

4.

Many works of fiction have experimented with the idea of a false reality. One of these is the film *Truman Show*, which is about a man named Truman who, unbeknownst to him, stars in a continuous reality show that has been airing since his birth. He lives in an artificial town built inside a film studio, filled with hidden cameras and actors who he believes to be his friends and family. During the film, he starts getting more and more suspicious of this fake reality as he notices inconsistencies in his world and all his attempts to leave the town are stopped. At the end of the film, Truman finally escapes the fake town and, presumably, begins his life in the real world. Truman's behavior is in line with Iris Murdoch's quote, since he succeeded in escaping his fantasy and finding reality. In the quote, she claims that the great task in life is to overcome the fantastical realities around us to find reality in itself.

Many interpretations of the film consider Truman analogous to humanity, stuck in a fake world and in need of finding the real one. But if humanity is like Truman, then what world is waiting for us beyond the confines of our illusory realities? How do we know it exists? Also, is our fake town any less real because it was constructed by someone else, or is it real as long as we think it is?

In this essay, I will argue that, contrary to Murdoch's claim, the great task in life is not to find reality but to understand the complexities and implications of the fictional realities that influence our worldviews. Firstly, I will show that fantasies have effects on physical reality, thus, they do have a certain degree of reality. Secondly, I will explain that reality in itself is not easily knowable because of the great influence of fictional reality in our worldviews. Lastly, I will conclude that the great task in life should be to understand fictional realities and how they determine our worldviews.

I.

In this first section, I will discuss illusions and argue that, because of their practical effects in our worldviews and physical reality, they can be considered realities in spite of their fantastical nature (albeit a different kind of reality than reality in itself).

For the purpose of my analysis, I will understand fantasy to mean a group of practices or ideologies with a social origin that define a society and determine its individuals' understanding of reality. These fantasies don't necessarily stem from any universal principles and can vary from culture to culture as well as through time. For instance, they can define what justice means for certain individuals, what is a good life, or acceptable behaviors in society. However, it also shapes how we understand the physical world and how we interpret its phenomena. For example, a person from a religious society might find a relation of causality between praying and events in the physical world, while to an atheist there is none. In this sense, a fantasy works like a mesh or lens defined by our space and time through which we see reality.

Although these fantasies are dependent on each society to exist and are not universal, it is undeniable that they have practical effects on the real or physical world. For example, sexism has affected, in some way or another, a number of scientific advances. Even though there is no written, universal rule that establishes the

supremacy of men over women, this ideology is present in medicine to this day. One relevant example is that, for centuries, only the symptoms of heart attacks in men were widely known and taught in schools, so a lot of women died from heart attacks after being dismissed because they didn't have sharp chest pains. Here, we can see that an ideology with an entirely social origin had a tangible effect on how we do science, as well as quality of medical attention for women in our society.

Now, if these fantasies have direct influence in our ways of thinking and the real world, we could understand them to be something more than just fantasies that need to be discarded. In every society, they shape the world around us and our understanding of it. This effect on reality makes them more real than mere fantasies. Let us understand fantasies as Nietzsche's concept of fiction: the world works as a highly complex net of intertwined fictions that alter and build reality directly as well as our consciousnesses. For this reason, I will now call them "fictional realities" instead, since they alter and create reality but their origins are fictional.

Therefore, fictional realities do have a certain degree of reality because of the great scope of their effects in the world around us and our worldviews.

II.

Having already analyzed fantasies, I will now delve into the concept of reality and thereby argue that, if a reality does exist, then it is not easily knowable. When discussing reality as opposed to fantasy, I will refer to the idea of a universal and objective social reality. (I won't discuss reality with respect to analytical or empirical sciences since that would exceed this essay.) To do this, I will present two models of reality in itself, both related to ethics.

The first model is Plato's theory of ideas as presented in his famous allegory, which I will briefly summarize. He claims that humans are like prisoners in a cave who can only see shadows, which represent the objects of sensory knowledge (actually mere opinions). Outside of the cave is the rest of the world illuminated by the sun, which respectively represent all ideas and the idea of Good. Ideas are the only real thing and are knowable through reason and enlightenment, while sensory reality is merely an illusion, a degraded version of the reality accessible through understanding. For Plato, the ideas with the highest degree of reality are moral ideas (like the idea of justice) and the idea of Good. He deemed these universal, objective, unequivocal and intelligible through reason.

