

Theory of Knowledge Essay

“Evaluate the role of intuition in different areas of knowledge.”

Word Count: 1,594

Intuition has a vital role in our lives and helps us make day to day decisions. Its role varies in different areas of knowledge. It seems intuition often plays a role in the beginning of a research that may lead us towards knowledge. It does not provide 'immediate knowledge', but rather an almost immediate understanding of a situation or problem. The more experience we have in a domain, the more reliable our intuition is, but the gut feelings are not always accurate. In some areas, our intuition leads us on a path that will lead to a barricade, causing us to take a different approach. It plays a role in the development of concepts and brings about progress.

Intuition is also referred as a '*gut feeling*'.¹ It is when we 'know' something, but we do not even know how we know it. Intuitions are sudden judgments. We can't immediately explain where they originate from. Intuition may begin with a perception of something from the outside world, such as a facial expression or a change in behavior, which is so brief that we are not aware we have noticed it. We can think of intuition as an unconscious associative process and according to some psychologists, a mental matching game. This means that the brain takes in a situation and does a very rapid search of its 'files' and finds its best match among all the stored memories and knowledge. From that analogy, we attribute a meaning to the situation in front of us. However, intuition can be confused with immediate knowledge. Intuition is rather described as 'an almost immediate situation understanding.' For example, we do not acquire knowledge of love or danger, we feel them in a eloquent way.

¹ Flora Carlin. "*Gut Almighty*". Psychology Today. Volume 40, Issue 3. June 2007. URL: http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com

Our intuition causes us to act in certain ways, someone who lacks intuition is unable to make simple day to day decisions and is restricted to obtaining some knowledge. A psychologist from the University of Southern California, Antoine Bechara², examined brain damaged patients who could not form emotional intuitions when making decisions. So they had to make decisions via deliberate reasoning. Bechara says: "They ended up doing such complicated analysis, factoring everything in, that it could take them hours to decide between two kinds of cereals." Our intuition helps us make simple decisions. It involves a lot of guess work, so sometimes helps you pick the right answer. If we are given time to think over a question for a few minutes, we are sometimes less likely to get the correct answer than if we used our intuitive response. This was shown by in study done by a team from the University of London. It was stated that there sometimes is wisdom in a person's lack of knowledge³.

Intuition plays a large role in our lives and is very much involved in ethics. Most people determine whether an action is right or wrong automatically. They do not need to solve the problem through logical arguments, they just know it. However this gut feeling of whether something is right or wrong is not always (accurate.) When making an ethical decision, we do what we believe is right. But what is right to one person is not always the right to others. Hence someone can be misguided by his intuition when making a moral decision. For example, a man's intuition might tell him it is right to have an affair with another woman. But he would think twice before discussing it with his friends, as

² Flora Carlin. "Gut Almighty". Psychology Today. Volume 40, Issue 3. June 2007. URL: http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com

³ Flora Carlin. "Gut Almighty". Psychology Today. Volume 40, Issue 3. June 2007. URL: http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com

they may not believe his action is right. When making a moral decision it isn't always advised to go with your guts. What our intuition tells us is not always right and may lead to making a bad decision. What one needs to be able to do is determine when his intuition is leading him to what is right. In ethics, intuition pushes you in a certain direction, whether it is joining a religious group, cheating on your taxes or hurting another person and may play a large role in your final decision.

The Arts contain a huge range of human 'creative activity' from paintings to literature. Intuition can play a role in attaining knowledge about the Arts. It can help us deciding what 'art' is to us. For example, we immediately know whether a painting is beautiful, but we do not essentially know why. An artist will spend a lot of time 'creating' works, this is often the case with visual arts. The artist recalls on a feeling from a past experience and tries to recreate that feeling using external media, such as paint. Through the work, the artist can transmit the feeling to other people and share the experience. Intuition may be involved when an artist creates a piece of art. An artist's intuition may tell him to use wood for a particular sculpture, rather than bronze. He does not essentially know why he uses wood over bronze but his gut tells him that wood is the material he should use. Hence he will go with his gut feeling and use wood. In arts it seems that intuition is involved in both the creation and recognition of art.

A problem with the arts is that they do not appeal in the same way to everyone. So there may be conflict over deciding what really is "Art." This often brings up the state of mind: "I may not know what art is, but I know what I like." If art is what each one of us, as individuals, 'like' then our intuition plays a major role in defining what art is to us, as we all have

different tastes. Through a strong, immediate "gut" feeling, we can decide what art is to our own selves. For example, I may look at Michelangelo's famous paintings and not have any strong feelings. But to a more religious individual the painting may have a greater meaning. Whereas a painting of Mauritian landscape by Marcel Lagesse will be beautiful to me because of my origins but will have no meaning to the religious person. This may create a conflict, but it is evident that our intuitions may have affected us in a way we have a different perception to what art is.

In areas such as history, intuition can play a significant role. Historians can never be certain to how an event of the past has happened. But what they can do is give suggestions to how an event has occurred and perhaps get close to truth by exploring the past from a variety of perspectives. Intuition may help put the pieces of a historic puzzle together. For example a historian may be looking at the battle between the English and the French over Mauritius in 1810. But he cannot get quite get all the facts together and the events to match in a chronological order. Some facts will always be missing. His intuition may direct him to search in a specific direction for these facts. For instance if the historian was trying to figure out how the English took over the island from the French, his intuition may tell him that the English must have had the element of surprise in their attack. This gut feeling can only be proven if he finds facts that support it. Intuition might lead him to obtaining specific facts that will support or reject his initial assumption. Both ways intuition plays a vital role in history. It contributes to the evolution of the ideas, and gives an 'educated guess' that kicks off the historical research.

In natural sciences we investigate how things work such as a biologist investigating how the lungs work, or a chemist investigating the

how potassium reacts in water. In these sciences, we seek to understand how things work using reasoning and logic. But it is often the case that a hypothesis needs to be developed prior to the actual experiment. This is where intuition may come in play. In chemistry I was asked to explore the effect of reactant concentration on the equilibrium of a reaction. Before the experiment I had to develop a hypothesis. I had no knowledge in the domain but my intuition told me that an increase in concentration would shift the equilibrium to the left of the reaction, as there would be more products formed. I could not explain why, but I tried to prove my hypothesis through the research. In this case the data I obtained supported my hypothesis. And from the results I was then able to explain why it happened. Intuition helps scientists to direct research on a particular path but does not give immediate knowledge. Intuition provides us with the 'educated guess' that may result in the findings of important facts.

The role of intuition is quite similar in the different areas of knowledge. Intuition is often involved in the beginning of a research, where we do not have any knowledge. With intuition we can develop an understanding of a situation or problem and solve it. In the different areas of knowledge such as history and the natural sciences intuition provides us with the educated guess that will lead research in a particular direction. But it also has a large role in our day to day situations and is widely involved with moral decisions. One may say it is comforting to know that *"You can lean on your intuition when facing a big life question and even better, you've got a mind that can both listen to the 'gut' and keep it in line"*⁴

⁴ Flora Carlin. "Gut Almighty". Psychology Today. Volume 40, Issue 3. June 2007. URL: http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com

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