

Discourses on Isopublic Podcasts

Transcript and End Notes

Series: First Principles

Episode: 1.2 "What Is Real?"

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Transcript

Welcome to *Discourses on Isopublic*.

My name is Dean Adair—creator of isopublic, nation of political equals and the “rule yourself and no else” society.

♪ *Intro music*

This is Episode 1.2 titled, “What Is Real?”

This episode is next in my First Principles series. My goal with this series isn’t to persuade or convert but to disclose my opinions on fundamental questions which in some way contribute to the model of isopublic.

In episode 1.1 of this series, I gave my reasons why I believe nature is indeterminate and that we do indeed possess free will. For this episode, I’m going to reflect on the nature of nature or, more precisely, what we perceive as reality. That we tend to take reality for granted and that we shouldn’t. How this relates to isopublic I’ll offer at the end.

In the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, there’s a scene in which Morpheus first introduces Neo to simulated reality after unplugging him from the Matrix. It’s a white space seemingly without walls or ceiling, featureless except for two worn leather chairs and an old TV. Morpheus tells Neo, “This is the Construct.” With disbelief Neo asks, “This isn’t real?” Morpheus responds, “What is real? How do you define real?”¹

In the movie, the Matrix is a computer simulation of reality that the people in the Matrix don’t realize they live within. I remember the first time I saw the film. It was more than just entertainment to me, the movie made me think about the nature of reality. I don’t think any movie has affected me that way. As I watched the story unfold, I found myself feeling like Neo, disoriented and “a bit like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole.”

What if you really do live in a simulation? I don’t mean a simulation of the Universe as some believe, called the simulation hypothesis² which I don’t believe. But a *real* Matrix not constructed by some evil AI as in the film but by your own brain. As Morpheus continues, “If you’re talking about what you feel, taste, smell, or see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.”³ And that’s the truth of your existence isn’t it? That you do live in a real Matrix but one of your brain’s making, a simulation of the real world constructed by your brain. That means everything you sense, all that you perceive, isn’t the thing itself but a simulation of the thing as constructed by your evolved faculties of perception, i.e. the Construct of your own mind, a 5-dimensional diorama of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch acting as a real-time simulation of the real. How else could it be? It’s not as if real objects exist physically in your head, nor does your consciousness act like a window on the world. Your mind must construct a

model that mimics the world external to your consciousness with the brain-manufactured simulated world as what you *actually* experience every waking moment of every day.

The 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, proposed in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that there are two realities, the noumenal and phenomenal. The noumenal being the real world, and the phenomenal being the world as you perceive it, i.e. the simulated world produced from your senses—the former being the things-in-themselves and the latter transcendental copies that exist only in your mind.

Thus, when you look about you, hear noises, taste food, smell smells, feel what you touch, all that is a mere representation of the real and not the things-in-themselves. That what you perceive is derived from your senses. That in your subconscious, all the sensory inputs are processed and assembled for your conscious mind to perceive the world as you do in a simplified, coordinated, and useful form. Your brain is functioning like a reduction machine that enables you to act in the world effectively. Your environment is impossibly complex, but nature via natural selection has fine-tuned your perception such that noumenal complexity is optimally simplified making possible your survival in nature. Thus, you don't perceive everything in nature, only that which is good enough for humans to survive in nature.

Unfortunately for Kant, he got everything else after that wrong as far as I'm concerned. I find only serious problems studying Kant past this point, though he went much further in his thinking. After Kant conceived of the noumenal/phenomenal, he concluded that "Space is not an empirical concept which has been derived from external experience,"⁴ and that "Space is a necessary representation *a priori*, forming the very foundation of all external intuitions."⁵ Thus, Kant believed our awareness of space is *a priori* intuition, meaning that we conceive of space *before* we experience it which isn't the case. This is Kant's blunder—all that follows I dismiss.

What Kant got profoundly wrong is that we're born with space-awareness via our genes. That through the experiences of our ancestors via natural selection over countless generations we developed a built-in *a posteriori* intuition of space, what can be called *genetic experience*.

