

True and something  
believed to be true



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In the gospel of John in the New Testament (18: 28-40), Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor. Pilate, who is a sensible and experienced man, is perplexed as to what Jesus has done to warrant a meeting with him. After a short exchange between the two men, we begin to see truth in two different ways.

On the one hand, Jesus has a very firm idea (18: 37): “ You are right in saying I am a king. For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” To which Pilate merely replies: “ What is truth?” - as if to say, “ You think truth exists independently of everyone as a standard by which we can judge our beliefs?”[1]

The question, “ what is truth,” is central to everyday life and the ways of knowing help us begin to answer it. When you know something, you are certain about it and have no doubts regarding the matter; when you believe something, you merely think it is true and are not completely certain about it. There are many things that people assume are true but a quick look at specific ways of knowing might prove otherwise. The ways of knowing-language, perception, reason and emotion-serve to distinguish the truth and remind people that some claims aren't “ meant to be taken at face value.” There are many types of perception. Nave realism is a view of perception that asserts that we directly perceive the world as it is. Objects are simplified; the way that things smell, look, taste, sound and feel is how they smell, look, taste, sound and feel. We hear a sound when a tree falls because the tree made a sound when it fell. Though, reasonably, there is a lot more to perception. For example, “ Though things may appear to be colored to us,

our experiences of color are merely representative of the surface properties of objects"[2]; " the physical property of reflecting certain wavelengths of light and the actual color as we experience it are two different things."[3]This eventually leads to the idea of representative realism, which suggests that perception is not as simple and passive of a process that the naive realism is. Representative realism follows the idea that we simply are not able to obtain enough information about our surroundings with our senses. Instead, it involves the person; " we supply most of the content of our experience."[4]For example, to most people touching a table means that contact had been made. But this perception is a mistaken one; science refutes that claim and states that when someone " touches" a table, no physical contact had taken place. According to physics, the table is made up of millions and millions of atoms and it is in their nature that when coming into contact with another atom, they repel each other. So when a hand, also made up of millions of atoms, comes into " contact" with a table, the atoms repel each other and scientifically, the hand touched nothing. Our sense of perception allows us to take the claim of touching the table to be a true claim and there is little or no doubt regarding it. But after studying the ways of knowing that involves perception, it has been ascertained that it has several weaknesses and learning about them helps us re-evaluate what we considered to be true. Language is a matter of syntax, in this case, representation of meaning. When communicating, the first step is to encode meaning in syntax and then convert it back into something significant. Thus language is the medium of communication. But not everything can be expressed in language, though it is a dynamic part of peoples' lives - language changes. Words go ' out of fashion', they start to mean different

things and people invent words and different ways of stringing them together. So things that might have been one thing during a certain period of time might not be the same now, and since knowledge also differs with every language, something that is considered to be the truth in one language may not be in another. The quest for knowledge and truth is limited by our language and its ability to control what we can and cannot know.

[5]Language is ubiquitous and something that surrounds us so completely that we rarely are consciously aware of it. Language is relevant to the theory of knowledge because it is the primary way we acquire knowledge about our surroundings. But truth sometimes becomes ambiguous due to the variety of interpretations of language. For example, the U. S government has been accused of approving the usage torture such as water-boarding on extrajudicial prisoners by the CIA. The government denied it as torture and instead claimed that it is an ' enhanced interrogation technique.' The truth remains ambiguous in this case, is it really a severe technique of interrogation or is it torture? Water-boarding is classified as torture but the government manipulated the words used to describe the action to blur the truth of the matter. Language can be misinterpreted because what one person means when they have said something may not be what another person understands. If a person sometimes does not understand the implied meanings of certain words, they can be misled to believe that it is something else, leading to misunderstandings. Meaning is an integral part of language; to discover the truth, one must first try to understand what is meant by this sentence before the decision of whether this sentence is true or not can be made. Emotion sometimes makes it harder for us to differentiate between what it true and what is believed true. Strong emotion “ distorts the other

ways of knowledge.”[6]Emotion influences the way we think and many of our intuitions are based on gut feelings, so when it is linked with finding the truth, it can be described as a “ sixth sense”, or “ having a feeling”, we do not know that there is truth in what we believe, we just feel it.[7]Feelings cannot be trusted all of the time because we do not know whether or not they are indicating the truth. Because emotions affect the way we perceive, perhaps finding the truth based on emotions isn’t the best way to start, it does one thing. It allows belief to bloom. People’s strong beliefs considering some matter is able to power their notions that what they believe is in fact the truth, and even though it may not be, it is the truth to them. A definition of knowing could be the awareness of the truth of something; for instance a belief or faith in something; which is regarded as truth beyond any doubt. [8]To reason means to let logic take the reins of trying to find the truth. People are able to use past experiences to work out what has happened in situations. Rationalists believe that reason is the most important way to find knowledge. “ The central principle of rationalism is that we can discover important truths about reality through the use of reason alone.”[9]“ Cogito ergo sum”, a famous saying by a famous rationalist René Descartes, was used as the foundation to build a rational system of philosophy. The two ways of reasoning are deductive and inductive. Deductive reasoning allows a person to work from a general case to a more specific instance whereas inductive reasoning is reasoning from a specific case or cases to a general rule. Deductive reasoning uses a general claim to classify something. So it can sometimes be unreasonable to come to a conclusion and simply claim it as ‘ the truth’ without being more thorough about the matter. For instance, the premise “ all humans are mortal” is true, and we know that Socrates is

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human, so we are able to come to the conclusion that Socrates is, indeed, mortal. Another example uses another premise, everyone who drives at 90 mph is breaking the law, and we know that Paul is breaking the law, so do we come to the conclusion that Paul is driving at 90 mph?[10]No, it is important to remember that when coming to such a conclusion, that it can be a conclusion of an invalid argument. Inductive reasoning goes beyond the immediate evidence of our sense, so we cannot always trust it to be truth. [11]People have a tendency to generalize too fast and jump to wrong conclusions, a result of faulty and unjustified reasoning. Confirmation bias makes these generalizations even worse as people tend to only remember the facts that support what they believe and leave out anything that goes against what they have believe to be the truth. Truth is hard to find when reason and logic are clouded with prejudice. There is a huge difference between knowing something is true and believing that it is true. The various ways of knowing have many drawbacks and may lead one to believe something is true when it isn't. Understanding these shortcomings can only help us recognize that claims of knowledge cannot be taken at face value.

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[9]Ibid, 143.

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