You see things; and say "Why?" But I dream of things that never were; and I say "Why not?".

George Bernard Shaw

We have to start somewhere so let's start with a proposition.

The quality of your assumptions largely determines the potential quality of your life. It is the assumptions that you don't know you are making which will have the most impact.

Your psychological map of the world is really a constellation of assumptions. These assumptions could also include beliefs and axioms you hold, either freely chosen or unconsciously conditioned by society. These assumptions continue to be reinforced by culture and family systems.

The higher the resolution of your maps the more effective it will be in guiding your life, living your goals, dreams and values. We will discuss specific possible maps but also the art of psychological map-making itself.

And it is both investigating the assumptions we know and exploring to uncover the assumptions we don't know we are making in situations that the real opportunity for growth lies.

Let's start with a bang and look at the assumptions that might filter your entire outlook on reality. We can break the infinite variations of these possibilities down into three broad categories to make it easier to think about.

One possibility is you might generally view the world through the lens that there is a clear objective reality that is behind most things and with enough work, thinking and time you can theoretically get to the bottom of what this is and see "what is" and "solve" reality through understanding and uncovering the objective truth.

On the other side of the spectrum would be the view that there is no objective reality and that everything is relative, contextual and subjective and you cannot even theoretically get to the bottom of "what is". And it appears the reason why some ideas are taken on across a society is purely due to

power dynamics at that point in history rather than objective truth or correctness. It can lead at the margins to consider everybody's "truth" to be as equally legitimate as everybody else's "truth".

A third option could be a compromise view. And by compromise I don't mean limitation, I mean extracting the highest nutrient value in each approach and combining them. We could take the position that there could theoretically be an objective reality underneath any phenomenon, issue, event etc but that with the limitations of the human mind you will never be able to uncover it truly. You can only hold four to six things in working memory at any one time so how can you process the billions of pieces of data simultaneously, and all their possible inter relationships, related to any situation or phenomena in front of you, as well as access the thoughts and observe accurately the behaviours of anyone else involved. And, of course, you are not aware of any variables that you are not aware of. If you didn't see the Tesla driving past you down the end of the street while you are talking to your neighbour doesn't mean it didn't happen just because you weren't aware of it.

That leaves us with the logical conclusion that you are left, at best, with some sort of defendable subjective view on any phenomena. However, that is not saying that all subjective views are equally defendable. If you say to me that simultaneously you are the only person who is going to win the lottery this week and I am as well, this is clearly a practical impossibility so that subjective map doesn't make the grade of possibility. This is of course based on the assumption that you and I are not living in different universes in a multiverse! This idea is consistent with the philosopher Karl Popper who stated words to the effect that no theories can be proven true and all theories are just waiting to be disproven.

In most situations we can be left with a huge number of seemingly legitimate, possible subjective narratives around anything we care to think about.

You might think there a lots of things that don't fit into this discussion, such as empirically validated scientific constructs. What's subjective about them?

The subjectivity is not at the final step but at the assumption level. The assumptions you don't know you are

making. In fact, all progress (in the long term) whether scientific, social change, personal growth could be seen as the slow uncovering of assumptions that an individual, scientific community or society didn't know it was making and the substituting of more nuanced known assumptions that provide a better "map" or more flexibility in relating to what society or an individual thinks is important or is useful at the time. At a certain point in history some societies walked over red dust and used this dust to create structures to live in. Future societies used this red dust to extract Aluminium and create 747s. We can be aware of something without being aware of what full possibilities lie in what we are seeing.

Still, you say, there is objective reality that "just is". Ok, let's take a classic example of something that may appear to be in this category. The boiling point of water. What is subjective about the fact that it is 100 degrees Celsius? It is empirically validated fact, surely.

It would seem on the surface that to question the objectivity of something so settled in the canon of human knowledge would border on the delusional.

So, I will ask you a question about this unquestionable fact. What assumption are you making that you don't realise you are making when you proclaim this fact?

You receive some points if you say "well, the Celsius scale is an artificially created scale, but given that necessary assumption you can safely and objectively proclaim the boiling point of water is 100 degrees."

Think it through for a minute or two.
……………..
……….
….
.

One assumption you likely don't know you are making when you proclaim the boiling point of water to be 100 degrees is at sea level. If you happen to be at the summit of Mount Everest you will find that the boiling point of water is approximately 68 degrees Celsius. And ironically, science teachers at isolated high altitude communities may be teaching this as objective fact to all the students who then

walk around the community testing it out until it is settled fact in their minds.

So, let's say you have your little travel kettle and it usually boils the water in 12 minutes. You put on the kettle while summiting as a little celebration. While its starting to heat up you set your alarm and survey the beautiful view with your back to the kettle. You go back in about 12 minutes to find all the water boiled away. What happened? Did the high altitude ruin the kettle because its obviously not working correctly. But you think maybe you set your alarm incorrectly. Maybe you did 22 minutes instead of 12. You assume you made a mistake with that as you've had this trusty kettle for 20 years and you thought that it would be a reliable device to bring on your first mountain climbing expedition up Everest. You set the alarm again for 12 minutes and survey the view again. After 12 minutes you go to organise your tea and find that the water has all boiled away again. Clearly the kettle element is broken you think and leave the kettle on the side of the mountain for eternity as you descend. However, the water is boiling at 68 degrees celsius while you are assuming it is 100 degrees celsius.