What I mean by genetic experience is that, in essence, our genes have encoded the experiences of our ancestors via inherited mutations. So perhaps as our distant predecessors were being hunted by various hungry predators, those who could discern sounds from the left or right had better survival odds than those who couldn't, living long enough to reproduce resulting in our having two ears, not one. And not three or four ears, since more it seems wouldn't be necessary, i.e. nature keeping things simple not stupid. Or that with two eyes, we have stereoscopic vision giving us depth perception increasing our survival odds over monocular vision allowing our ancestors with two eyes to better gauge distance to predator or prey. It's our physiology, our physical being, that gives us our perception of space, not intuition absent experience as Kant believed.

Kant also believed our time-awareness is *a priori*. But space implies time, meaning without space, i.e. dimensionality, there can be no time or vice versa. This, because what we call time is just the relative change of all things in space. Kant wrote, "Time is not an empirical concept deduced from any experience, for neither coexistence nor succession would enter into our perception, if the representation of time were not given *a priori*. Only when this representation *a priori* is given, can we imagine that certain things happen at the same time (simultaneously) or at different times (successively)." This is wrong. Because time is inseparable from space, that our innate sense of space implies an innate sense of time. Or put another way, time is the change in the relative state of objects with space acting as the medium that allows change to occur. Measuring time might be a relatively new innovation for *Homo sapiens*, since about 6,000 years ago,⁶ but our perception of time must date to the



dawn of our species. If the Universe were to stop changing all at once, time would stop. Time isn't a thing-in-itself, i.e. time isn't a noumenal or physical thing in nature, i.e. you can't feel, taste, smell, or see time. Time is an abstract concept useful for measuring relative change in space, just as distance is useful for measuring relative position in space. But our awareness of both space and time is *a posteriori* not *a priori* as indicated by our physical characteristics.

But if time is conceptual, wouldn't that make time *a priori*? I don't think so. It makes time descriptive of an innate property of nature and by-product of experience. I reject the distinction of *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge as unnecessary and confused. I don't believe there can actually be *a priori* knowledge, i.e. knowledge independent of experience. Whatever *a priori* is, I'm not going to consider it knowledge. For me, knowledge must be rooted in human experience either directly via our senses, or indirectly as either communicated experience of others or our ancestors as genetic experience.

So, for example, I consider mathematics to be *a posteriori*. The number one is represented in nature as a single thing, two two things, three three things, etc. Zero is the absent thing. The concept of numbers is rooted in experience, thus, all knowledge predicated on numbers is rooted in experience too. Algebra, geometry, calculus, etc. are derived from arithmetic and arithmetic is manipulation of numbers. In other words, we can't imagine or intuit anything we don't experience in the real world at some level, meaning, we can't conceive a mathematics that is entirely independent from our experience. Putting things together we experience to create a new unexperienced thing is still based on the initial experienced things. A pink unicorn is still a horse the color of pink with a horn. A flying spaghetti monster is still a monster that flies and is made of spaghetti. And though a monster might have big teeth and be made of pasta, those properties are composited from things we experience. I believe that we can't intuit what we don't experience no matter how much we abstract what we do experience directly or indirectly.

Kant lived before Darwin and was unaware of natural selection and the science of genetics, so he didn't understand genetic experience. Had Kant thought more about the fact humans have two eyes and two ears, he might have realized that our sense of space and time are a product of human physiology, not intuition. For calculus to be *a priori* would require the spontaneous knowledge or intuition of calculus divorced from arithmetic, *a priori* arithmetic a spontaneous intuition of addition and subtraction divorced from the experience of counting sheep or goats as our first ancestor to count with numbers might have done. But though I reject Kant's distinction of *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge, I do consider his insight of the noumenal/phenomenal worlds to be useful.

We can know the noumenal and phenomenal are true because, for instance, the tree you see or touch can't be physically in your head. There's no reason to believe the entire Universe exists only between your ears and that everything and everyone exists only for your sake. If we can agree on that, then we have to agree the Universe exists outside ourselves, outside our consciousness, and that our senses only give us the evolved means to selectively perceive it.

We can further know that, for the normal brain, the simulation of the noumenal world must be very accurate. It's safe to say that nature via natural selection has fine-tuned human sensory perception to enable us to survive effectively in nature. That those of our predecessors who failed to smell, hear or see the saber-toothed cat stalking them were less likely to pass on their genes than our ancestors who did. So, the noumenal must be effectively well represented by our senses, but only so far as necessary to make survival of the species possible. Thus, without the aid of technology, we can't sense radio waves, see in the ultraviolet spectrum, or breath for days underwater because it's not been necessary for our survival as a species to do so.

