

Ways of knowing are a check on our instinctive judgements. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Instinctive judgements are a part of our innate understanding and knowledge that we develop very quickly when presented with new information or imagine new ideas. Ways of knowing can be used to alter these judgements after reflection and analysis of the initial reaction, however to say that they are a “check on our instinctive judgements” is a very generalised view and not entirely accurate, it is all dependant on the semantics of the phrase. In order to analyse the statement, I must first establish a definition as to what instinctive judgements are. Instinctive judgements are the initial conclusion that we make when we are presented with information. In this essay, I will be referring to a “check” as reviewing our instinctive judgement. The areas of knowledge that I will be considering in this question include Maths and ethics. The first knowledge question that arises with such a statement is: how do we make an instinctive judgement?

Instinctive judgements occur spontaneously and regularly, and are an important factor in the pursuit of knowledge. When presented with new information, including mathematical theories or ethical concepts, we immediately make a judgement and form an opinion, which can be expressed as a first impression. This does not occur without a basis, the immediate response to the same stimulus will differ from person to person. This is because in order to make an instinctive judgement, we are reliant on our Ways of Knowing. These include: language, sense perception, emotion, reason, imagination, faith, intuition and memory. The ways of knowing that are integral to making an instinctive judgement are emotion, memory and intuition. The reason being that when making an instinctive judgement, we will interpret things differently based on our subjective experiences; although our sense perception will be similar but the way we interpret it will be different. This is because of memory, in particular emotional memory. This idea of forming an instinctive judgement and the potential change or reinforcement of that through Ways of Knowing can be carried through in several Areas of Knowledge.

In Mathematics, instinctive knowledge comes with basic concepts such as arithmetic and algebra. Most people know that, for example $1+1=2$, however the way in which they know it may not be in numerical terms. Although we are taught numbers, the idea of having two things is intuitive. In mathematics, we make judgements using our ways of knowing, more specifically, reason and memory. We use our intuitive guesswork, when we are faced with a mathematical problem, which is how an instinctive judgement is made. We use our previous experiences in facing certain problems to repeat a similar process in the new problem we are presented with; therefore, our memory is key in making this judgement. Our reasoning is then used to further develop this judgement into a logical response. Here, we use ways of knowing to, not only check our instinctive judgements, but also to form them in the first place.

When considering complex ideas, for example Leibnitz's theorem regarding the limits of a series, or other advanced calculus, our instinctive judgements are made by using memory and intuition to see the logic of the theorem. The memory is of similar theorems seen in the past, whilst the intuition is to understand the logic and, sometimes, to determine the connection to what is seen in nature. We then use reason to better understand it and reinforce our instinctive judgement. There have been many occasions where theories that are initially thought of as being illogical and therefore not provable to then be proved much later on. Fermat's last theorem for example, here Fermat himself, through memory of his previous theories and imagination made the instinctive judgement that was the basis of the theorem. Before being able to use ways of knowing to check his judgement, he died, leaving it to future generations. When using reason and intuition to try and prove it, many failed, thus it could have been said that the ways of knowing were used to check this instinctive judgement and deem it wrong. However in 1994 two mathematicians, Taylor and Wiles, proved the theorem.¹ In this case, I can clearly see that ways of knowing were used more in proving the initial judgement rather than checking and disproving it.

¹ Fermat's Last Theorem." -- from Wolfram MathWorld. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2015.<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/FermatsLastTheorem.html>

Using ways of knowing, for example reason, can, however, sometimes change the original perspective and evaluate the initial judgement. In the case of mathematics it is where a theory is proved wrong through extensive calculations. For example, in the 18th century, Lagrange believed that any function could be expressed as a power series, except at some isolated points, using his intuition, imagination and memory. This is instinctive as it was an initial idea rather than a proof or disproof of a pre-existing theorem. He wrote many papers under this assumption and the approach was largely influential for many years, however, Jahnke in the 19th century, redefined functions as we know them today and completely disproved Lagrange's work.² In a reason-based subject such as maths, perceptions are changed when theorems are disproved. But the way in which we initiate the idea also uses ways of knowing.

