

The Subjective/Objective Duality

Excerpt from *The Hand That Rocks the World*, by David Shackleton

The subjective/objective duality is an interesting one. Most people are relatively comfortable with the concept that there is a subjective realm of internal thoughts and feelings, and an objective realm of objects and phenomena in the outer world. Common distortions of this duality consist of seeing one of these opposites as dominant and the other as a consequence, a derivative of the first. For instance, the new age idea of consensual reality sees the outer, objective world as purely a consequence of people's internal, subjective beliefs. Consider the following writing from a popular website:

“Living Consciously

“Dear Friends,

“To paraphrase Neville: the future becomes the present and is revealed in our inner talking.

“The reason that kind of statement initiates resistance is simple. Most of us do not stay with an inner dialogue on a particular topic long enough to actually set it in motion. We day dream but we do not really get to the feeling of the thing as already being so. Our future then, is a rehash of the past or a hit and miss kind of experience, where we feel we have nothing much to say about the events in our life. We have not had the experience of the power of mind to bring about desired results.

“The key is to assume the Effect is in the Cause and Cause is in our mind. We are not making something happen as much as we are “seeing” the thing done before it appears in the world. It is in this seeing that mind power takes shape as form and substance. Matter follows the direction that Mind takes. Just as the chronic worrier always has something to fear, the chronic affirmer of prosperity always has supply to spare.

“People complain that the emphasis on this Law is misplaced in a spiritual teaching. It is not! The ignorance of it causes people to be in despair or intense anger at the seeming injustices in their world. Despair and anger cause violence, greed, self destructive behaviors, crime, war and ultimately taint the collective unconscious, making dis-ease a reality. Poverty exists because people do not know how to generate prosperity. This causes the rich to hoard, to arm themselves against marauding invaders, to live behind iron gates. This causes the poor to stay poor and/or to hate those who prosper, creating an “us and them” atmosphere which always leads to violence of some kind.

“The world of effects is not the problem. It is the inner world of ignorance that needs to change.

Stay tuned in,

Dr. Carol Carnes”¹

We can see from these ideas that a coherent, internally consistent worldview can be created entirely around one side of this subjective/objective duality. Dr. Carnes' view of the world, as expressed in this post, is that the objective is subordinate to, is entirely determined by the subjective. As she says, “Matter follows the direction that Mind takes.” The recent popularity of the “Law of Attraction”¹ represents the same elevation of the subjective over the objective, in different words. Here is the blurb from author Rhonda Byrne's website:

“The Secret [the Law of Attraction] has been passed down through the ages... coveted, hidden, lost, stolen, bought for vast sums of money, and known by some of the most exceptional people who ever

¹ The Law of Attraction is the belief that achievements in the external world, such as success and prosperity, are entirely the consequences of internal states of mind.

lived: Plato, Galileo, DaVinci, Beethoven, Edison, and Einstein, to name but a few. *The Secret* book reveals how you can change every aspect of your life. You can turn any weakness or suffering into strength, power, unlimited abundance, health and joy. Everything is possible, nothing is impossible. There are no limits. Whatever you can dream of can be yours, when you use The Secret.”ⁱⁱ

It is not difficult to discern the attraction of such a worldview – it promises to deliver whatever you desire without the troublesome problems of merit, competence or sustained effort. It is, of course, a fantasy. It is a fantasy that has netted its author millions of dollars (*The Secret* book and film grossed over \$300 million and the book remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 146 consecutive weeks).ⁱⁱⁱ

The idea that the objective world can be controlled just by wishing it so is magical thinking at its most obvious – and yet it is believed by millions. Such a worldview will manifest some problems in that it is false-to-fact, but it provides explanations for such difficulties. For instance, a person who believes with Dr. Carnes or Rhonda Byrne that the subjective controls the objective may try many times to get their mind into the right place to create prosperity for themselves – and as long as that result doesn’t occur, their worldview will tell them that they must still be harboring negative thoughts that are defeating their purpose, undermining their unity of mind. If at some point their trying meets a matching opportunity in the outer world and they do find some prosperity, they will attribute that success to finally getting their mind into the right place.

The worldview, despite being a serious abbreviation and distortion of reality, has an explanation for everything. Dr. Carnes’ short piece of writing above, for example, purports to explain external, objective manifestations of violence, greed, self-destructive behaviors, crime, war, poverty and prosperity all as solely and entirely consequences of the inner, subjective world.

The truth about these dualistic opposites is always the same – both sides have independent existence and equal power. In the case of the subjective/objective duality, the subjective world is independent of the objective, and the objective world is independent of the subjective. This doesn’t mean that they have no relationship, no influence on each other; clearly they do. Our thoughts and feelings are affected by what happens in the outer world, and the outer world is affected by our subjective attitudes and decisions. What independence means is that a change in one does not instantly and automatically produce a change in the other. Each side is influenced, but not controlled, by the other.

Consider the famous philosophical question, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?” This is a question about the subjective/objective duality. It asks if the objective world has independent existence from the subjective. Behind the question is the obvious fact that we cannot know for sure. Since we can only perceive when we look or listen, then we cannot know by observation what is happening when we aren’t looking and listening. If, however, we accept the independence of the objective and the subjective worlds, as suggested by the dualistic balancing model, then the answer is clear. The tree falling in the forest makes a sound, whether or not there is anyone to hear it.

I find this a satisfactory answer because if I invert the question the answer seems obvious. The question about the tree is really asking whether an event in the objective world that has no consequences in anyone’s subjectivity is still real. Inverting that question produces this: If a person has a thought or feeling that has no consequences in the objective world, is the thought or feeling still real? The thought or feeling was *experienced*; it seems obvious that it is real. By dualistic balance, I say that the objective and the subjective are both fully real, fully independent, and of equal, balanced power.

What would a worldview look like with the opposite imbalance, one that elevates the objective over the subjective, that sees our thoughts and feelings as simply the consequence of controlling events in the outer world? This is the worldview of religious determinism, which sees people essentially as predetermined puppets of God’s plan for the objective cosmos. This worldview is not as common these days as new age consensus reality, but it has had great following in the past. Which side of a duality

people gravitate toward varies with cultural and individual factors of the time. What seems to remain constant is that it will be just one side that they choose, while making the other side wrong.

The progress of an individual or a society towards wisdom, then, is progress towards dualistic balance, towards the state where we 'get' both sides, by which I mean that both sides feel right to us, both are in alignment with how we experience and comprehend the world, and both are in full use in our consideration of strategies and solutions for our lives.

i www.carolcarnes.com, cited May 2013.

ii See Wikipedia article at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_attraction_\(New_Thought\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_attraction_(New_Thought))

iii Taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_(book)) on August 7, 2014.