



Reality does not Conform to the Ideal, but Confirms It

Failure Comes Only When We Forget Our Ideals and Objectives and Principles

—Jawaharlal Nehru

The relationship between reality and the ideal has been a perennial question in **philosophy, art, and science**. While reality often appears to deviate from our idealized visions, it simultaneously serves to validate the existence and necessity of these ideals. Reality, in its complexity and imperfections, does not conform to our ideals but confirms their **relevance** and **importance**.

Philosophy has long grappled with the **tension between the real and the ideal**. **Plato's theory of forms** presents one of the earliest and most influential articulations of this relationship. According to Plato, the **material world is a shadow of a higher reality** composed of perfect, immutable forms or ideals. The objects we encounter in daily life are imperfect copies of these forms. For example, a specific tree is an imperfect representation of the ideal form of "Tree."

While the physical tree does not conform to the ideal form, its existence confirms the necessity of the Form to understand and categorize it. The imperfections and variations we observe in individual trees highlight the **conceptual perfection** and **universality of the Form**. Thus, **reality confirms the ideal** by necessitating its conceptual framework to make **sense of the imperfections observed** in the real world.

Immanuel Kant further developed this idea by arguing that human cognition relies on prior concepts and ideals to structure experience. According to Kant, while we can never fully grasp the **"thing-in-itself"** (the true essence of reality), our understanding of the world is mediated by ideals like causality and time. These ideals do not conform to the empirical world directly; instead, they shape our perception and confirmation of it. Reality, in its stubborn resistance to idealization, thereby confirms the need for these cognitive ideals to make sense of experience.

Literature and art also explore the dynamic between reality and the ideal. In these domains, the ideal often represents a **moral, aesthetic, or social aspiration** against which reality is measured. The tension between the real and the ideal becomes a powerful narrative and thematic device.

In Indian literature, **Munshi Premchand** is a notable author who depicted the harsh realities of early **20th-century rural India**. Premchand's works showcase the stark contrasts between societal ideals and the grim realities of his time. The novel **"Godaan"** portrays the struggles of Hori, a poor farmer, who dreams of owning a cow to improve his family's life. The harsh realities of exploitation by landlords, moneylenders, and societal pressures are depicted in a poignant manner. Despite the grim reality, the novel underscores the **ideals of simplicity, perseverance, and moral integrity**. Hori's persistent hope and dignity, even in the face of insurmountable challenges, highlight the disparity between the idealized rural life and the brutal reality of exploitation and poverty. Premchand uses this contrast to critique social injustices and advocate for compassion and reform.

In Indian visual art, the tension between reality and the ideal is vividly illustrated through various movements and individual artists who have captured the essence of Indian life and its social dynamics. Two notable examples are the Bengal School of Art and the works of the Progressive Artists' Group.

The Bengal School of Art emerged in the early 20th century as a reaction against Western academic art styles. It aimed to revive Indian traditions and aesthetics, often idealizing India's past, spirituality, and nature.

Artists like Abanindranath Tagore depicted scenes from Indian mythology, historical events, and rural life, often romanticizing and idealizing these subjects. For example, his painting "**Bharat Mata**" (**Mother India**) presents a personified, idealized vision of India as a nurturing mother figure, symbolizing **purity** and **sacrifice**. While the Bengal School focused on these ideals, it did not entirely shy away from the realities of colonial oppression and social issues. The idealized visions served as a call to **cultural** and **national rejuvenation**, highlighting the gap between the nation's glorious past and its current state under colonial rule. This romanticized portrayal was a form of resistance, affirming the value of cultural identity and independence.

In the realm of politics, the interaction between reality and ideals is both profound and contentious. Political ideologies are often built on ideals of justice, equality, and liberty. However, the implementation of these ideals is invariably challenged by the complexities and imperfections of real-world governance.

The history of democratic movements illustrates this dynamic. The ideal of democracy envisions a political system where power is derived from the consent of the governed, and where all individuals enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Yet, the reality of democratic societies often falls short of this ideal, marred by issues such as corruption, inequality, and political polarization.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the key leaders of the Indian independence movement, championed the ideals of **non-violence (Ahimsa)** and **truth (Satya)**. His vision for India was rooted in the principles of self-rule (Swaraj), equality, and social harmony.

