

Question: How can the different ways of knowing help us distinguish between something that is true and something that is believed to be true?

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"There are no whole truths; all truths are half-truths."¹ The truth does not change over a period of time, only the perception and the interpretation of truth have been changed over a period of time. It is hard to determine whether the discovery we just figured out is the whole truth. Hence, ways of knowing are meant to help people approach the truth from different aspects, although they lead to the findings out of half-truths most of time. However, a lot of half-truths mean we are close to the true nature of the subject studied. Three of the ways of knowing, perception, emotion and reason, are involved in this essay to demonstrate different directions on the attempt to find the truths in human history.

Perception is an interesting way of knowing, as sometimes it can become subjective without being noticed. "We are constantly deciding what to focus on, what to ignore, what is information and what is background noise." Once perception is subjective in its own nature, it cannot be the only tool to be used when it comes to judge a problem. In the old days, whenever people looked at the moon, all they saw was a spherical, white, and smooth planet. There were myths, fairy tales as well as superstitions involving the moon. For example, the Chinese and other Asian countries believed that there was a fairy living on the Moon, she will visit the Earth in the middle of August every year. Hence, they have had a big celebration in mid-August to welcome the fairy. After the landing of the Apollo 11, there were no inhabitants on the Moon. Moreover, the surface was filled with rocks and no water was found. These conditions did not allow any organisms to live on the Moon. Consequently, the whole belief in fairies living on the moon of the Chinese has been replaced by scientific discoveries about the Moon such as its climate and nature. Perception has verified the existence of the Moon and its relation with the Earth. However, reason is required to stimulate people to develop space shuttles to discover the Moon and to establish a new truth replacing the old one.

Perception and reason can be applied to an interesting phenomenon of the body schema. One of the recent demonstrations of this is the experiment conducted on 220 subjects by Frank Durgin of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania in 2007². There were model left hands put in front of the subjects, whose own left hands, which were put somewhere they cannot be seen, in the same pose as the rubber hands. A laser pointer was then used to strike the unseen hand and the rubber hand with identical movements. After a period of time, two-thirds of the subjects described a sense of ownership towards the rubber hand, some may even be able to feel the heat and the touch of the pointer. The senses play an important part in creating this illusion. Sight has reported that there is hand being stroked by a laser pointer. Touch has sent the

¹ Alfred North Whitehead <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/002217.html> [Accessed 08 Sep 2009]

² <http://knowledgetheory.blogspot.com/2007/10/this-is-not-my-nose.html>

message of heat and sensation in the subject's hand by the laser pointer. Receiving these two messages, the brain can be reasoned to have made the connection between them and decided that the rubber hand is the real hand. "It's obvious that the hand is rubber – no one is fooled at all. But if your brain decides it's your hand, all the conscious awareness in the world won't change it." The hand is rubber and it is not from the subjects, these are truths. However, most of the subjects have been told by their brain that the rubber hand is part of their body, proven by the reports that they could feel touch and heat on the rubber hand. Applying perception as the only way of knowing in this situation, the truth would not be recognized. Hence, with the aid of reason, the nature of the event has been revealed: proprioceptors in muscles, tendons, and joints have produced responses towards the stimuli. Hence, a surprising fact has been published. The brain is supposed to be objective, as it is responsible for awareness of the surroundings. However, in this experiment, it can be seen that the brain can also lead to illusions, not reality.

However, there are things in the life that cannot be observed by eyes, heard by ears, touched by hands, tasted by tongue, smelled by the nose or proven by conducting many experiments or deducing from facts. Emotions and relationships are subjective, and they cannot be judged based on looks, appearances or gestures as everyone is different. Based on a survey, love has little to do with what is said between the couple, but 55% is expressed through body language, 38% is the tone and speed of their voices and only 7% is about the content of what they say³. Hence, there are no tangible proofs to decide whether a guy is into a girl or not. The feeling of love is different from person to person, hence the definition of love also has numerous versions. Perception, reason and language cannot alter a person's emotions and feelings. For example, in the play Romeo and Juliet, Romeo is madly in love with Rosaline, then he suddenly forgets everything about her the moment he meets Juliet. One second before Rosaline is everything to him, the moment he sees Juliet's face, everything changes. This swift change has brought up controversial discussions. To analytical people, they cannot observe the differences between the love Romeo has for Rosaline and the one for Juliet. They even criticize Romeo for being rash, thoughtless and shallow in love as he changes his mind so suddenly. Nevertheless, for romantic people, they focus on the love story between Romeo and Juliet than how Romeo changes his mind because the attraction between them are so strong and sudden that makes the whole play interesting to watch. Romance and tragedy have been their main focus, so they would not mind Romeo's past, as long as the only girl in his eyes is Juliet.

More examples to support the emotion as a way of knowing to approach the truth include the relationships as well as faith in daily lives. For example, in Vietnam, when a younger person meet the older people for the first time, they need to pay

³ <http://knowledgegetheory.blogspot.com/2007/12/science-of-love.html>

attention to several social customs as the old people tend to judge the youth and his parents based on his behaviours. The youth needs to talk politely, address properly with great respect, as well as wait for the older to eat or drink first. ▲Another example is the relationship between best friends. They do not have to have the same interests, or study at the same school, but still they are compatible of each other's personalities, strengths and weaknesses. For example, Mercutio and Romeo are best friends. Mercutio protects Romeo when Tybalts approaches and challenges him to a duel. To help Romeo not to fight with his brother-in-law, Mercutio uses the excuse of being Romeo's best friend to represent him in the duel. This sacrifice from Mercutio has proven their close friendship, which requires trust and respect. Mercutio, to some extent, has believed that Romeo knows what he is doing and hence trusted his decisions, even if he decides to marry the foe's daughter, Juliet Capulet. The intuition to trust some people and not others is hard to determine and explain, as people depend on it unconsciously as a part of human nature. Yet, an analytical person would find Mercutio's death pointless and wasteful as it does not prevent Romeo and Juliet from their destined deaths , it strengthens the tragedy and its sadness and sorrow. Moreover, Romeo seems to be more childish than Mercutio throughout the play, Mercutio, therefore, has no evidences, causes or proofs to trust Romeo as he is less experienced. To understand these types of relationship, a person needs to listen to their heart to understand human feelings, which sometimes simply cannot be comprehended by gestures, sayings or actions. ▲All of the deep meanings are hidden inside and people who are willing to open their heart to understand in the emotional way would be able to feel it and experience it.

In conclusion, there are several ways to approach the truth or the half-truths in the first place. Perception, reason and emotion are mostly used by people to distinguish what truth is and what truth is believed to be. Perception is the first step in the process of finding truth as people need to observe their surroundings. Then, we need to analyze the situations to determine whether the observations are accurate and real. Finally, we need to feel it, understand it, and know it, as not everything can be understood using formulas and facts.