Can we ever *know* the noumenal world? By *know*, it would be in an objective and absolute fashion like we know $2+2=4$. Such that by knowing, we can know the future absolutely. In that sense, we can never objectively know any noumenal thing. Given what science and technology have revealed to us, e.g. the existence of atoms and subatomic particles, we know that nature is impossibly complex. That we should be confident in knowing that nature is *unknowable* in any objective absolute sense.

The ancient Greeks had a saying, “Know thyself,” that’s still commonly repeated today, even making an appearance in *The Matrix* (in Latin). But what does knowing oneself really mean? To know oneself noumenally? Phenomenally? Metaphysically? Maybe metaphorically? Approximately or precisely? What are the tolerances of knowing oneself?

The noumenal you is essentially unknowable. Consider that the average human tongue is estimated to contain some 10,000 taste buds,⁷ the average brain 100 billion neurons,⁸ and given that most cells in the body regularly die to be replaced by new cells, how well can you really know the real you? How do you plan to get in touch with the some 7×10^{27} atoms⁹ that make you you?

The inanities of postmodernism, critical theory, the opinion that sex is a cultural construct—all of that nonsense can be traced back to Kant’s blunder, to the Kantian transcendental aesthetic which is rooted in the belief that space and time is *a priori* intuition, not *a posteriori* via genetic experience. Though I do concede that all knowledge is a cultural construct, it doesn’t mean it’s arbitrary or not related to reality. Just because the idea of an elephant is a cultural construct, that we ascribe to the thing that it’s gray, large, has floppy ears, trunk and tusks, doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist in reality. We can change whatever we want to *believe* about the elephant, we can call it pink, small, and able to fly by flapping its ears but that doesn’t change what the noumenal elephant is in reality. We can say whatever we want about our biology, about the sexes, that they’re just cultural constructs and the differences imaginary, but that doesn’t change the reality that the sexes exist noumenally defined by their physical differences. We can wish reality anyway we want, but that doesn’t change reality nor the negative consequences of getting it wrong.

Our beliefs impact how we interact with the noumenal world which, in turn, impacts our well-being. Much of what we believe in the form of traditions, customs, mores, rituals, etc. from our ancestral past are rooted, even if by superstition, in lived experience that our ancestors believed to improve their well-being. We should indeed objectively and competently scrutinize traditional beliefs to determine if they do increase well-being or are harmful, but not be so dismissive and quick to dismantle wholesale just because they’re traditional, especially those that we don’t understand well like religion.

The success of our species in nature, in the noumenal world, depends on our effective use of our evolutionary advantages of tool-use, cognition, and language. Our cognition includes reason. It’s only through reason do we have technology and technology is a bridge between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. If we fail to correctly judge the noumenal, if our perception of reality doesn’t conform to reality, we invite calamity with misconceived or misused technology.

I define *reality* as the universal set of all interacting things that also includes us. By *interacting things*, I mean any influence that an object (matter or energy) has on another object such that the interaction causes an effect whether we are able to observe the effect or not. And that if we take the totality of all such affecting things, I hold that this constitutes the bounds of what we think of as nature and the Universe.

You look into the night sky and photons of light strike your retina causing an electrochemical response in your nervous system and you see a distant star. Cause and effect. Reality being all things that affect other things in this vast array of direct and indirect interactions is nature, is our reality. The stars emit

photons that travel through the vastness of space to interact with your eye, your nervous system, then your consciousness placing you and the stars in the same reality. You hear or read my words which entered your consciousness by the firing of synapses in your brain, my mind affecting yours by a causal chain of digital transmissions thus placing you and me in the *same* reality. This is what constitutes the noumenal world and the phenomenal world how we experience it, thus the phenomenal is dependent on the noumenal and not separate from it.

