

*Why do we err despite our sharp eyes and attuned ears? Because man is a lovely accumulation of limits and imperfections.*

Reality is consistent and permanently existent. We define it, in simple terms, as the way things are and work; it is the true state of the universe, our surroundings, and ourselves. In short, reality is a limitless truth. We assume too often, however, that what we believe to be real is truly real. We assume that the reality that we perceive is, in fact, the whole reality of things, rather than a part of it. This is where we as typical human beings begin to err. It is true that the reality of the world has the property of being understandable; there is a sense to everything -- to the planets that revolve around the sun as well as to the electrons orbiting an atom's nucleus. Yet, how can human beings who are limited mortals, completely know and thoroughly understand something as infinite and intangible as the reality of the universe? It would be arrogant and foolish of us to believe that we could grasp all of reality. Reality has the property of being understood and we have the capability of understanding it, but only up to a certain point for we are confined by our limits, while reality has no limits. It is indeed a "thing" that stretches beyond the scope of our minds. So it is our limits (which we are in addition not always fully aware of) that initially cause us to err by impeaching us to understand the complete reality of things.

Our first limit is our perception of the world, of what is true. We cannot see all with our eyes, hear all with our ears, taste all with our tongue, or feel all with our hands. Our limited physical capabilities cause our perceptions to be particularly incomplete. It is with these at times unsatisfactory five senses, however, that we will attempt to

perceive reality as it is so that we can conveniently respond to it. Yet, our individual flaws and limits (for not everyone is limited the same way) will make the reality we perceive particularly our own. For example, a color-blind man will not perceive van Gogh's *The Starry Night* the same way a person with normal eye sight will. It does not mean that the color blind man will not appreciate the painting. It simply means he will appreciate it differently. His perception of his reality, however, might cause him to err by making him say that the painting is boring. This is an extreme case that clearly illustrates how we cannot sense all the reality there is to sense due to physical limits. Thus, our perceptions of the world are more incomplete than wrong. It is as if each individual could only see the world through one perspective, one mental window that restricts their perceptions.

We would probably err less if our interpretations of our perceptions were flawless as well. However, it is not the case. Our second limitation comes with our mind's interpretation of those already imperfect perceptions. Our minds literally "filter" our perceptions of the world and ourselves. It is our experiences, emotions, tastes, imagination, logic, irrationality, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which are in the end the elements in charge of interpreting our perceptions one way or another. Sometimes these will distort our perception either slightly or dramatically, but our minds will always interpret our perceptions one way or another. For example, a woman who is already in a melancholic emotional state because her husband has left her is most likely to interpret F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel "The Great Gatsby" as a tragic love story rather than a novel on the corruption of the upper class. Her eyes have perceived the Fitzgerald words on the pages of the novel the same way everybody else has, but her emotional "filter" causes her to

interpretation to be different from somebody else's. And, thus, she could be erring in her interpretation of the novel.

But how do our incomplete perceptions and distorting interpretations lead us to err on a daily basis? This is where reality comes into play again. When we have limited perceptions and distorting interpretations of our world's reality, we have limited knowledge of our world's reality as well. This limited knowledge will cause us to at times incorrectly respond to the world because we do not understand it completely. This means that we will make mistakes because we do not know what is the right decision to make. We attempt to interact and respond with the world in such a way that will benefit us. Unfortunately, our imperfections and limitations make us incapable of perfectly responding to every situations. For example, an American economist with bad eye sight reads the numbers of graph wrong. That is his physical perceptive limitation. This economist also has little experience, which cause him to interpreted the data incorrectly, and be even more wrong. That is his distorting mental interpretation. As a result this economist has limited knowledge on what is actually going on in the U S economy and tells President that there should be a tax cut, causing a huge budget deficit. This economist has erred because he had limited knowledge and understanding, causing him to make the wrong decisions because he did know the right one.

In summary, we cannot know everything and find ourselves incapable of responding correctly to everything. We will hesitate or undertake the wrong course of action because of our limited perceptions and distorting interpretations of the world, which affect our knowledge. For if we err most of the time it is because we have limited knowledge on how to interact with the world. This limited knowledge means limited understanding, which reduces our ability to act and react as we always

should. And, thus, the wrong decisions we make and clumsy actions we undertake due to our limited knowledge (or faulty information that we mistakenly believe to be knowledge) leads us to err.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the more knowledge we obtain the less likely we are to err. For example, an experienced and trained teacher with knowledge in pedagogy is more likely to be a good teacher, than a teacher who has never taught or been taught. However, I employ the word likely for extensive knowledge does not guarantee we will always be right. Often, our emotions, imagination, intuition, and other “filters” mentioned before will not only distort our perceptions of the world, but influence our actions and thoughts despite our knowledge. For example, the CEOs of Enron who lied and manipulated their financial situation knew that what they were doing was wrong and illegal or erring according to the law if you prefer. Yet, they dismissed this knowledge for their interpretation of reality due to their logic and values (or lack of) influenced their actions by making them believe they could get away with their crimes. Another example, would be Galileo’s trial. Despite his scientific calculations and observations that the sun not the earth was the center of our solar system, the Church and society made Galileo recant his discovery because of their beliefs which dismissed this knowledge. Thus, they erred.

Some may say, however, that we do not err solely because of our limitations, but because there is such a thing as “bad luck,” in other words, outside circumstances that will cause us to err. These exterior forces could range from the actions of other people working around us to a computer meltdown. These externalities would obviously explain the times we have erred despite our accurate knowledge and perception of things.

However, it would be fallacious to consider our errors due to external forces as erring. We can argue that in fact we are not erring when these outside circumstances come into play because we have no control over them, while erring implies control. To err is to make a choice, to take control of ourselves and make a decision. But we have no control over these outside forces that cause us to fail rather than err. For example, a student who is unable to turn in a TOK essay on time because his printer did not work, is not erring. He did not make any wrong decisions. He failed to turn in the essay, not err. However, if the student does not submit the essay because he did not want to write it, then he is erring. It is true that we err because we have limited knowledge. However, it is not because we have limited knowledge that we automatically err. In the case of the TOK student, he fails to print his essay because he has no knowledge on how to fix printers. He is not erring, though, because he does make the decision not to print his essay because he has no knowledge on how to fix printers.

Thus, we err because of our limited perceptions, imperfect interpretations, and limited knowledge. As a matter of fact, we will always err because it is in our nature to make mistakes and climb out of the abyss of our errors. To not err would mean that we no longer had the innate imperfection that defines us as human. Yet, it is precisely because we attempt to surmount our imperfections and errors, to indefatigably search for the perfection that we lack, that we as imperfect beings have achieved the greatest feats. In short, our imperfections to overcome and without our errors to learn from, reality would be nothing more than a bland fairy tale with a happy ending. And wouldn't that be imperfect as well?

