Psychosis

By Chris Dunn

According to Princeton University, psychosis is any severe mental disorder in which contact with reality is lost or highly distorted. The first and most obvious question to ask is: what is reality? According to Princeton University, reality is all of your experiences that determine how things appear to you. Thus, psychosis is any severe mental disorder in which contact with all of your experiences that determine how things appear to you is lost or highly distorted. How can what your experience of what appears to you be distorted? If you experience pink elephants sitting on mushrooms on a day to day basis, you experience this as it appears to you. Thus, pink elephants sitting on mushrooms are reality. The reality of this perception does not depend on the material existence and/or an “external cause” of your perception. In other words, the previous definition dismisses the idea of objectivity. Thus, even if every reasoning being has a different experience of the “same” coordinate in “space-time”, they all perceive reality. None of their perceptions are wrong, whether or not they blatantly contradict each other. This is very much in opposition to the commonsensical and/or traditional outlook of what reality is. The traditional definition of reality is: that which exists objectively; that which is true. Thus, using this definition of reality and the common understanding of proof, by the fact that others did not see pink elephants accompanied by scientific analysis, it could be determined that in reality pink elephants did not exist and that the one who saw them is psychotic. This definition of reality requires that two witnesses to the same event do not contradict each other, else one must be wrong. However, this definition leads to a difficulty: how can we know who is wrong? Perhaps, if there are more witnesses to the event, whichever account has the most witnesses is the truth. I would assent that most of the time this increases the likelihood that the majorities’ account is the true account, however I would also have to object that there is a possibility that the majority are wrong. Many thinkers have been labeled as insane in their time, but are celebrated as geniuses today, i.e. Galileo. Then, perhaps reality can be found by science. If after scientific analysis, it is found that a pink elephant does not exist, then it does not exist in reality. A major basis for science is repeatability. If something can be repeated through experimentation, it is accepted as reality. However, science is flawed in this assumption. If one sees a pink elephant on a day to day basis, without the assent of witnesses, one is labeled as psychotic, despite the repeatability. A real example of this taking place is the “discovery” of cold-fusion. Several scientists claimed they witnessed it, but it was rejected by the scientific community because it could not be repeated. Quantum theory, however has, on the whole been accepted by the scientific community, despite its unpredictable and unrepeatable nature. Thus,
Science is dependent on the opinions, perceptions, and biases of the observers. However, the traditional definition of reality does not rely on the awareness of reality. In other words, reality is independent of consciousness along with its opinions, perceptions, and biases. Thus, according to this definition, it is plausible that no one is in touch with reality. But which of these definitions of reality, if either, is correct; which is the reality? In order to judge which is true, we must use the preexisting definitions of reality. Thus, it appears we are trapped; it appears that we cannot know the reality of reality and thus reality in itself. I would like to claim that if we are in such disagreement as to what the definition of reality is, much less what actually constitutes reality; reality may not be as obvious as many would have us to believe. Perhaps only a rare few, if any, actually come to know reality. Let us now turn to the original definition I began this paper with, psychosis. To paraphrase, psychosis is not being in touch with reality. Thus, if only a rare few, if any, know reality, they are the only sane individuals. The rest of us are psychotic.

Are we then to conclude that since it appears we cannot know reality, we should throw our hands above our heads and give up searching and questioning and/or resort to some breed of skepticism? I personally do not believe this is the path we should take. I believe that in light of this we should search harder and question more. Skepticism is the cowardly, if not impossible way out. As a “rational” being, we are practically forced to make judgments on reality. We could, of course, drown ourselves in the mindless ramblings of sitcoms and soap operas or numb ourselves with alcohol and drugs. I, however, believe that we should explore metaphysics to its fullest potential and tackle the apparent impossibilities of our finite existence.

Knowledge of reality may escape us, but not wisdom. Wisdom was never and is not for the divine. It is for any and all who love it; it is for the philosophers.

Please join us for our discussion on psychosis (or anything else for that matter). We will meet in Gamble Hall, room 213 on Friday, February 6th at 1:00 pm.

How much better to get Wisdom than gold, to choose understanding than silver!
- Proverbs 16:16

If you have any questions, criticisms, or comments, please contact either Chris Dunn or Dr. Nordenhaug. Anyone interested in writing a brief article for The Philosopher’s Stone, please contact either of us (it doesn’t have to be good, [as shown above], however it does have to be thoughtful).

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