

S15-01

DEFINITIONS OF REALITY

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Introduction: The nature of reality is an age-old problem. The distinction to be drawn between the external world and our subjective experience raises questions about how far our experience of the phenomenal world corresponds to the objective external world.

Aims: In this talk I will describe Plato's simile of the cave, and use this to examine the nature of reality and of illusion. I will then turn to how reality and illusion are dealt with in literature, drawing examples from Cervantes' Don Quixote, Jose Samarago's Blindness, Sophocles' Oedipus The King, and the works of Borges' & Kafka. I will also critically examining Baudrillard's simulacrum.

Method: This will involve conceptual analysis of the ideas and notions in the texts described above.

Results: We can never be sure of the accuracy and validity of our experiences. This problem is even more acute in the modern world because of the difficulty that consciousness has in distinguishing reality from fantasy.

Conclusion: The philosophical and literary ideas and concepts about reality are of great importance to psychiatrists, not least because of the distortions of reality that many patients experience. I will conclude by emphasizing the implications of these notions for psychiatrists.