

## David Mayr

### 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," The Times, 15 April 1983.

## **We shall not find reality! - We shall search for it!**

In the quote, Murdoch suggests that the world that we live and everything it contains, everything we experience and even everything which goes beyond that is nothing more than a plain illusion. Moreover, Murdoch emphasizes that finding a way to lift that curtain and really uncover reality is the great challenge as well as the great goal in life. But how can something like a reality even be defined and does something like a reality consequently even exist? If so, is everything that we perceive really just an illusion? And finally, is humanity as such even meant to achieve all-embracing knowledge about reality?

First, one must define what reality even is. Soon, one can thereby arrive at the conclusion that reality is something, if not everything, that is not just objective but also objectively true. An opinion as such, independently of the person expressing the opinion and the content at the core of the opinion, is not reality but rather something that was created in the process of finding one's way through reality. While one might argue that something that is created within something, becomes a part of it, it can then be responded that while the process of arriving at one's opinions might take place in the scope of reality, it does not actually reflect reality as the reality existed before the opinion was formed. Subsequently, from now on reality will be used simultaneously with the concept of undisputable, eternal truths, whereas opinions and similar things will be treated as results of human individualism which, while taking place in reality, are not part of the fundamental reality itself. However, despite now having defined the concept of reality in the context of human existence, it must still be verified whether this exact concept even exists.

As reality has been defined as the eternal truth lying at the core of everything, it must rather be discussed whether a fundamental core of everything even exists than just repeatedly asking if reality exists. Thereby, one must independently of whether they believe in reality or not admit that we all perceive something each and every minute. This necessarily is not reality as even Murdoch states in her quote that these perceptions are only illusions. However, the exact idea that perceptions might just be products of our own fantasy, also suggests the existence of an ontological reality. For once, if, contrary to what Murdoch stated, perceptions really weren't an illusion of something, it would make these perceptions, even if they might differ from person to person, themselves the global and somewhat objective reality as there wouldn't be something more fundamental to them. Consequently, this would imply that reality undoubtedly exists as perception as such cannot be rejected. In contrast, if perceptions are really plain illusions, then the question ought to be asked becomes, what they are actually an illusion of. An illusion needs a truth from which it differs, namely

reality. If the core does not exist then the illusion itself becomes the core of whom illusion may be created. Hence, there undisputedly would have to be a core to everything carrying the name reality.

The question that must be answered is whether human perceptions really are the core, or if there is something more fundamental uniting all the different perceptions. While it must be addressed that it would be deeply unsettling and up to a certain point might even feel slightly contradictory for an objective reality to just consist of many, potentially even varying, perceptions and constructs making up this bigger somewhat objective reality rather than there being a more fundamental uniting element, the simple fact that it does not feel right does not allow us to rule out the possibility that it still might be this way. What does somewhat suggest that it isn't this way though, is the fact that science is able to predict in a reproducible manner and even independently of the person conducting the science, suggesting that there is a deeper core to everything. Hence, while one might not be able to rule out that there is nothing else at the core of human constructs, which would actually make the constructs themselves the reality, science at least strongly hints at the existence of such a more fundamental core, making it entirely plausible that our world, and within it our unique perceptions of it which could never possibly grasp the entirety of a bigger reality, are nothing more than an illusion of a deeper reality.

However, it still must be noted that despite hinting at the existence of a reality, which goes beyond human perceptions, science as such is not really a tool to actually uncover reality but rather a tool to approximate and model it. Science allows us to form models resembling reality, but it will never allow us to actually reach the core. Science is about approximating reality rather than searching for it. It is the process of getting closer and closer without ever reaching and without having the urge to reach a final reality. Newton's axioms provided a fantastic way to make powerful predictions regarding reality. But they did not perfectly reflect it as Einstein's General Theory of Relativity showed. Likewise, the fact that at the singularity of a black hole, which is a core to not just the black hole but our universe as whole, like reality is the core of everything, our conception of practically everything collapses with Einstein's ideas and quantum physics suddenly not being compatible, fosters the idea that science, the most powerful tool known to humanity, does not have the intention to become truth but rather just aims at being the fantastic approximation tool it was always intended to be.

