Determining the Reality of Our Thoughts

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To address this, we need to start with the following understanding. It is the natural order of things that when we want to confirm the reality of our own choices, we look to see if the external realities we interact with agree that the choice is real. Our external realities confirm this by responding in the ways they do to real choices – accepting them as real, responding to them as real, or reacting to them as real.

So let’s take the question “Are flying elephants real?” I can believe so, but I find rather quickly that my shared reality disagrees. In fact, it specifically labels them as fantasies or delusions, as clearly unreal. Therefore if I maintain they are real, this is not a choice that works for both -- so it makes no difference which of us is right, the crucial point is that this not a “real” choice **for this relationship**.

The reason that this is a crucial distinction is that “real reality” is more complicated to know than we usually assume. For example if this were the year1600 and I told you that men could build machines that would one day allow them to travel from Europe to America in just a few hours, our shared reality would have regarded that as unreal and delusionary – and been totally wrong, as it was about many other “truths” about reality that were held at that time. Our shared reality is not necessarily real reality. Science for many years was convinced that space was filled with a cosmic ether. What beliefs of our present time will prove incorrect, untrue?

Again, “real reality” is a hard thing to pin down. But once you accept the understanding that we can’t trust that even our shared reality is always accurate as to what is “true” or “really real,” we can instead concentrate on what the relationship agrees as real or unreal, rather than argue about which will ultimately be proven correct.

A great disadvantage of this common approach of looking for validation to know what’s “real” is that it can easily confuse us into believing that the external reality we’re dealing with controls what is real for us. The relationship can’t accept something as real unless both parties agree it is. This can lead us to believe that the other person must forgive us and accept our amends, for our actions to be fully real.

It’s hard to keep in mind that there are two realities here, and that they do not have to agree for some choice or action to be real. They only need to do so to make the choice or action a choice available to the relationship itself, one that it can interact on. Relationships can and do exist with many such differences, large and small. Whether spoken or unspoken, they are either “agreements to disagree” or “disagreements to agree” if the relationship continues.

Given the essential unknowability of what is “really real”, my next best resort is, naturally, to use my shared reality. To check as to what is real, I literally do “a reality check” – in this case, of my inner reality with my shared reality. If I have agreement or validation there, I am in good shape.

Because my relationship with another person is much more malleable in respect to choices, it “plays by its own rules”. If , for example, the other person refuses to accept my definition of fairness, the fact that my shared reality accepts it as real is not a compelling argument for the other person to do so. If their shared reality accepts it, then we have harmony and agreement on this. But again, using the Nazi Germany example, agreement with others on shared reality doesn’t make something either right or “really real.”

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