

Exploring *Whose Reality?*

When studying *Whose Reality?*, there are some key questions that you'll need to ask yourself in order to understand the concept. Those key questions are raised in this chapter, *Exploring Whose Reality?*.

What is reality?

A 'reality' is a world perceived by a particular person. It is what we believe to exist, as opposed to an idealistic or hypothetical view. Our reality is based on our life and activities that we view to be 'real'. It is made up of multitudinous components, from our family and friends to our experiences and beliefs. Almost every individual has these factors in their lives, yet what separates us from sharing the same reality is our unique perception of the world. Presented as a question, the context title, *Whose Reality?* suggests that different people encounter different realities. Reality is subjective, meaning that what we see or believe is based or influenced by our own feelings, opinions, emotions and experiences. It is also based on how we interpret and perceive people or events that makes our reality deeply personal. Our connection to our own reality is so intricate that arguably, only we truly understand our own reality.

What is reality versus fantasy?

Reality is our view of what actually exists in the world as opposed to imagination or illusion. We believe that we can distinguish between what is real or not by using our five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Although we are convinced an object is real, philosophers have often argued 'how do we know with absolute certainty that something is indeed, real? How can we be sure that it is not merely our minds tricking us into thinking the object is real?' One of the many theories suggests that our conscious state (or reality) is imagination whereas the subconscious – when we fall into the world of dreams is reality. Moreover, the theory of solipsism asserts that we cannot be sure that anything or anyone in the external world exists; we can only be sure that our minds exist.

Mental patients show one of the most evident examples where reality can be confused with fantasy. When someone suffers from psychosis, they experience hallucinations and delusions, and thus distort their reality into fantasy.

Reality and illusion falls into play everyday in human lives. Politicians can influence the public's reality by manipulating the information they reveal about particular issues. They can lead us under an illusion by omitting certain information that could hurt their campaign. The media also performs a similar form of misrepresentation. Often they can emphasise a certain perspective on an issue while completely disregarding other perspectives in an attempt to gain public support for their stance. Thus, it is evident that our realities are often, if not always integrated with illusion.

What are the types of reality?

It can be argued that our world does not exist as one reality but is made up of multiple realities or dimensions. Below are some categories of reality and their corresponding examples:

- **Beliefs reality:** Some believe in heaven as our after-life yet others believe in reincarnation.
- **Social reality:** Wealth versus poverty.
- **Religious reality:** Christians follow the leadership of saints and church fathers whereas Muslims follow the leadership of imams and prophets.
- **Cultural reality:** Growing up as an Indigenous Australian versus an Australian immigrant.

- **Emotional reality:** When cheerful, a VCE student is determined and hopeful of getting into a desired university course. Yet when frustrated, this VCE student is doubtful about his or her chances of success.
- **Environmental reality:** Some believe that climate change is real, yet others believe it is a hoax.
- **Relationship reality:** While one person believes that a person is a good friend, the other may think they are simply acquaintances.

How do we experience reality?

We must question whether or not we can completely experience an entire reality, in other words, when an event occurs, how can we be sure we completely understand the situation? Below are some examples of how we perceive reality that is distorted from the truth:

- **Exaggeration or downplay of a situation:** Our experiences, opinions and beliefs may influence us to exaggerate or downplay a situation. For example, you notice a small boy bullied by one of his classmates. You may overstate the situation since you have painful memories of being bullied yourself. Conversely, you may downplay the situation since you may believe that the small boy can defend himself.
- **Partial or full perception:** When we see a situation, do we possess the full picture? Using above example, we see a bully taunting a child, but what if the 'bully' we see was in fact the 'victim' in the first place, and is now standing up for him/herself? Your view is different to the bully and victim's reality.
- **Misunderstanding:** Just because we view a thing in a certain way, does not mean we automatically understand the situation. Once again, you see a bully and a victim, but what if they are just playing a game?

As shown from these examples, our subjectivity heavily influences how and what we see.

Is a reality static?

One's reality changes every day, sometimes significantly and other times less so. With new experiences, commitments, relationships, events, information our understanding of the world shifts accordingly. For example, if an individual wishes to follow a new religion, then their reality will adapt to suit their new belief system since they will participate in new beliefs, culture and commitments to the religion.

Prompts for Exploring *Whose Reality?*

1. Our reality is always changing.
2. Reality is never fact but fiction.
3. We are defined by our reality.
4. Our perspective is always subjective.
5. Both reality and imagination help our understanding of the world and ourselves.
6. The reality we create is unique to our own experiences.
7. Reality is subject to our interpretations.
8. Reality can be both subjective and objective.
9. It is through a significant event that our reality changes.
10. Our realities are formed by our opinions and beliefs.
11. Reality forces us to act in extraordinary ways.
12. When we face the truth, we need to be ready to face pain and suffering.
13. People have varied reactions and responses to things because of their different realities.

14. Reality is what we want to see, not what we have to see.
15. Reality is based on the people and experiences we encounter.

Our reality in relation to others

1. Our reality is never our own, but influenced by others.
2. No two realities are identical.
3. Sometimes we lose ourselves in the reality of others.
4. We cannot escape the world that others create.
5. Accepting the reality of others is easier than accepting our own.
6. Conflict occurs as a result of different realities.
7. Some people manipulate others by distorting reality.
8. One event can produce multiple realities.
9. Only through multiple perspectives can we understand reality.
10. Some events influence our reality more significantly than others.
11. Our reality can impact others positively or negatively.
12. The realities of two people are drastically different.

Memories

1. What we chose to remember and forget shapes our reality.
2. Our memories distort our current reality.
3. Memories help us maintain a grip on reality.
4. Mixing memory and reality helps bring people pleasure and pain.
5. Memory is intrinsically connected to reality.
6. Some people suppress memories in order to cope with reality.
7. Memories are the source of our illusions.
8. We can change our dreams to become our reality.
9. Our memories teach us how to deal with reality.

Dealing with reality

1. We create illusions in order to cope with reality.
2. Illusions are safe while realities are cruel.
3. Truth is always more powerful than imagination.
4. Distorting reality can result in both good and bad.
5. What separates truth from fiction is our perspective.
6. Illusions have the power to conceal reality but can never erase it.
7. In the end, we are always forced to face reality.
8. Illusions are created both intentionally and unintentionally.
9. Reality and illusion are never dichotomous.
10. Escaping into illusion is weak while facing reality is courageous.
11. Illusions are created as a result of our disappointments and failures.
12. Fantasies are how we create a world of success and happiness.
13. Without illusion, reality is too difficult to confront.
14. We cannot be forced to confront the truth; we must be willing to.
15. What is real and fiction is irrelevant, merely what we want to believe.