

The Nature of Reality - Does reality, in fact, exist or not?

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May 8, 2020



Not long ago I did a little research on Carlos Castaneda, the 1960s guru of sorts. His books had a big impact on spiritual seekers of my generation. In a nut shell, he wrote about meeting an evolved shaman, Don Juan, and expounded on his teachings and his psychedelic adventures with this Native American teacher. He implied that his accounts were non-fiction. Later research showed that his tales were not real but, in fact, a hoax from the start. Castaneda, himself, never commented on the criticism and continued to write. Lots of people in the literary and psychology worlds came to his defense. Journalist and author Richard de Mille summed up the controversy saying, "Reality doesn't exist. It's all what people say to each other."

Oh really?

Does reality, in fact, exist or not? We certainly act as if it exists and how we act is a pretty good indicator of existence. Descartes said, "I think therefore I am." More likely it ought to be said, I act therefore I'm alive.

Is reality only what people say to each other? Well, not only. Things do exist and are real based on my relationship to them. If this bus stops short,

I'm writing this on an inter-city bus on my way downtown, I may be thrown forward impacting the seat in front of me with my knees and maybe my head. That's real. That seat has its own nature of shape, hardness, and softness but it is not real to me unless I come in contact with it by sitting in it or being thrown against it. Everything exists and is real to the degree that I relate to it. Didn't Castaneda meet Don Juan at a bus stop?

There is also the narrative, my own story and the larger narrative. How does that seat in front of me fit in to the narrative? Things are also more or less real based on their relationship to a narrative. The folks around me on the bus are only slightly connected to my narrative. They are connected to their own story and may be more connected to the larger narrative. They do have the potential to become a part of my narrative but the possibility is low unless I reach out to someone or some event occurs that throws us together. A sudden accident might do that but more than likely I'll get off at my stop and they will do likewise.

My narrative and the larger narrative fit together and can be perceived as patterns of relationships. If I become lost in my own story and totally disregard the narratives of my family, neighbors, the society, nation, and world, you and others would most likely look at me as rather strange, eccentric, or mad.

Then, can I change reality at will by changing my relationship to people and things? Theoretically, maybe so but only in a limited way. I don't have much ability to effect many events directly. Take the COVID-19 pandemic; I didn't cause it nor am I a part of shaping the policies implemented to combat it. On the larger scale many things are out of my control. Some things are under my control like how I respond.

I do, in a limited way, have the ability to change reality by the way I perceive patterns and relate to people or things. Every situation, person, or thing I come across has some potential. How I reach out and relate to that potential can make a new reality.

Thinking leads to understanding. Understanding tends towards belief. The purpose of belief is to provide a direction for action. Action towards a purpose is living.

What do you think? (I'm reaching out.)