

10. "There can be no knowledge without emotion.... until we have felt the force of the knowledge, it is not ours" (adapted from Arnold Bennett). Discuss this vision of the relationship between knowledge and emotion.
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Theory of Knowledge

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(1553)

10. *"There can be no knowledge without emotion...until we have felt the force of the knowledge, it is not ours" (adapted from Arnold Bennett). Discuss this vision of the relationship between knowledge and emotion.*

Oftentimes the role of emotion is downplayed due to the belief that emotion can mainly hinder the knowledge acquisition process. In this essay, knowledge is considered to be anything of which a knower can be aware to a degree of understanding ranging from the surface to the deepest level. The role of emotion differs significantly depending on the different types of knowledge that we can acquire. These types of knowledge can be thought to belong to four main categories: 1) basic *sensory* knowledge, 2) *theoretical* knowledge, such as scientific theory, 3) *personal* knowledge, such as those regarding relationships, and 4) *group* knowledge, such as a commonly held belief in a society. The degree of importance of emotion varies from one type of knowledge to another.

Emotion can lead the individual away from the factual truth by forcing him or her to view the circumstances from a limited perspective. According to University of Massachusetts professor Lawrence A. Blum, the "Kantian" view on emotions follows the idea that "emotions are entirely distinct from reason and rationality. They do not yield knowledge" (2). Blum adds that this Kantian view believes that "We are passive in respect to our feelings and emotions. They are not in our control, and thus we are not responsible for them" (2). This viewpoint

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implies that emotions are not important in the acquisition of knowledge or the making of knowledge as "ours," since such emotions are not "ours" in the first place. The Kantian view is directly opposed by philosopher David Hume, who declares in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that "reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (415). Reason, commonly believed to be the guiding way of knowing by philosophers such as Kant, Descartes, and Plato, is only a vehicle to reach knowledge but cannot attain knowledge independent of emotion. Emotion must provide the impulse to use reason in the knowledge acquisition process.

A modern contradiction to the Kantian view can be seen in feminist philosophy, which holds to the idea that "emotion represents an inherent, ever-present component of perception, understanding, and knowledge" (Kuiper 79). Not only do emotions define who we are as individuals, but are essential in directing us towards an individual understanding of a piece of knowledge. While emotion often acts as an obstacle in the pursuit of knowledge, it is also critical in driving this pursuit beyond the simplest and most fundamental level. Our knowledge of intangible things, such as our personal relationships, our self-perception, and the beliefs of our society are greatly influenced and guided by emotion. Emotion provides meaning and gives value to knowledge, spurring the preservation of the knowledge within our minds. Since we, as individuals, each have our own unique emotional spectrum, our different emotional responses towards knowledge individualize the knowledge, making it "ours." Emotion, in all its variances and intensities, is a fundamental part of our human existence and of our understanding of knowledge.

Even so, knowledge can exist independently of emotion. While feminist philosophers say that, "since knowledge is not value free, it cannot be emotion free" (Kuiper 79), there are still examples of valuable knowledge without the presence or influence of emotion. This is a direct contradiction to the statement made within the prescribed title regarding the existence of

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knowledge without emotion. While there *can* be knowledge without emotion, what is important is not the existence of knowledge, but the individual's interpretation of the knowledge.

Knowledge that does not need emotion in order to be acquired includes sensory knowledge and simple theoretical knowledge. For example, the educated people of our world often begin the learning process with the knowledge that $1 + 1 = 2$. This simple theoretical knowledge may be met with some emotional response during the individual's initial encounter with it, but such a response is too minimal to be important. The knowledge that $1 + 1 = 2$ is a simple idea and thus requires very little emotion to be ingrained in our mind. When I think of this basic arithmetic, I have no perceptible emotion (other than a faint twinge of dislike for math in general). Turning to basic sensory knowledge, we can acquire the knowledge that "this paper is white" or "that water is cold" or simply that "there is a book on the table." In John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the author claims that "in the reception of simple ideas, the understanding is for the most part passive...For the objects of our senses do, many of them, obtrude their particular ideas upon our minds whether we will or not; and the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least, some obscure notions of them" (70). Knowledge, on the most basic level, can be obtained and retained without emotion.

Yet people frequently have some kind of emotional connection to a piece of simple knowledge due to the existence of an association to personal or group knowledge. The initial receiving of sensory knowledge itself does not require emotion, but the subsequent reaction and understanding of the sensory input does. Detectible emotion, usually occurring with an uncontrolled initial response to a stimulus, categorizes objects according to the emotional response that arises. We tend to group things as (in the most general sense) good or bad, and emotion is the test that accomplishes this grouping. As a "knife-shy" person, when I see a small knife, I am afraid even when there is no real danger. In addition to the recognition of the hazards

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of knives, the association I have formed with a memory of a frightening past experience helps elicit this knife-fear as a response to basic sensory input. However, although the fear of knives is shared by many people and can be considered group knowledge, some cultures may use knives as an essential or traditional part of life based on beliefs. Such cultures may not have the same emotional response to knives as I do. This implies that the fear of knives, while reflecting a natural survival response to a potential danger, is not altogether *a priori* knowledge. Yet it is certainly not necessary to have a frightening experience with knives in order to have this fear. Group knowledge emphasizes the danger of knives, which likely solidifies this fear and makes the knowledge "ours."

The individualizing of knowledge, or the making of knowledge as "ours," is a process that shapes a person's identity by establishing the knowledge of something as a part of his or her life, personality, and overall existence. This process is achieved via emotion, since emotions define who we are. If an individual has absolutely no emotion towards anything, he or she does not have a personality and might as well be a machine.

One way in which knowledge can become "ours" is by retaining knowledge. This process requires emotion when involving the retaining of knowledge beyond simple ideas. Excluding the most basic knowledge, which is usually retained in a mechanical way often through repetition, the pieces of knowledge that I remember best are those to which I have an emotional connection.

Emotion also prioritizes the importance and value of the knowledge on an individual basis. Two questions about knowledge issues come to mind when discussing the relevance of knowledge's value and emotion. The first is, "Is emotional knowledge more valuable than non-emotional knowledge?" and the second is, "If something were not worth knowing, what is there to know?" The answers to these questions depend on the individual's belief of the value of emotion. While knowledge based on emotion may be less accurate in truth, it is not necessarily

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inferior in value. "Our" knowledge may not be universally true; no knowledge can be completely so. However, depending on the way the knowledge touches our emotions, the knowledge can be so-called true on an individual basis. This concept can be illustrated in the realm of religion. As an unreligious individual, I am unable to grasp the emotions and devotion of religious people to their beliefs. Religious knowledge, a form of group knowledge, requires the individual to, in Bennett's words, "[feel] the force of the knowledge." Although I understand the beliefs of a religion, I only can do so at the fact-based level. Without an emotional understanding of a religious belief, I fail in making a religion a part of my existence. Religious beliefs are not my truths. Thus, in support of Bennett's approach, I can *know* religion but cannot truly *own* this knowledge.

In direct reference to the given quote – "there can be no knowledge without emotion... until we have felt the force of the knowledge, it is not ours" – this essay disagrees with the first part while agreeing with the second. Knowledge can exist disregarding the existence of a connection to emotion. However, an individual's acquisition of knowledge beyond the most basic sensory input and "simple ideas" requires emotion's impulse to spur the pursuit of knowledge. Emotion rules the way we think of ourselves, of our fellow living things, of the ideas and of the theories we create, and of the universe in which we live by assigning value to and by assessing the importance of such knowledge. Emotion is thus the key to formulating our own interpretations of knowledge and to understanding the knowledge as a part of our existence as knowers.

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