

Is it possible to prove objective reality?

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Many people mistakenly believe that it's possible to prove the existence of general objective reality. However, attempts to prove objective reality run up against the fact that there is a possibility that cannot be refuted by any evidence, whether through reasoning or induction, that life is a never-ending dream. As some Western thinkers put it: "If I could only get out of my head, I could see whether there is anything there."

Some ancient Chinese thinkers cited a paragraph full of doubt as follows: "One day, Zhuangzi (369-286 BC) dreamed that he was a butterfly flying here and there, as if it were a conscious butterfly following its own inclinations. The butterfly did not know that it was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he woke up, and since then it has become obvious that he was Zhuangzi. But he does not know whether it was Zhuangzi who dreamed that he became a butterfly, or whether it was the butterfly that dreamed that it became Zhuangzi."

Based on the Sufi perspective, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi considered that life is nothing but a dream, and that it serves as a bridge for humans to cross from it, just as one passes from the dream seen by a sleeper to what it means in the world of wakefulness, as indicated by the Quranic verse: "O eminent ones, explain to me my vision, if you should interpret visions." And he cited the Prophet's saying, "People are asleep, and when they die, they wake up."

This problem has attracted the attention of many ancient and modern thinkers. Pascal believed that humans cannot know whether they are in a dream or in wakefulness, as long as what happens in a dream in

terms of feelings is like what happens in wakefulness, and thus, there is no objection to assuming that we are in a dream that we will not wake up from until death. Similarly, Bertrand Russell saw no objection to assuming that we are in a never-ending dream.

The idealist philosopher George Berkeley believed that assuming the existence of external objects is not necessary for the occurrence of our thoughts, as long as it is acknowledged that these thoughts may occur sometimes and perhaps always, in the same order that we currently perceive them, without the need for external objects to cause them. Therefore, he believed that we cannot objectively prove the existence of external objects, as our perceptions are subjective and dependent on the mind.

Descartes is considered one of the foremost thinkers who admitted their inability to find a way to reason objectively about reality. This led him to rely on trust in God as the organizer, as he believed that his personal certainty in God was sufficient to reassure him of the reality of the external world, after despairing of distinguishing between the waking world and dreams.

Thus, it cannot be said that a dream differs from reality in terms of lacking harmony, consistency, and clarity, as some dreams possess these qualities that are characteristic of reality. From a logical point of view, there is nothing to prevent the assumption that our reality is a consistent, long dream that includes intermittent dreams characterized by both consistency and inconsistency.

Despite this, there have been philosophical attempts to prove objective reality, including those attributed to Emmanuel Kant. The essence of his attempt is to attribute proof of objective reality to internal awareness of time, as time has the characteristic of permanence due to its connection to something eternal. Surely, this thing is not within us but is outside of us, and it is the essence in space. Thus, he proves external reality.

This is the gist of the argument for objective reality, which has several flaws, and we have detailed them in "Paradoxes in Critique of Pure Reason." However, we suffice here to point out the paradox in the argument:

This philosopher initially relied on the continuity of time to prove objective reality. However, he later argued that time and space, whether they involve continuity and infinity or not, cannot be known in their true essence, which led him to deny their objective existence. This conclusion entails two paradoxes: firstly, his acknowledgment of the non-existence of anything that proves the sequence in time, which means the inability to prove the constant continuity, contrary to his previous assumption that he relied on to prove objective reality. Secondly, he denied the reality of both space and time and their phenomena, which contradicts what he intended to prove through the concept of substance and its relation to time.

The philosopher Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr tried to prove objective reality through inductive evidence as in "Logical Bases of Induction". He believed that if the existence of some perceptible issues outside of us was proven through induction, it would mean the existence of an objective reality separate from us in general. And since perceptible issues outside can be proven through induction, this means proving the general objective reality. The evidence he presented in this regard depends on the distinction in consistency and system between reality and the subjective state. It enhances the probability value of reality by considering the stability that can be interpreted as a power of reality compared to the subjective state or through what we sense of a pattern and regularity in the association of two events together.

However, the truth is that this development presupposes some pre-existing issues for it to succeed. And if we usually do not distinguish between wakefulness and sleep except from this aspect, it does not prove partial facts. Some may assume the opposite of what we want to prove, that what we see in our dreams, he sees as reality, and what we

see as reality, he sees as a dream, and that the stability and consistency observed is stability and consistency in the dream, not reality. This assumption cannot be used as evidence to deny or confirm it. Likewise, it cannot be used as evidence to deny the assumption that both consistency and inconsistency are states of constant dream. Therefore, the distinction between what is considered a world of vision and what is considered a world of wakefulness does not help in the presented issue. The approach that Al-Sadr took in proving the general reality through partial facts is not correct because the latter does not prove anything unless the former presupposes it.

Thus, we conclude that inferring objective reality is impossible, although we are certain of it in our conscience, just as we are certain of the necessity of some non-logical mental principles, such as the principle of general causality, and that one thing cannot be in more than one place at the same time or that two things can be in the same place at the same time, as we have no evidence to confirm these non-sensory issues except for intuitive detection.

However, such principles differ from the reality of the world. We derive our certainty from the former necessarily based on intuition, while there is no sense of necessity for the latter. Therefore, there is nothing to prevent us intellectually from the actual state of affairs being contrary to what we intuitively feel, even though our subjective feeling does not allow for this meaning.

And we thank God for this affinity and instinct that has left no room for people's minds to inject hesitation and doubt into it or to treat it at the same level as other issues.

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Reference: <https://www.fahmaldin.net/index.php?id=2410>

