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3.11

Philosophy of Discipline

Essay Question: In order to find out how things really are, one must understand the filters through which one perceives the world.

I believe that we perceive and therefore know. We perceive through emotions, language and reason. These are also known as the ways of knowing. Thus, it is appropriate to use the Woolman's twelve ways of knowing to talk about perception. Reality is what we see, hear, smell, touch, taste and feel. It is what we observe around us using our senses and feelings. However, how do we know that we are really seeing reality and not our perception or something that our brain can accept and process?

There are colors that our eyes cannot see for example ultra-violet and infrared-red. These colors are invisible to the human eye therefore we cannot see them. What we perceive is a clean Singapore. How do we actually know that Singapore is not littered with invisible rubbish? Of course, there are special devices that allow us to see these two colors and prove that there is no such rubbish. However, you can never be sure that there are no other colors invisible to our naked eyes. The things that we have always believed to be true, because we have 'seen' it with our own eyes may actually be non-existent so can we trust our eyes?

Is what we see real? 'My desk is in the study room'. This statement's so called 'proof' is based on 'unproven' premises and therefore nothing is true and reality is not real. This is skepticism. When can we be sure? We can only be sure when we begin with the simplest, most basic premises which is certainly impossible to doubt. This can be summed up into these three lines 'what we see is not real', 'you cannot be sure whether you are dreaming or not', 'there is only thing that you can be certain of and that is your consciousness of your own existence'. Xenophanes once said that we can always learn more than we know, but we can never be sure that we have reached any final truth. Thus is seeing really believing or believing is really seeing?

Everyone has behaves differently because everyone is taught or programmed differently. Some people never let a vulgar word slip their lips others say it all day. This is due to the different programs stored in their conscience. For example, if your father who bought you up teaches you that stealing is wrong, you would perceive that stealing is wrong and thus your conscience pricks you when you are tempted to steal. However, what if the person who passes the information to you is ignorant and teaches you what he thinks is right and these turn out to be wrong?

This boils down to authority and acquaintances. The drug addiction problem is because of incorrect perception. If your father brought you up teaching you that drugs is good for you, you will the perception that drugs is good and take drugs without it pricking your conscience, eventually fall into addiction of drugs. Therefore, are you able to trust your conscience or the persons who brought you up and helped program your conscience?

Dreams seem real and convincing. Is it possible that you remember your dreams as you remember past experiences? This seems absurd, but sometimes you can mistake a dream for reality (dreams often seem very real), as a result you may also mistakenly store that reality-look-alike thought in your brain. You mistakenly made these memories and you can no longer be confine your memory to real-life experiences, which in itself are not very convincing and have its areas for skepticism, but fake and pure materials from your imagination.

Every argument or proof proceeded from premises, which it did not itself establish. Trying to demonstrate the truth of those premises by other arguments or proofs had to be based on undemonstrated premises. Therefore, no ultimate ground of certainty could ever be reached. What a valid argument proves is that its conclusions follow from its premises, but it is not at all the same as proving that those conclusions are true. Every valid argument starts with an 'if': if 'p' is true then 'q' must be true. That leaves open the question of whether or not 'p' is true. The argument itself cannot prove that because it has already assumed it and to have assumed already what sets are out to prove would be to move in a vicious circle.

Perception can be simplified into two basic questions. Is your perception true? Why is it true or false? Then you can ask yourself how do you perceive? We know through our five senses? These senses send impulses or messages to our brain from the outside world. The brain then interprets and creates the real world in our brain. How does the brain interpret the impulses or messages? It can be done through past experiences, social, cultural, religious communities, spatial familiarity for example patterns and shapes, biological limitations, existing learning structures, language and self perception such as how we think or what we believe.

It is indeed doubtful whether anyone could live based on complete perception, or if they could, whether such a life would be worth living. However, this refutation of perception, if refutation it is, is not a logical argument. In practical life, we must steer a middle course between demanding a degree of certainty that we can never have and treating all possibilities as if they were of equal weight when they are not.

### References

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2. Bryan Magee The Story Of Philosophy Doling Kindersley Limited 1998, 2001