

# Ways of knowing more likely to lead truth philosophy essay



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Truth is a term that is multifaceted, and has been a popular topic of discussion by scholars and philosophers for thousands of years. Yet some fundamental basics for something to be considered true have arisen after all the discussions and theories: it must be a fact, is justified in a way that it corresponds to a fact that exists in the world, matches with one's overall sets of belief and/or it is useful and works in practice. A justified true belief is what knowledge is composed of. Sense perception, reason, language and emotions are the four Ways of Knowing, each one a powerful tool that enables us to reach closer to the truth. Sense perception is "the active selective and interpretative process of recording or becoming conscious of the external world"; reasoning is using logical, critical thinking to establish knowledge; emotion is the "experience of a bodily reaction to an event" where we are aware and involved; lastly, language is a tool for communication and "a system of persuasion and implication" through the "use of conventionalized signs, sound gestures or marks having understood meaning". However these four ways of approaching the truth vary in that one may help yield more precise answers and is more reliable than others, depending on their strengths and weaknesses. I believe that sense perception and reason create a dominant combination, carrying a high degree of certainty, in discovering global truths, compared to emotion and language, which are also vital but have greater limitations that provide challenges in finding the truth.

Buddha once said, "Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many... But after observation and analysis, when you find anything that agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of

one and all, then accept it and live up to it." This quote claims that perception, which is then supported by reason, is the ways most likely to lead to the truth, and I definitely agree. We experience the world and obtain direct, immediate, constant data through our senses: sight, hear, smell, touch, taste, movement, balance and hunger/thirst etc. The brain then processes these stimuli to create meaning to them and organize these sense data into schemas in our brain, reassembling reality to become organized, meaningful patterns, so that most of the time our world will be rational, steady and predictable. Hence we rely heavily on sense perception as our primary source of data collection of our surroundings. In biology, for example, I did a lab testing the effects of caffeine and adrenaline on the heart rate of transparent water fleas, called Daphnia. After exposing a daphnia in an adrenalin or caffeine solution, I relied solely on my sight to observe the thumping action of their heart beat and then count it. The heart beat dramatically increased from a 25 beats per second in controlled water fleas to around 44 in adrenaline and caffeine solution. By direct observation, my brain then gives meaning to this data input; resulting in me, knowing the immediate effects of what consuming these chemicals does to a Daphnia's heart. However sensory perception has a handful of limitations, the major ones including our biological and physiological limitation such a incapability of seeing wavelengths outside the visible light spectrum; our cognitive apparatus and processes can't distinguish perception from illusion; who we are as a knower, our built-in assumptions and prejudices alters the expectations and interpretations of situations- causing bias, subjective views; sensory input is relative, hence data from is s not always valid alone; sensory input is also discontinuous and outdated. Conversely the invention

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of digital video, computer technology and modern technology helps fix these problems or even eliminate it all altogether. For instance, when watching the figure skating world championships on TV, both Mao Asada and Kim-Yuna skated perfectly, executing all their elements. My individuality- the fact that I favor and adore Mao's skating style over Yuna's, and my pity towards Mao for always winning silver- contributed to my perception of the competition as being unfair when Yuna won gold. But when clips of the performances were previewed side by side, it illustrates how Mao did not fully finish her rotations on her triple jumps and thus was deducted points- ultimately justifying that Kim Yuna did deserve gold and performed a cleaner program than Mao. This example proves technology can overcome major limitations such as filters and seeing what we want opposed to the reality, by justifying what we see with more scrutiny through technology since technology can record the world around us, provide instant replay and allow unbiased evaluation.

On the other hand reason, is most advantageous due to its outcome of valid and coherent information- information with such a high degree of certainty that no other ways of knowing can reach. Reason assesses arguments, and provides support for claims and statements established through all the different experiments, studies etc. It is especially vital for areas with an empirical basis like science, history and math; these areas have been so developed and consist of such reliable, coherent and corresponding theories due to reason. Judgments and errors plague the certainty of truth for other ways of knowing; such as sense perception can be distorted; language is too vague and ambiguous leading to multiple interpretations, and emotion is the least reason-based due to its unpredictable, instinctive nature. Logic controls

the outcome of rigid conclusions with evidence. Yet reason has its flaws as well such as the range of informal fallacies and when premises that construct the arguments might be valid the truthfulness is still questionable, hence other ways of knowing is required to justify it such as the case of euthanasia where the argument " Taking a life is morally wrong, euthanasia is the act of taking away a life, hence euthanasia is wrong." Is perfectly valid but the truthfulness must be enhanced through the use scientific observations like using technology to see if the person's brain is responding to stimuli.

The use of sense perception and reason together complements each other to provide even sturdier, valid, reasoned-based knowledge with sufficient verification. The fact that global warming is occurring is derived from both reason and perception. According to NASA " 80% of ice field have been lost in the last century" as see through satellite pictures, hence we can use deductive reasoning to conclude that if " Drastic climate change and melting ice caps indicate global warming, NASA claims that " 80% of ice field have melted" , and " United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that 11 of the past 12 years are among the dozen warmest since 1850", hence global warming is occurring"

Emotions and Language has principal problems that override its benefits, and hence is less likely to lead to the truth. Although language is central in communication; performing many functions such as conveying emotions (expressive), express creativity, used for social and representational purposes, it is deceptive and treacherous due to its vagueness and ambiguity.( Not so much for math and science, since language is controlled,

neutral and rigid in these areas but in the other AOK's. Take Stalin for  
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example, he used language as propaganda to establish a personal dictatorship, attack enemies and disguise the reign of terror and purges as well. Putting up slogans like “ Peasants can live like human beings” filled with emotionally-arousing words, appealing connotations and glittering generalities manipulated the peasants into believing Stalin will bring back the glory days in Russia just like before World War I. Similarly emotion reinforces problems such as blurring reason, “ bias our perceptions and color our language”; humans are helpless in controlling emotions- it is irrational and occurs at fluctuating, urgent impulses. For example when my friend and I watched “ Valentine’s Day”, she had just broken up with her boyfriend so was feeling distressed and gloomy, whereas I was joyous and excited to see Ashton Kutcher in it. By the end of the movie, her emotions has shaped a negative perception of the movie, thinking it was “ cheesy and gay”, and divert from rational thinking to blame me for wasting her time watching it. On the contrary sometimes our reasoning is based on emotion; for example during a mandarin test, I had a cheat sheet ready in my pocket, but I decided not to cheat because of the guilt and fear I will feel. Suggesting that emotion mustn’t be totally ignored since without emotion, the world will be dull, cause the uniformity of values and everything will pass unnoticed. So emotions can help humans acquire knowledge and enhance the search for knowledge, but the “ voice of reason” is more rational.

All the areas of knowledge are interconnected, one fails to work alone, and one effects the other, whether it is to enhance or limit the quest for truth. The advantageous combination of sense perception and reasoning creating

highly valid, justified truths, with solvable limitations, whereas others, like emotions and language are overshadowed by its limitations.

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