

Pinch me to prove that I'm real!

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Since we cannot change reality, let us change the eyes which see reality. Nikos Kazantzakis

Humans have pondered their existence since our brains grew large enough to well, ponder. Why are we here? Ay, there's the rub as Willy Shakespeare once put it. He was talking about dreams and their relationship with reality. Reality, according to Merriam-Webster, is "the quality or state of being real; a real event, entity, or state of affairs; the totality of real things and events." While somewhat helpful, don't you hate it when definitions of words contain those very words? You can't say something is "real" simply by using the word "real." Try to explain that one to a visitor from another planet. Most believe that reality is a matter of perception, a sort of "seeing is believing" concept. If we can see it, touch it, maybe even smell it or taste it, it has to be real, right? Richard Wagner once said imagination creates reality. We often talk about turning dreams into reality. Does that mean then, that reality is spawned from our imagination, which is conceptual and not tangible? Bryan Singer said that "we don't live in the world of reality, we live in the world of how we perceive reality." But isn't everyone's perception different and unique? How then, can there be any consensus? John Lennon espoused that "reality leaves a lot to the imagination." I'm with Shakespeare "to sleep, perchance to dream." My son, the 20-year-old songwriter and armchair philosopher, said we cannot be certain that other people exist. We only know that we do. When I was 20, the deepest thought I had was getting another beer after last call. But essentially, Liam is right. I know that I exist because I have senses. I can see and touch my limbs. I get hungry. I laugh and cry. But, I don't see myself as others do. Being on "my side" of the lens, I can't see myself as I walk along like Jar Jar Binks. Again, if my reality isn't everyone else's reality, is it real, or my interpretation of real? Feeling dizzy? Physics also tells us that we can't actually touch anything - the electrons in our bodies repel the electrons in any object. We hover above, or away from everything, albeit at an infinitesimal distance. Right now, there are roughly 7 billion people wandering around Earth, each with their own concept of what's real. Wow! T.S. Eliot said we humans cannot bear very much reality. It all comes down to that three-pound gooey mass in our heads. Our brains hold everything that we are - our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, memories, stories, concepts, pain, suffering, delight and of course, pizza. Can't forget pizza. My brain is very much different than your brain (hold the snide comments). Ok, so what can we consider a solid fact, or truth? Some say it's mathematics. The old adage is that $1 + 1 = 2$, no matter who you are, where you are. Math is cool because it's pretty water tight, logical and definitive. In math, there's no opinion or conjecture, it's just plain, verifiable proof. Like science, once something is proven, and adopted by the wider community, it becomes fact. With math, there are assumptions, however. Someone came up with the concept that if we "add" things together, we get more of them. But one apple plus one orange isn't two apples. It's two different fruits! The binary system is made up of only two numbers - 0 and 1. This system is used in well, everything today. It's the basis of all computing, processing, digital language, etc. So, my friends, all we need is zero and one, forget about apples, oranges and all the other fruits and digits. Are numbers real? That brings up pi - an "irrational," endless number that starts as 3.14159 and carries on until the end of time. A number without end? What? Why do we need it? Apparently, it's quite useful in everything we humans do or build. It's basically the mathematical constant - the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. Okay, numbers are cool, but Bitcoin, well that's just made up entirely. But didn't Einstein say that "reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one?" We also often criticize those for living in their own little bubbles of their own realities. But wait, isn't that what we all do? We all live in our own heads, so that's where our reality floats and bobs and squishes around. I'm with Tim Burton in believing that one person's craziness is another person's reality. And Lily Tomlin was spot-on when she observed that reality is the leading cause of stress. Back to reality, or a form thereof. Our experiences in life are our own interpretation of a set of electrical impulses in our brains. Our blobs turn these signals into things that make sense, and allow us to then make sense of the world around us. Some, like physics professor Sean Carroll said we can never prove that we're not all hallucinating, or living in a some massive computer simulation. What we see, he says, isn't the fundamental world. Our senses can't detect wave functions, atomic particles floating around or even the oxygen we breathe. "The smart thing to do is to take reality as basically real, and work hard to develop the best scientific theories we can muster in order to describe it," he said. Maybe I will just "row, row, row" my boat, since life is "but a dream." You can bet my boat will have a cooler filled with perfectly aged beverages! Real or not, I'm drinking them!

