (if not consists only of) things that are uncertain, that are uncanny, that we can only consider to be illusions.

How to fully explain the existence of a fairy and why it is just as nonsensical to do so

Murdoch says that the task in our life is to find reality. Let us for a moment suppose that we were to explain every aspect of the universe and we would do that successfully; not even one error in our understanding of the world, everything explained, proved and certain to be as we state it is. It truly is exactly how we learned it is. Task completed. Amazing, what now? Well, we can continue to exist but there is nothing striking or interest, no need and no content for us to think of as we already know everything of reality. We could of course daydream but that is almost an antithesis of finding reality and thus definitely not a task of ours. That is to say: if

we even could find reality, which the last argument stated to not be possible for us, it would lead to decay of our life. Humans have no use in living in fully explained and known world. Hence finding reality is not a task in life since in a fully comprehensible, explainable world there is nothing more for conscious beings to do. Humans strive for understanding; the essence, base and centre of our existence lies in thinking, acting, doing things. If we have nothing else to think of, do, experience, then all we have left is breath, eat and satisfy physiological needs. And that not by any means desirable, it cannot be the final form of human existence as it lacks just the components that make us human in the first place.

One may say that it is better than living in an illusion: how could we do that? To which an answer is – how could we not? It is barbarism to exclude from existence, take a right to be from that which is not correspondent with what we deem as reasonable or certain. As stated by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, by doing that we reverse back to illusions, back to myth of reality as something that can be found and fully understood. Our need to rationalise everything, preferring *ratio* to myth and getting rid of that second one is in itself a sign of mythical thinking – explaining the world how we are able to in order to make it digestible for us; so that we are not confused, not frightened. Those procedures do not however serve our purpose in any way, shape or form, if anything – they are contradictory to them.

Embrace a fairy

In this essay I argued against the words of Iris Murdoch from “Life, Reality, Tasks”, stating that it is not possible to fully find reality and that if it were it would be of no use to conscious beings. We may fear a something that we cannot explain, something uncanny, a fairy but that precisely is our reality – that is the phenomenon we are dealing with, it is not logical, nor comprehensible but it is what we are experiencing at the moment. Of course, we will look into it, we will try to understand the situation, find explanations try to check if our vision is correct. It is in fact proven, certain that we see a fairy or at least that we have this kind of perception. There is no use in denying that – that is the reality, even if it is not what we expected and frightens us. The great task in life is then not to find reality but to live in it, accept it, without erasing the fairy.