

Wayne,

It's misleading to call the "objective world" (which is the full scope of scientific inquiry) real or unreal; it is more accurately an abstraction from reality. There is no purely objective world just as there is no purely subjective world. Each is an abstraction from lived reality.

(Don't the abstractions called "objects" in computer science suggest as much? A computer program at Tulane may, and probably does, have an "object" called Wayne Johnston. This object is an abstraction that consists of a character string (name), numeric string (birthdate), etc. A different database—say that of the IRS—may also have an object called Wayne Johnston but with different characteristics abstracted. The physical scientist, like the computer scientist, studies only those details relevant to his or her level of abstraction. But scientists sometimes forget this and make claims that go "beyond scope.")

Just as the scientist elucidates valuable truths from his abstraction from reality (called the "objective world"), so might poets, philosophers, and Zen masters elucidate valuable truths from their abstractions from reality. When I look at a philosophical assessment of nature in, say, Kant's Critique of Judgment, or the elaborate expression of natural and human forces in the world of Greek mythology, or Blake's visionary poetry, it's not at all clear to me that these teach us less about reality than Darwin. I agree that they tell us less about the abstraction of reality called the objective world, but they tell us about the subjective abstraction of reality -- love, friendship, betrayal, creativity, despair, all the flora and fauna of what Jung calls the collective unconscious. One could at least argue that this subjective line of vision on lived reality is closer to the heart of human experience than the objective line of vision.

But, you may argue, all this "subjective stuff" is really just the effect of objective stuff happening in the brain. We may be stuck with an irreducible chicken-and-egg problem here. Which is more real and which is the shadow cast? But let me try to work it out a bit.

Picture the first time you fell in love.

Now imagine we've isolated the electronic arc in the brain that corresponds to falling in love. Turns out, every time someone falls in love electricity fires across this arc. Now we open someone's brain and you see the arc.

Which is more "real"? The subjective feeling you got when you fell in love or the electrical arc in the localized time-space of a certain lobe of the brain?

It seems like you as the physics guy have come close to saying that the feeling of being in love is just unproven, ungrounded bullshit unless and until we can locate the electrical arc that gives it a quantifiable, demonstrable value.

It seems like I have come close to saying that the feeling of being in love is the only reality that truly matters and the electrical arc is insignificant.

How about this: the feeling of being in love is one kind of abstraction from reality (we'll call it "subjective reality") and the electrical arc is another kind of abstraction from the same reality (we'll call it "objective reality").

Now let's define "objective reality" as "reality abstracted as information." When we see red or green or blue, what has happened is electrons moving at certain wavelengths have been decoded as information that is usable to the brain. Same with every other sensation we receive from the objective world. Your pencil is 99% empty space with billions of little atoms flying around, but you see and touch the pencil -- you see it as abstracted information you can use (and the fact that you can use it as a pencil is a tremendous tribute to the power of human imagination).

Maybe we could define subjective reality as "reality abstracted as feeling" but "feeling" doesn't quite seem sufficient in this context.

But somehow I suspect that the feeling of "being in love" is not about getting information. Surely we can study "being in love" and get information about it, but "being in love" is now being viewed "from the outside." We have shifted the interface. We are now working from the vantage point of the "objective" abstraction of reality and see the objective aspects of being in love. This may prove a very useful study, and it can yield interesting information (such as the electrical arc) but it will never, no matter how many studies you do and no matter how subtle your analysis of the arc becomes, it will never give you the actual feeling of being in love. This feeling is by nature out of scope for an analytical tool that evolved to express information about the objective aspect of reality.

That's the best I can do for now.

Gary