

Are some ways of knowing more likely than others to lead to truth?

Common sense may suggest that certain methods of knowing are more reliable than others in lead to the truth. Majority may perceive reason as being more precise in achieving the truth. However; there are four different ways of knowing something according to the basic TOK diagram: sense perception, language, reason and emotion. Sense perception and emotion stand out as two of the most personal and therefore subjective headlines. Language and reason seems more likely to provide us more “reasonable” information which is also more objective and commonly accepted. Related to this matter, each way of knowing is more adapt and suitable in a specific area of knowledge. Suitable ways of achieving true knowledge differs for different areas of knowledge. Even though it may be deduced that more objective ways of knowing as language and reason seem more acceptable in leading to the “truth”, in certain areas of knowledge, sense perception and emotion could be chosen as appropriate methods. 5 10

Constructing a common truth by exchanging, modifying and improving ideas plays an important role in natural sciences in which accuracy and consistency of knowledge is fundamental. Geographers claim that continents are constantly moving because they are small solid layers on a large pool of magma. However, human senses do not perceive such small movements; they feel the ground hard and compact, except during earthquakes. The truth is that the continents in are subjected to constant displacement and sense perception is not a utile way of understanding this. Scientists suggest that solids are composed of atoms which are in regular motion; however, these atoms are so small that they are not visible to human eye, so from a three-dimensional perspective, the objects are considered as static. Therefore reason is the most appropriate way of knowing in natural sciences. 15 20

Human sciences are a more complex area of knowledge since they involve every aspect of the human life. All four ways of knowing play significant roles in human sciences. Sense, reason, language, and emotion initiates from human, and they all describe the human being. Language is the mirror to the insight of someone, and via language, certain researches could be accomplished. For instance, when a certain population's culture is being examined, it is possible to obtain information from the people living in that culture. As they narrate their values and experiences, accurate information may be obtained. Emotions manipulate thoughts and behavior. Psychology, as an example, is a human science in which emotion has an important place in knowing. Scientific research is being carried through emotions of people in psychology. For instance, during an experiment of whether heat stimulates aggressiveness in humans, a group of people is kept in an air-conditioned room, and another group of people is kept in a hotter room for a certain amount of time. Then the researchers question their level of anger to compare the results. Emotions both play a significant role in human life and in leading to the truth in human sciences. As another example, in knowing if God exists, emotion is a better way than language, reason or sense perception to lead us to the truth. Language may be a way affecting his thoughts however it may not successfully lead him to the truth. Since exchange of ideas may not lead to a consistency, reason would not be a successful way for him either. As ancient humans did, a person may perceive an object is a God, however, their emotions towards these objects lead them more than their senses for these objects in order for them to reach their own truth. Emotion will be the most convenient way shaping his thoughts and leading him to the truth. Alternatively, partisans of the caliph Ali which is one of the branches of Muslims, hit themselves with chains on the remembrance day of their Prophet Ali's death. They tolerate physical pain by putting themselves in Ali's place and feeling intense emotions towards him. Sense perception is also a crucial way of knowing since it guides the individual to develop and execute thoughts. If an example is to be given,

sense perception is proven very useful in determining medical problems. In examining how a person reacts when the doctor hits his knee, a doctor can determine whether he has a problem with his reflexes or not. Reason also is important as a way of proving validity of a knowledge or construct meanings of other areas of knowledge. Therefore, all four ways of knowledge is a part of leading to the truth in human sciences. 50

History, similar to human sciences, involves all ways of knowing; with some of them standing out more than the others. For example, emotion is a part of the historical truth but is not a useful tool in reflecting history. In history, the actual course of events is the focus of researches, while the emotions of the history tellers remain secondary in priority. For example, Herodotus recorded history, in which he included his emotional and spiritual affections. Modern historians collect the objective information he presents; however, his subjective comments are usually being ignored. Sense perception, language and reason are important ways of knowing in history similar to human sciences. People's narration of their experiences or ancient tales that is passed from generations on to generations help the historians to acquire true knowledge, during the procedure that both sense perception and language is being used. Reason, again, facilitates the need of obtaining commonly accepted, logical validity. 55 60

In the arts, an objective truth does not exist. From determining the beauty of art to acknowledging something as a work of art, emotion, language and sense perception play a much bigger role than reason. Artists reflect their ideas by their art which is a type of language, and they may express the meaning of their art in words leading the audience to the true knowledge behind what the audience perceives. Sense perception determines whether an art piece is original by considering other pieces previously seen. Emotion determines whether an art piece is beautiful. For instance, Dali depicts surrealist images; the audience combines 65 70

sense perception and emotion in understanding his art by looking and determining what he feels looking at those images.

Similar to the arts, personal truths exist in ethics. Different groups have different beliefs about how human should live his life. In knowing the truth in ethics, reason and emotion are better ways; indeed these two ways of knowing usually contradict each other in this area of knowledge. For example, in finding the right thing to do when a patient's brain death has occurred and he had been breathing with the help of a machine; to unplug the machine or not is a complex ethical question. Whereas reason might say there is no need for him to live which only means inhaling and exhaling for him, emotion says that he is a human being and he should not be killed until he dies by himself. 75 80

Finally, in mathematics, the best ways of knowing are reason and language. Mathematics can solely be considered as a language and mathematical language leads people to mathematical truths. Alternatively, since mathematical truths require logical validity reason is the main way of knowing mathematical truths. Mathematical truths enrich with new formulas, proofs that require logical validity and that are connected with each other. Whereas mathematical language reflects specific truths, it even defines definite explanations for concepts that do not fit into the common truths. For example 0^0 is an indeterminate form which has more than one possible solutions, but all these possibilities can be explained by mathematical language. 85 90

In conclusion, effective ways of achieving true knowledge differs for different areas of knowledge. The concept of "truth" also differs for different areas of knowledge; it has different features in different areas of knowledge. For every area, a certain or a couple of ways of knowing is preferred in leading to the truth. Therefore, different ways of knowing are more likely than others to lead to truth in different areas. It is impossible to single out a way of knowing from the entire picture, since each and every one of them are essential to the 95

conception of truth. Therefore, it is impossible to claim the existence of a single definite way of knowing to explain all of the examples given above. All four areas of knowing are essential in reaching true knowledge.