If we are at the point where we accept that the best we have in any situation is a subjective narrative does this mean that all subjective realities are equally valid, once ones that are logically impossible are removed from consideration. And perhaps we can't be sure that what seems to be logically impossible is still actually impossible because of assumptions that we are making.

Because we don't know what we don't know in any situation, this provides the philosophical basis for a sort of structural humility when engaging with the world.

While, at least, many subjective realities or narratives will be equally justifiable in a situation some will be more functional than others. Functional, in the sense of supporting you living your values or achieving your goals.

Let's look at a simple example of that. An athlete has been injured for 12 months and is just trying to come back. They are 3 minutes behind their personal best of 12 months ago. They are also 12 seconds faster than last week. Both of these are justifiable pieces of data. Privileging their attentional focus on which piece of data would be more likely to support their goal of making a successful comeback in the most

enjoyable (or least emotionally painful) way?………. My prediction is you would choose focusing on the 12 seconds faster than last week.

However, if your first awareness is that you are 3 minutes behind and that is the objective reality you are stuck with, you may develop a low-functioning map that breeds depression, suicidality and creates barriers to motivation and the dream of coming back. You may not go looking for other justifiable realities that may better support your needs, goals and values.

Traditionally when considering whether to take a new idea on we often start with the assumption that there is one objective truth. We then need to decide whether our old ideas were the truth or is the new idea the truth. We then need to investigate the new idea thoroughly because we don't want to make a "wrong decision" about the objective reality and take on something that isn't the truth. Thus, if we find one logical inconsistency with the new idea we stick with the old idea. Ironically, we don't apply the same scrutiny to the old ideas we hold which may be functionally out of date since we took them on, often in childhood.

With the new way of thinking we are investigating, the only criteria for exploring a new idea fully is………

……is the new idea at least as equally justifiable as the old idea we are holding and does the new idea appear more functional in its ability to help us move forward towards the life we may want. Not is the new idea perfect and "objectively" true.

In a sense we are trying to create maps and increase the resolution as we go through life. Higher resolution, to a point, gives us more flexibility and options to support our values and goals.

And we can develop and use different maps for different contexts or circumstances. If we are metaphorically cycling on the weekend, then having bike paths laid out on our map may be useful. However, if we prefer bushwalking, then having bush tracks laid out may be desirable.

Let's go a bit further here. If I said to you what do you think about the phrase "look before you leap", you might say yes it's a cliché. Giving it more thought, situations may

come to mind about how living through that principle at times saved you from disaster and that there have been times you ignored that and suffered real pain. This might spark you to think it is a useful axiom to keep in mind more consciously going forward.

However, imagine instead I had asked you what do you think about the phrase "they who hesitate are lost". Again, you might have gone through the same process. Cliché. Living according to that at times create sparks of joy and opportunities utilised and neglecting that at times having led to opportunities lost. This again might have sparked you to think it is a useful axiom to keep in mind more consciously going forward.

If you look closely "look before you leap" and "they who hesitate is lost" are mutually exclusive concepts or in other words, almost the exact opposite concepts. Therefore, which is right? Which are you going to privilege generally?

The usefulness of those axioms will depend on the context. If you are 19 and travelling with some friends in summer and find a river along the highway with a rope swing, which of those axioms does your 90 year old self hope you listened to? Look before you leap most likely. Testing the water depth with a stick so you don't risk breaking your neck just swinging into the river.

Later that night you all go out and the person of your dreams smiles at you from across the bar. Which of the two axioms does your 90 year old self hope you listened to despite the current anxiety you may feel? They who hesitate are lost I would guess.

Assuming your subjective reality is objective can lead you to want to "save" someone else as you clearly have the truth that they can't see correctly. Ironically, they may have the same view. Thus, we are tightening the grip of our current subjective map upon us by defending it at all costs. Looking to the other person for ideas and perspectives that we can add to our own maps seems a more meaningful game in many cases. Looking to extract value from every interaction. Structural curiosity and exploration leading to higher resolution, flexibility and in the end functionality.

The most useful, nuanced answer to what is the right attitude or idea is "it depends". All subjective views may

be equally valid or everybody's truth is equally legitimate, but not all subjective views will be equally functional in a given situation. And functionality will be defined by each individual in their own way. The process of map modification is a life long process. It doesn't matter how many places we visit, people we meet, or books we read, we will all die with infinitely more about the universe we don't know than we do and we will share that same ratio with Einstein, Mozart and the kids who played with you in the under 7 netball team……..

As we saw earlier with the boiling point of water example, we may have part of a solid map without knowing we don't have a complete map of the terrain. Curiosity and an explorer mentality with a dash of humility might be as good a place to start as any.