

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of reasoning as a Way of Knowing.

There are certain characteristics of the human mind that play different and vital roles in the acquisition of knowledge, the process of understanding and the analysis of this knowledge. In knowledge itself, the different Areas of Knowledge and Ways of Knowing (emotion, language, perception and reason) present people with many opportunities for means of interpretation, understanding and also the communication of information. Reasoning as a Way of Knowing is a particularly interesting characteristic of the human intellect because people, by nature, are able to think intuitively, without restraint and in such a way that a primary piece of information can be processed through reasoning to gain further understanding. In this way, people are capable of acquiring knowledge by compiling a number of facts, interpreting them and by way of reasoning, 'finding them to be true'. In short, reasoning can be defined as any process which involves drawing a conclusion from a set of premises. In the different Areas of Knowledge, reasoning comes in different forms and plays a range of roles as a Way of Knowing, depending on the nature of the information.

In the following essay, I will make an attempt to unearth and analyze the logic and some of the key theories linked with reasoning and its role as a Way of Knowing. In doing so, I will investigate various circumstances to find occasions where reasoning falls short and in addition, I will hopefully be able to make judgements as to whether reasoning is completely legitimate in all Areas of Knowledge and how its strengths and weaknesses add up to give an overall view of its importance.

One of the shortcomings of reasoning can be portrayed through the example of a fallacy which is when reasoning is illogical, misleading and/or erroneous and suggests false notions. For example, one could speculate the following argument, 'nothing is better than winning the lottery, sleeping for four hours is better than nothing, therefore sleeping for four hours is better than winning the lottery'. This is an example of a fallacy of composition or a syntactic fallacy and is an obvious example of disingenuous reasoning. In this case, two factual statements are connected by the word 'nothing' and the third one follows, taking advantage of the wording of the other two statements and posing as a summary of the meaning of the statements. One of course knows that sleeping for four hours is not better than winning the lottery. Reasoning can almost always be used as a means of justification and people often use it to make various claims but as revealed by the previous example, its limitations are quite apparent. There are many different types and forms of fallacy but all of them expose the negative side of reasoning and therefore display a major weakness in reasoning as a Way of Knowing. In addition, the argument arises of whether it is equitable to use reasoning in this way when trying to explain or prove something.

Contestably, reasoning also has its assets as a Way of Knowing. An interesting tool used in human reasoning is the ability of introspection where someone reasons their own reasoning as a cognitive process of searching for reasons for certain feelings,

actions or beliefs. This process is given quite a substantial focus in psychology where research is often carried out on human reasoning and the motives behind it. It is also very important for people to be able to evaluate themselves and to try to understand their own beliefs and tendencies. The only way for this to be accomplished is through a thought process, dealing with introspection and reasoning with one's self.

Moreover, as lawyers need good argumentative skills, reasoning is also a big player in the field of law, acting as a means by which legal decisions are made. And as another example of reasoning playing a part in the professional world, it is a crucial indicator in the scientific Area of Knowledge. For instance, in cognitive science and artificial intelligence "[the complexity and efficacy of reasoning] is the inevitable component of cognitive decision-making". Generally, the sciences, as an area of knowledge, depend on reasoning a great deal. In many processes and experiments carried out in this field, a scientist will discover or prove a hypothesis and then resort to reasoning to apply it in various circumstances to establish its validity.

Forms of reasoning are also present in the mathematical area of knowledge. As is commonly known by most people, the interior angles of any triangle add up to 180 degrees but this is reasoned after assuming that the triangle lies on a plane. Kant makes this observation and then goes on to claim that "on a sphere, the angles of a triangle add up to more than 180 degrees" and gives the example of "a triangle constructed from three lines on the surface of the earth as follows: At the north pole draw two lines south at right angles to each other. Each of these lines will intersect the equator at right angles. Take the portion of the equator between these lines as the third side of the triangle. Now it should be evident that the angles of this triangle add to 270 degrees, and not 180 degrees." This example renders quite an interesting quality of reasoning and the fact that it can take on different forms in relation to the settings in which it takes place. This element does not strike me as definitely positive and I do not think that it is necessarily a weakness either but more along the lines of a fascinating point of view which in a way suggests a conflict between reasoning and perception.

Socrates developed a technique of reasoning where he would motivate others to reason using inductive reasoning for the purpose of "[centering] the discussion on the individual he was questioning and that individual's beliefs, [eliciting] honest answers" and at the same time, "[exposing] ignorance by claiming his own ignorance ('Socratic irony')". Socrates was a master in reasoning and his accomplishments revealed an almost manipulative side of reasoning with which he led people to believe that they had come to revelations by their own means and also with which he was able to 'prove' many of his theories. For example, "that the soul is immortal, and that it knows everything that exists because it is reborn from a previous life and because it knows everything that existed in a previous world". Socrates then went on to verify his claim by asking a young boy to solve a geometrical sum that the boy had never come across before. After leading the boy through a step by step reasoning process involving questioning by which the boy

solved the problem, Socrates affirmed that the boy must have somehow remembered mathematical knowledge from a previous life and one way or another, used it to solve the sum.

It is very likely that humans have availed themselves of reasoning as a means to sort out their thoughts and work out what they should believe and do since the beginning of time and despite its limitations and weaknesses, reasoning stands as a dominant Way of Knowing and plays an invaluable role in the workings of the human psyche. As a result, no matter what problems arise as a result of reasoning, may it be a conflict between reasoning and perception, emotion, language or even a faith of some sort, reasoning will always exist as a Way of Knowing because it represents the liberation of the human mind.