

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

ESSAY

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

Discuss and evaluate this claim.

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Everybody in this world perceives things differently and has a different perception of things. Some people perceive things totally different than others, such as an affluent westerner and an African refugee, and others are quite similar in their perception, like two superstars in Hollywood. The similarities in perception rely upon filters of perception such as media, experience, religion, culture and language. Although it is often when one does not understand or agree with the perception of another that conflict occurs it is only natural that as human beings we all have different perceptions of things. But it is important for one to have the broadest possible knowledge about the filters of perception in order to really understand the way others perceive the world.

Language at first glance seems to be something that we can speak, write, read and hear but language is also seeing. It is widely estimated that 80% of all language is non-verbal. We sometimes don't recognise it but body language occurs in almost every situation. When talking to someone it is often not what we say that has the greatest effect on the person but the way we say it and our body expressions that we use to say it. Language is closely linked to culture because it varies from one culture to another. In Fiji raising the eyebrows shortly in response to someone's question is simply an agreement to the statement they have made but in other cultures this expression may be an insult. So if a Fijian goes overseas and performs this expression unconsciously he may cause insult to others because they do not understand this form of language he uses. This all happens accidentally but it happens because one or both parties involved are not aware of each others perception of language. When two people have similar perceptions of language, expression often help aid transmit the message more clearly. I recently had a short conversation with someone using purely expressions. My dad's friend was at the road in his car and we looked at each other. Using expressions we both knew I was able to tell him that my dad was not there. This is quite remarkable I think but it was only possible because we both understand the meaning of expressions used.

As mentioned, culture is closely linked to language because each culture seems to have a different language. Culture also helps people gain an identity for themselves. When people ask us why we celebrate certain festivals we often use the cliché because it is part of my culture. To have a cultural experience is of benefit to one because it helps prevent misunderstanding but even more creates understanding about fellow human beings. Travelling around the world is probably the best way to learn about other cultures. I have travelled to some other countries in my life so far. Three years ago I was in Bali in Indonesia and during two weeks I learnt a lot about the culture of Indonesian people. The most important thing is acceptance of culture and respect for each others culture. People are often critical of western culture because they have no acceptance for it. It is also important to have respect for all cultures because the world is globalising. In Germany there are many migrant workers from other European countries and it is disrespect and no acceptance of each others culture that sometimes leads to the conflict of cultures.

Religion is somewhat similar to culture because someone usually only practices one religion although there are so many. With religion it is also mutual respect that is of great importance. Without mutual respect there will be conflict such as in Northern Ireland to name an example of religious conflict. Having a greater understanding of other religions can help create acceptance amongst religious groups and the best way to gain knowledge about others is through experiences. My Aunt was on an

Aeroplane a couple of years ago and was seated next to an Islamic man. She was quite frightened because of the events of 9/11 and all of her perceptions about Islamists created by these events. During the flight the man would get up every hour, spread out a prayer mat in the corridor and pray. Throughout the flight my aunt asked the man many questions about his practices and she found him to be very kind. This positive experience changed her perception of Islam immediately.

The events of 9/11 created many assumptions amongst people about the Islamic religion. These perceptions were created amongst people mainly through the media so the media also has a powerful role in creating perception amongst people. Just last week I read two local newspapers and in both there was a story about the same car crash. One newspaper made the accident sound horrific and the other simply stated the facts which made the events seem less horrific. So in this way my perception of the car accident was altered by the author and because I believed what was written in the paper. It is therefore important to understand that not everything portrayed in the media is true or believable and one must be critical of media to gain a true perception of things.

It has been emphasised throughout the essay that experiences are the best way to gain correct perception of things. I found this out yesterday during an exercise at a leadership camp. The students had to climb up a 20 meter high tree. Watching from below it did not look like a difficult or scary task mainly because my perception was that the tree was not that high. This perception quickly changed as I climbed the tree because looking down it looked at least five times higher than from below. The perception of things is therefore also altered by the perspective from which we view it. After that I had developed empathy for the people climbing after me because I knew what they were going through. Having an experience creates empathy, respect and understanding towards others.

In order to really know how things are, it is absolutely vital to have a correct perception of things. Not understanding or developing respect for other perceptions can create conflict and therefore for each filter of perception an abundance of knowledge and understanding needs to be gained. Understanding different perceptions also gives rise to creativity and inventiveness which leads to development. It is up to each individual to make sure that he/she has a good understanding of things by understanding the way in which perceptions are formed.