The reality of British colonial rule was marked by exploitation, racial discrimination, and economic deprivation. Gandhi's various campaigns, such as the **Dandi March** and the **Quit India Movement**, highlighted these injustices and mobilized the masses to fight against colonial oppression. Gandhi's ideals were a stark contrast to the oppressive reality of colonialism. For example, **Dandi March** was not just a protest against the salt tax but a symbolic act challenging the entire structure of British authority. By embodying the ideals of non-violence and civil disobedience, Gandhi exposed the moral and ethical bankruptcy of colonial rule. This tension between the ideal and the real galvanized millions of Indians to strive for independence and social reform, ultimately leading to India's freedom in 1947.

Similarly, in the context of global politics, the ideal of universal human rights often confronts the harsh realities of **war**, **oppression**, and **poverty**. International bodies like the United Nations strive to uphold these ideals, even as real-world events repeatedly expose their limitations. The persistence of human rights violations does not render the ideal meaningless; rather, it confirms the urgent need for these ideals as benchmarks for progress and as tools for advocacy and change.

Science, too, exemplifies the interplay between the real and the ideal. The scientific method is grounded in the pursuit of objective truth and the formulation of theories that aim to describe and predict natural phenomena accurately. However, the empirical nature of science means that theories must constantly be tested against the messy and often recalcitrant reality of the natural world.

For example, consider the development of **Newtonian mechanics**. Isaac Newton formulated the laws of motion and universal gravitation in the **17th century**, providing a framework that could predict the movement of objects with remarkable accuracy. These laws represented an idealized view of the world, where forces and motions could be described with precise mathematical relationships. However, as scientists conducted more experiments and made more precise observations, particularly on the scale of very large objects (like planets) or very small ones (like subatomic particles), they discovered phenomena that **Newtonian mechanics** couldn't explain. This discrepancy between the **ideal (Newton's laws)** and the **real (empirical observations)** led to the development of newer theories.

In the field of biology, the ideal of a perfectly adapted organism is often undermined by the reality of genetic mutations and environmental changes. The theory of evolution by natural selection, proposed by **Charles Darwin**, acknowledges this imperfection by explaining how adaptation is an ongoing,

imperfect process driven by the realities of survival and reproduction. The imperfections observed in nature confirm the dynamic and provisional nature of biological ideals, underscoring the continual interplay between theory and empirical reality.

Ethics, perhaps more than any other field, illustrates the complex relationship between reality and the ideal. Ethical ideals such as **honesty, compassion, and justice** provide a moral framework against which human behavior is judged. However, the reality of human behavior often falls short of these ideals, characterized by **selfishness, cruelty, and injustice**.

This discrepancy is central to moral philosophy and ethical practice. Philosophers like **Aristotle** and **Kant** have argued that ethical ideals serve as aspirational goals that guide human conduct. Aristotle's concept of virtue ethics emphasizes the development of moral character through the pursuit of virtues, even as individuals struggle with their own moral failings. Kant's deontological ethics, on the other hand, posits that moral principles are binding regardless of the consequences, insisting on the importance of acting according to duty and rationality.

The real-world application of ethical ideals can be seen in various social movements and legal frameworks. For instance, the **abolition of slavery** was driven by the **ethical ideal of human equality**, despite the entrenched reality of racial exploitation. Similarly, contemporary movements for **gender equality, environmental justice, and animal rights** draw on ethical ideals to challenge and transform existing social practices.

The relationship between reality and the ideal is marked by a profound and enduring tension. Reality, with its inherent imperfections and complexities, often fails to conform to our ideals. Yet, this very failure confirms the relevance and necessity of these ideals. Whether in philosophy, literature, politics, science, or ethics, the ideal serves as a benchmark against which reality is measured, critiqued, and ultimately transformed.

In acknowledging that reality does not conform to the ideal but confirms it, we recognize the role of ideals as guiding stars in the human quest for understanding, justice, and progress. This dynamic interplay between the real and the ideal challenges us to continually strive for a better world, even as we grapple with the imperfections and limitations of the one we inhabit. It is through this striving that human potential is realized, and the promise of the ideal is brought closer to fruition.

Reality is Merely an Illusion, Albeit a Very Persistent One

—Albert Einstein