When approaching an ethical issue, our ways of knowing play an integral part in our instinctive judgement. Although it is evident that emotion and memory play a part in the instinctive judgement, due to the fact that if the ethical dilemma has personal links, an opinion will be formed on the basis of that, hence emotion and emotional memory will have had an effect. However, it is arguable that intuition is also an important part in instinctive judgements. When considering this, I argue that humans, as rational beings, have an innate understanding of morality and ethics from a young age, for example we know that murder is wrong. This is to say that we have a basic understanding and therefore will have an instinctive judgement based on our understandings and social conditioning. Hence the ways of knowing may not change the initial judgement, but rather reinforce it. For example, in Paris on the 7th of January 2015 the murder and attempted murder of 17 members of the Charlie Hebdo magazine caused uproar in the French population. Over 1.6 million people

² Widely Accepted Mathematical Results That Were Later Shown Wrong?" *Ho.history Overview*. N.p., 15 Aug. 2010. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.

walked in the streets of Paris to protest their anger³. Here several knowledge questions are raised, for example, what are the dangers of stereotyping? The cartoonists were well known for their racial and religious stereotyping and had received several death threats prior to the event in January. This also raises the question of to what extent we should stand for our opinions, even if they harm or offend others.

The instinctive judgements that were made by many people all over the world were that the events were morally wrong. These were formed using ways of knowing such as emotion and memory. Hearing about someone's death, immediately triggers an emotional response, and memory associates that with past events. Imagination is also important as it allows us to imagine ourselves in that situation, which strengthens the emotional response and thus the judgement. However, if we then use our reason to look at the situation from other perspectives and more objectively, we are able to see how the lead up to the event can also be seen as morally wrong, as the cartoons posted in the journal were sparking tension and anger in certain cultures and in this case, religions. Ethics relies on reason to be a check on the emotional response, and hence the instinctive judgement. However, still using reason, one can see that the reaction to the prior events was more extreme and thus more morally unjustifiable. In this case, we can see that ways of knowing are not used as a check on our instinctive judgements as they are integral to the formation of this judgement in the first place and, in fact, reinforce our initial judgement. Thus, I can only argue that ways of knowing are less used as a check on instinctive judgements in ethics, but rather they are first and foremost used as a basis on which an instinctive judgement is made.

³ Crilly, Rob. "Unity Rally for Paris Shootings: Live." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, n.d. Web. 05 Feb. 2015.

In conclusion, I feel that we must incorporate the understanding that although ways of knowing are used as a check for judgements in some areas, such as mathematics, it is to naïve to universalize this approach by implying that this is applicable to all areas of knowledge, such as ethics. Ways of knowing may be used after an initial judgement to better understand the judgement or reinforce it and potentially sometimes alter this initial idea, however the instinctive judgement itself is formed on a basis of the ways of knowing, and so therefore I cannot agree that this statement applies to our understanding of knowledge. Instead, I argue that ways of knowing are a foundation on which we build instinctive judgements and thus help us in the pursuit of knowledge.

Bibliography

¹ Fermat's Last Theorem." -- from *Wolfram MathWorld*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2015.<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/FermatsLastTheorem.html>

¹ Widely Accepted Mathematical Results That Were Later Shown Wrong?" *Ho.history Overview*. N.p., 15 Aug. 2010. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.

Crilly, Rob. "Unity Rally for Paris Shootings: Live." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, n.d. Web. 05 Feb. 2015.

The candidate tries hard to wrestle with the conundrum of when ways of knowing are intimately involved in the process of making instinctive judgments and when they are acting in tension with them.

The effort to establish a clear conceptual foundation for the analysis is partially successful, although the definition of instinctive Judgments is too vague to bear the weight of some the arguments to come.

The Mathematics content is well-intentioned and reaches a peak of effectiveness with the Lagrange example. The section on Ethics is somewhat less successful.

Ways of knowing are treated in a somewhat monolithic fashion--dropped into the essay without sufficient nuance as to their particular character and internal structure-- but in the end the candidate does manage to gear them to some worthwhile claims and counterclaims with respect to the title.

As a whole, this is a rather typical essay that exhibits moderate success, and hence belongs at level 3 (6/10) of the assessment instrument.