This unravels a deeper question regarding the destiny of humanity to find absolute truth. If not given the tools to uncover reality, reality might actually not be intended to be uncovered. This would then result in the fact that, contrary to what Murdoch stated, finding reality could not be the greatest task in life as a task always requires the right tools. But what other tools are there to approach this task. And might there be a universal tool allowing us to really resolve the task?

One option might be faith. However, as the name faith, or belief as one might call it, already indicates, it is all about believing. Whether someone is religious and believes in God or any other almighty entity or holds the view that no such thing can exist: Every belief that someone has when it comes to this topic, with the range of views representing a spectrum as vast as multi-faceted, will always remain a belief. Beliefs are not there to be verified or falsified. Like opinions, which are real but do not reflect reality, beliefs, which are just a possible way of having an opinion, are individual creations which help us to navigate reality without unravelling it. A believe shall not be falsified. But, independently of whether this believe is of a religious, atheist or agnostic nature, or even of a completely different kind, it will never be useful to find reality, the same way it is not useful to indisputably reflect reality.

The last tool that remains, which itself is a science but not just a science but also more than that, is philosophy. When Murdoch suggests that finding reality, and with it truth, is the greatest task, this

probably refers to the power of philosophy and the things that can be gained with it. Philosophy, which at its core really is all about thinking and things being thought of, might actually be the best way to investigate reality. But a question that occurs is whether we even shall hope for philosophy to unravel this mystery, or if philosophy must and can not be used to find truth but rather search truth.

Luciano de Crescenzo once stated that there are things that can neither be believed nor known. He moved on with elaborating that these things were philosophy. This view makes it clearer what the nature of philosophy really is. Philosophy is about asking questions and about thinking about things without these things being things that are ought to be known or believed. Philosophy allows us to engage with topics which could not be approached with other sciences and religion in the same way. But at the same time these are things which cannot be believed nor known. Therefore, reality might definitely be engaged with in a philosophical manner. But the target should not be to arrive at truth. The task should be to search for it.

At first glance, this might sound like philosophy being too weak, too empty, too inconvenient. Too useless to approach the process of looking for reality. But one who holds that view hasn't realized the real strength at the core of philosophy. "Looking for something" is often connotated with giving everything to just arrive at the point of "having found something". But the question is: Was it then really about looking for something or more about having found it? It is short-sighted to believe that arriving at your goal at all costs is the most important thing! Because it might actually be the case that the process of trying to get to your putative goal should have been the actual thing that is worth to aim for. This is what the search for reality, like many other things which are ought to be addressed with philosophy, is all about.

To refine this idea, one might think of the following scenario: Two people independently of one another are engaging with the question whether mankind is intrinsically bad. Both of them know Rousseau. Both of them know Hobbes. Both of them know what the other one knows. But one quickly arrives at a conclusion. It thereby does not matter to which conclusion the person came. It just matters that the person did come to a conclusion. Because now, the person doesn't have to engage with the question anymore. But at the same time the person cannot engage with the question anymore. Actually, the person mustn't even engage with the question anymore. There are no more questions for the person to ask when it comes to the topic. Note that this does not implicate that one shouldn't have any opinions as it was previously stated that opinions are an essential part of human individualism. It rather means that instead of being all focused on always coming to a quick and straight-forward result, there actually is something powerful about remaining one who keeps searching instead of finding.

To conclude this thought experiment, we might now look at the other person who kept questioning everything that could be questioned about this topic. And the insights the person gained from this questioning over questioning over questioning are what might be seen as not just the fun part of philosophy, but also the most vital part that there is to philosophy, too. Like the person keeps thinking about the evilness of human beings, we all should keep thinking about reality and engage with it as it might not only be impossible but also non-desirable to eventually find reality.

In conclusion, when Murdoch talks about a world which is nothing more than an illusion, we need to understand that this so-called illusion is actually all about the limits of human perceptions, human concepts and human constructs when it comes to approximating reality as no tool is known to humanity which allows us to completely resolve the desire to unravel reality. However, this should not be seen as a problem but rather a destiny which is both unavoidable and fortunate. Finally, philosophy teaches us exactly this as only by questioning reality in a philosophical manner can we

arrive at the conclusion that the great task in life isn't to find reality. The greatest task is to keep searching for it!

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