The second model is Kant's. Although Kant did make the distinction between a knowable phenomenal reality and an unknowable noumenal reality, when it comes to Kantian ethics, the concept of duty is common to all rational beings. As a short summary, good actions are always done from duty and according to the categorical imperative, which states that one must act on maxims that one deems universalizable. In other words, act as you would will others to act. Then, Kantian morality is also objective, since reason should give unequivocal answers to the question of which maxims are universalizable.

However, I would like to argue against these takes by showing that duty and moral concepts can be relative. The influence of fictional reality in our conceptions of duty

shouldn't be ignored, and this is evidenced in the fact that not everyone deems the same maxims universalizable. For example, most people in today's western society would agree that the maxim "I mustn't kill anyone" is easily universalizable and acting in accordance with it would be consistent with duty. However, a samurai from medieval Japan would probably not agree, and instead think that the maxim "I must kill those who affront me" is more aligned with duty. In the same way, the ideal of justice in modern western society differs greatly from that in ancient Egypt, and it is not easy to simply say which one is 'best' or universal.

Morality and social reality as stipulated by fictional reality is not objective. Although the question remains open about whether a universal and objective social reality exists, even if it did and was knowable through reason, it wouldn't be as easy to grasp as Plato states. For example, if it turned out that, somehow, there existed a universal, unquestionably valid maxim that justice must always be "an eye for an eye", our belief in our current justice system could hinder us from learning that truth, and even if we did, it is not evident that we would apply it. In my opinion, both authors underestimated the weight of fictional reality.

Imagine Truman somehow knew that his world was fake, but had no evidence of there being a 'real' world beyond his. If there had been no doors to the movie set, no flickering lights in the sky, open roads for kilometers that allowed him to explore new places within that fake world, maybe he would have kept living according to the laws and behaviors programmed by his fantasy, albeit now aware of its illusory nature.

It is unclear whether social reality is objective or knowable, but we do know that it wouldn't be easily apprehensible because of the influence of fictions. On the other hand, fictional reality is present everywhere and can easily be accessed. In the next section, I will deal with the implications of this point.

III.

In this last section, I will argue that the great task in life is not to find reality but to understand the fictional realities around us how they intertwine and how they work to affect our worldviews and physical reality.

I have previously argued that a) fictional realities have a tangible effect on physical reality and worldviews, which gives them a certain status of reality, although different from reality in itself; and b) whether reality in itself exists or not, it is hardly knowable because of the influence of fictional reality. As I claimed in the former sections, fictional reality has more influence in our worldviews and the way we live than reality in itself would. For this reason, the search for reality would be a purely academic undertaking with little application in the real world. (I will further clarify that my analysis is circumscribed to what I called social reality, not empirical or scientific reality, for which there are many applications.) It is still a noble pursuit, and the search for universal social truths will always be relevant, but I would not describe this activity as "the great task in life". Fictional reality, however, has a more concrete effect in our lives and societies than reality in itself.

But, if not this, what is the great task in life related to reality? Nietzsche talked about fictions and warned us about the dangers of confusing fiction with truth. He claimed

that reality is actually a compound of articulated fictions, and that the danger was not living in a fictional reality but rather believing one's fiction to be objective truth. He widely criticized a great number of philosophers before him as well as religious figures for this. All fictions are fantasies, and none is more real than another. Thinking otherwise can lead to people trying to impose their ideologies over others, which they deem 'less real'. That way, failing to understand the fictional nature of reality can lead to conflict and the glorification of false truths. This is why it is of great importance to be aware of the fictions around us and how they have influenced us.

Taking fictional reality for granted is a mistake, but, as I argued in the first section, so is discarding it. Fantasies have a degree of reality because of their effect in society and its individuals, but it is important to understand that reality as incomplete, subjective, fluctuant and not absolute nor universal. This mindset opens doors for questioning our worldviews and the fictions around us, which is vital for critical thinking and self-awareness. It follows that the study of fictional realities, how they function in society and their bases and principles is highly relevant. This also highlights the importance of humanities and social sciences in building a more aware and intellectually competent society.

Thus, I argue that the great task in life is not to find reality but to understand and problematize fictional reality. We do live in a fantasy world, and that is not a problem, it's how human society functions. However, this does mean that it is imperative that we understand the implications of these fictional realities, their fictional nature and how they shape our worldviews.

In this essay, I explored fantasy and reality in order to state that the great task in life is not to find reality but to question and understand the complexities of the fictional realities that affect us. I did so by showing that fictions do have a degree of reality, that reality in itself is hardly knowable, and that understanding fictional reality and its fantastical nature is much more relevant for life in society than the search for universal truth or reality. In a way we are like Truman in his fake town, but with no knowledge of an omnipotent director, learning about the patterns and intricacies of our fictional world seems much more interesting.