

## **Initial Perspective**

What does it mean to perceive something? Is there really any one truth to what we see or hear? Can we be objective about the “world out there”? Some people spend their entire lives searching for the truth, the one answer to a question about that outside world that we live in. And all of us ask ourselves similar questions about truth and reality as we go through life. We wonder what is really real and what it means for something to be true. These are not easy questions to answer and I think we develop stronger opinions and ideas about such things as we have more experiences and have more time to contemplate what it all means.

For me, my beliefs on these matters are influenced by many of my current and past experiences. Firstly, I am Christian. This greatly affects my ideas about how many different truths there can be as well as the nature of reality. The belief in a Supreme Being and Creator has a definite impact on how I view the world and life around me. My schooling is another major influence on my belief system. I have grown up in a system that somewhat deifies the powers of science. A system that says science holds the objective truth to what the world is like. I am also a biopsychology major and have consequently taken many courses in college that enforce the belief that if it can be proven in a lab experiment.

This first question of what is reality is one that can never be answered, and yet at the same time is it one that one can not help asking. There are varying positions one can take on this issue and also varying degrees within these different positions. At this time in my life I feel that I most easily identify with a constructivist point of view of reality. I

believe that there is a world outside of our minds that exists independently from any human conscious thought. There is something material and physical out there that God made for us humans to live in. However, I believe that how we view that world is absolutely not objective. We all see the world individually, through our own eyes. Our experiences our thoughts, our emotions all affect how our brain interprets the world.

This can be more easily seen in a case study done on a football game between two universities. Certain characteristics of the viewer, such as what school they went to affected their perception of what seem to be objective facts of what happened during the football game. "It seemed the 'game' actually was many different games and that each version of the events that transpired was just as "real" to a particular person as other versions were to other people." (Hastorf, 1954) So each of them has their own reality of what happened during the football game. In this case, as I am closely aligned with the constructivist point of view, I would say that there was one truth about what happened during the football game. One and only one game took place in reality. However, each person has their own view and their own truth about what happened during the game. It is possible that each person truly saw differing things. They were not mistaken or couldn't see clearly, that is in fact what they saw through their eyes. They may all feel it is true to them, but none of them saw a true reality of what happened. It is not possible to ever see what truly happens in the world, our brain gets in the way.

To a certain extent, then, I agree with a quote from the popular movie "The Matrix": What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see...then real is simply ... electrical signals interpreted by your brain." We, as human beings, are not capable of really

knowing the true nature of the world out there. So, reality for us is just what is created by our brain. But at the same time, I believe there to be a true reality independent of us out there. It may not be possible for us to ever perceive or understand it objectively. That is something only God can do. However, it still exists on some level. Reality and the world outside our consciousness are still there even if we can not perceive or conceive of it as it truly exists. It exists in the fact that God created it, and He knows the true nature of things. Only we as mere human beings cannot comprehend this, because it is clouded by so many other thoughts and feelings we have.

Therefore, what someone sees is a combination of the world out there as well as one's own mind interpreting what is going on out there. This, I believe, makes everything that we perceive subjective. There cannot exist a perception that is completely objective. One's own thoughts and ideas always affect the outcome of what is perceived no matter how careful we are to keep this from happening

Another question, which may not be as salient to us all the time, but we nonetheless contemplate from time to time is the question of the validity of science. Why do we in society base what we know to be true on what science tells us? We live in a society in which science has the final say in everything. If there is enough scientific evidence for something then that means it is true. It almost does not even seem like this is a question in our society anymore. The scientific method just is the way to the truth of anything. My science background inclines me to believe in this scientism as well. I would basically say that I believe in scientism. However, I also believe that there are problems with the scientific method. I understand that trying to reproduce the real world in a laboratory is impossible. And, as I think no human can ever be truly objective in any

situation, I also believe that this includes scientist. No science experiment or test can ever be truly objective. Even when using machines and technology you still must somehow involve the human mind. The machine must be created by a human, and the results eventually interpreted by someone's brain. However, despite these shortcomings, I think the scientific method is the best we can come to the truth. Even though, we may never be able to find the true reality about anything, we still must search for it. I am not sure why it is so important to find it, but it just seems to be human nature to quest for the true untainted facts about the world.

I most surely believe this to be a more reliable method than intuitionism. Intuitionism relies too much on human perception of the world to be a reliable source for the truth. The Verstehen Hypothesis says that there are some types of knowledge, such as psychology, that are best understood simply through introspection and intuitionism. It says that some things we just know. I do not believe this to be at all the case. The mind is full of flaws. We, as human beings, do not intuitively know anything. All of our knowledge, even about ourselves is affected by the environment in which we grew up. There have been many examples shown in social psychology of how people's intuitions are wrong. For example, many people in the United States presently do not believe themselves to be racist. Some truly believe that the color of someone's skin does not affect their judgment of a person's intelligence or morals. However, many studies using methods besides intuitionism have discovered that most people do in fact pass judgments solely based on skin color. People may even look at this study and still think intuitively that they would never do such a thing and that the numbers were exaggerated. But with

science we are able to see that their intuitions are wrong. One cannot be objective about one's own thoughts and brain activity.

While I think that we can never be completely objective about anything or even find the real absolute truth, I believe that we must continue the quest to do so, if for no other reason than for the journey and for a purpose. I also believe that the closest way we can come to finding out what truth really is, is through science. Though we may never find the answers we are searching for, only science can bring us closer.

## References

Hastorf, A. H, & Cantril, H. (1954). They saw a game: a case study. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 129-134.

Wachowski, A. (1999). *The Matrix*. [Motion picture]. Los Angeles, CA: Warner Brothers.