

REALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent,
but the one most responsive to change —Charles Darwin

To live or not to live in Reality? The answers you are going to read from this writer are categorically on the side of Reality. My reasoning is not complicated. I'm defining Reality as whatever exists. It could be an entity, an action, a value, a thought, a form of energy—anything within Nature. Reality is *the* standard of truth and fact. Reality is the only environment which every living being has in common. It's whatever happens, whether we believe it or not. It's the guiding force behind evolution, the mother of all life. Reality controls *us*; we can't control *it*.

As living beings, we can't live without it; in fact, we feed off of it. Contrary to religious hocus-pocus, if we can't live without Reality, we can't feel without Reality. To the degree we try to isolate ourselves from Reality, we shortchange ourselves. As to the question about whether or not to live in Reality? The answer is, we have no choice, for anything that's possible by peaceful means. I emphasize the term "by peaceful means," because Reality also guides us towards moral choices. To be realistic necessitates we be honest with ourselves and with others. That's why, by the standards of reality, there is no such thing as an honest crook, an honest politician, and an honest clergy.

And yet for as self-evidence as the absoluteness of Reality should be, it is not as understood as it needs to be. Symptoms are everywhere. Why do things go wrong? In Reality they don't. They only go wrong for us because our expectations weren't realistic. The great question: Why is there evil? Because the majority of good people either fail to recognize it or are too willing to accept it. Why do bad things sometimes happen to good people? Because Reality has no conscience or consciousness. Why do we feel stress when none directly threatens us? Because too often we imagine threats that don't exist in Reality. War, disease, poverty, taxes, oppression, emotional stress, and every other form of human caused suffering, are symptomatic of humanities' ignorance about the nature of Reality.

Synonymous with Reality, I'm an advocate of applied knowledge and voluntary cooperation as the only possible remedies for human betterment. We'll always have ignorance, no matter how knowledgeable we are for the simple fact of our limitations. Nature is infinitely complex; there are too many things going on at one time. But it's one thing to not know and to know we don't know; that kind of ignorance takes knowledge. And it's another to not know, and to think and act as if we do know. This is the form of ignorance that does all the damage. Our thoughts and our actions cannot change Reality, no matter how hard we try. Or we can retreat from Reality in our minds. But the problem of what to do with our body always remains. We cannot defeat Reality; we can only learn to live with it.

I'll take a shot at explaining why Reality is so poorly understood and ignorance so endemic. To start, we are born ignorant. It's not until about the age of two, when children begin to learn language, do they begin to experience unreality. It comes from our parents and from every other authority figure not wise or opposed to the ways of the real world. Ignorance requires passivity, to accept what passes for knowledge without questioning its fidelity to Reality. Unfortunately, children don't have that capability. We're creatures of habit. Once indoctrinated, we usually carry early beliefs with us for the rest of our lives.

By the standards of Reality, it would seem that religion should have become extinct a long time ago. The sad fact that it hasn't, leads to the observation that the great majority are rarely capable of thinking independently. On most questions they accept popular views at face value. They are equally content if born or coaxed into one set of beliefs or another. The first step for the few who are not content with the status quo is to break free from the restraining influences of the great majority. In Reality, every person is born free. It is only when he wills himself to obey the dictates of religious and political authority that he becomes a sacrificial slave in the eyes of a self-styled elitist minority.

The authoritarians know that they cannot get you to conform by coercion alone; they need your willing cooperation. To do that they have to convince you to deny Reality. From there you are at their mercy. In religion, it's taught that what does not exist in Reality, exists in Reality. In Reality, a thing is what it is; in religion, it's often something else. In Reality, a thing will act according to it's nature; in religion, a thing can act against its nature. In Reality a thing cannot be something else at the same time, while in religion it can. In Reality there are no contradictions, while religion is completely self-contradictory. In Reality it's our nature to strive to improve on our circumstances, while religion teaches to adhere to custom and tradition. And yet for as self-evident as Reality is, the population who can't or who don't want to understand it is of epidemic proportions.

To understand Reality we have to make an effort to be conscious of it; passivity and habit is primarily what holds us back. It's a weeding out process. It can be uncomfortable at times, but in the long run the rewards are overwhelming greater than the drawbacks. I don't want to make this seem like an either-or proposition. One extreme is suicidal, while the other is living life to the fullest; most of us live somewhere in between. I chose religion as a subject to explain Reality because no other area of human thought is more in counter-opposition. Politics is another area of thought devoid of Reality, but that is a whole other topic in itself. They have a great deal in common in that they threaten some form of punishment for disobedience to their particular brand of behavior. What applies to religion, applies equally to politics.

Fortunately there are positive roll models. We can give the development of the discipline of science a good deal of credit for pioneering study of Reality. A scientist doesn't try to change Reality. Instead, he strives to understand it. You don't find scientists trying to force their beliefs on others. Kudos goes to the entrepreneurs who aim to transform scientific knowledge into practical (and entertaining) benefits. Similarly, you don't find entrepreneurs coercing people to buy their wares. Combined, science and capitalism undermine the machinations of religious and political authoritarians. In Reality, we are free to choose according to our own self interests. Coercion is a form of unreality in that it is a means of producing social conformity in too many areas where it is impossible. We need to be mindful of it, so we don't support it or fall victim to it.

In presenting this series, I hope to convince you, the reader, believer, faithful, voter, patriot, taxpayer, or however you define yourself, that religion and politics are social cancers. Do you want to live your life by your lights or do you want to let others fool you, intimidate you and hold you back? The choice is up to you.