Given what is reality, the next question might be, “Why is reality?” Why does nature exist? I don’t know and I’m confident no one does, thus to us reality just is. Why does it need a reason to exist? As far as we’re concerned reality exists for its own sake, as do you and do I. Nature is an end in itself, and so are you and so am I. I can’t impart any meaning beyond this without making assumptions I can’t justify. The noumenal world is complex beyond comprehension, including the noumenal you and me.

Though I consider Kant’s thinking beyond his point of blunder harmful, I think there is an important moral consideration for his noumenal/phenomenal worlds. With respect to how we interact with the noumenal world, is to recognize that our understanding of nature is limited but that our actions in nature have real consequences. That with technology, the consequences could cause great suffering if we don’t use it virtuously. That anyone who proclaims the “science is settled” upon which public policy is to be based should be received with immense skepticism. And of those who are skeptical, they must be heard and their opinion given dutiful consideration at the highest level.

The issue of “climate change” so-called is an example. Government climate “scientists” so-called make dire proclamations of impending doom based on computer models, not science. They use computer climate models, which have yet to come close to accurately predicting the conditions they are intended to simulate, to justify government action to solve this manufactured problem by adding restrictions on industry or diverting tax money to themselves or their supporters with research grants, carbon-tax credit schemes, and so. There have been calls to decarbonize the economy and even to geoengineer Earth’s climate to fix a problem there’s no evidence even exists or that they’ve fabricated themselves with data manipulation.¹⁰ This is a dangerous situation that I see as the demon-child of government and the natural human proclivity for hubris and greed. Inane or corrupt policies of politicians and bureaucrats, enforced by police and military, have the potential to send human civilization back into a pre-industrial dark age causing untold harm to humanity and the planet they claim to be so concerned about while shielding themselves from the negative consequences, i.e. living it up in their gated communities while everyone else suffers. It’s estimated the US government has misappropriated an estimated \$170 billion of public funds from 1993 to 2014¹¹ combating the hobgoblin of climate change. In the isopublic, those serving in high political office, bureaucrats, and academics responsible for such a lie would be held personally liable.

On a practical level, Kant has little to offer, but there’s an ideological value in distinguishing the noumenal/phenomenal worlds. That the principles of equal freedom and integrity of state matter in this regard. The right of equal freedom gives each the ability to voice concerns over public policy that could have wide-spread dire consequences and the integrity of state assures that those opinions are heard, especially unpopular or controversial opinions. I believe isopublic is the best model of state to accomplish these vital objectives. This, because isopublic has no political establishment to enforce policies that work against the interest of the People.

In isopublic, the state doesn’t govern the People, the People govern the state, and the state can’t act on its own or as a tool for the wealthy to get wealthier at the expense of everyone else. In a free society, harm is limited to individuals, not the entire country as can government policy. If individuals make



mistakes, which all humans do, the damage done is contained and far more easily corrected and remedied.

Here ends this episode of *Discourses on Isopublic*.

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This is Dean Adair signing off until next time.

♪ *Outro music*

End Notes

¹ *The Matrix*. Directed by The Wachowskis, Warner Brothers, 31 Mar. 1999.

² "Simulation Hypothesis." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 15 Oct. 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulation_hypothesis.

³ Ibid. *The Matrix*.

⁴ Friedrich Max Müller, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. In Commemoration of the Centenary of its First Publication. Translated into English by F. Max Mueller (2nd revised ed.) (New York: Macmillan, 1922). 11/4/2019. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1442#Kant_0330_180.

⁵ Ibid. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1442#Kant_0330_181.

⁶ "Time." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Nov. 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time#Temporal_measurement.

⁷ "How Many Taste Buds Are on the Human Tongue?" *Reference*, IAC Publishing, <https://www.reference.com/science/many-taste-buds-human-tongue-fb9a57397523e05c>.

⁸ "How Many Neurons in the Human Brain?" *HumanBrainFacts*, <https://www.humanbrainfacts.org/neurons-in-the-brain.php>.

⁹ "Composition of the Human Body." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 14 Oct. 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composition_of_the_human_body#Elemental_composition_list.

¹⁰ "61% Fake Data." *YouTube*, Tony Heller, 10 Feb. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgk3xFHvWLE>.

¹¹ "U.S. Government Funding of Climate Change." *Climate Dollars*, <https://www.climatedollars.org/full-study/us-govt-funding-of-climate-change/>.