

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 Essay

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

Knowledge and Emotion

"There can be no knowledge without emotion...until we have felt the force of the knowledge, it is not ours." Discuss this vision of the relationship between knowledge and emotion. This quote, adapted from Arnold Bennett, seems to be, at first glance, a wise insight. However, upon further exploring the meaning of such a statement, more factors become involved in assessing its validity. The complexities involved mainly regard the meaning of knowledge—it is too complex an idea to be described in so simple a statement. Knowledge is very multi-dimensional, and these different dimensions greatly affect the general role of emotion in knowing. Emotion is vital in gaining knowledge in some areas and helpful for gaining knowledge in others, but in other areas of knowledge, no emotion whatsoever is required to know. However, despite the simplicity of the statement, Bennett could be expressing a correct idea, depending on his definition of knowledge—in many cases, there are different levels of knowing, or different depths of understanding that can be reached on a given subject, from very basic to very deep. An emotional connection may be required in reaching a very profound and complex knowledge of a subject, so if Bennett is referring to this deep understanding, then Bennett

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expresses a correct idea. However, although in some cases it is true that emotion influences the extent to which knowledge is obtained or understood, in other areas of knowledge, emotion has no influence.

In many ways, the validity of Arnold Bennett's statement depends on what is meant by "knowledge." His statement is made unclear because he refers to knowledge very broadly, as a general term, when in fact the idea of knowledge can be broken down and separated into many different areas. Even within certain of these "areas of knowledge" it seems that there are certain degrees to which one can know something. The lowest degree to which one can know something is raw knowledge—direct facts or statistics. For example a statistic saying that forty-one percent of first marriages in America end in divorce is nothing but a fact, something you know. The second "level" of knowing refers to understanding and drawing conclusions from facts that you are presented with. To recognize the impact of divorce on these couples and their families would be to reach this level of understanding. To be able to fully understand information, often you are required to have a significant amount of emotion involved. So if you had direct experience with divorce—if you or your parents were divorced—then you can reach an even deeper and more intuitive level of understanding.

To more thoroughly display the "levels of knowledge," it is better to look thoroughly at a specific subject. For example, most United States History classes study about Indian tribes of America, specifically the Cherokee Nation, forced to embark on the Trail of Tears to provide more land for white settlers. If all that you know about this situation is raw facts, such as the route taken by the Indians, the dates traveled, or the number of deaths brought on by cold or hunger, then you know about the situation on

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only the most basic level. However, if you can draw conclusions about the impact that these statistics had on the tribe, as well as the individual life of each Indians, then you are capable of a greater degree of knowledge. If you have had a personal experience relating to the Trail of Tears, if, for example, you are of Indian heritage, or have undergone a similar discriminatory experience yourself, then you not only know and understand the facts that you have been presented with, but you also feel an empathy, and can therefore directly associate with the feelings of each individual to participate in that walk. This is a kind of knowledge that is impossible to obtain without emotion. Although no emotion is required to know that a certain number of Indians died from a certain disease on the Trail of Tears, to reach the highest level of knowledge, emotion must be thoroughly entwined with the facts.

This idea of different levels of knowledge complicates the evaluation of Arnold Bennett's statement. Most likely, when Bennett states that "until we have felt the force of the knowledge, it is not ours," he is speaking of the idea that has just been assessed—that although one can have knowledge of facts, until we reach the highest degree of knowledge, it is not truly ours. However, this claim is debatable in more than one aspect. Firstly, it is impossible to judge whether or not knowledge is "ours". Some would consider mere facts, the obtainment of which requires no emotion, a part of their knowledge, whereas Bennett clearly believes that only an emotional association with something makes it a part of our knowledge. This is where the statement becomes complicated, for it seems incorrect to assume that we must reach the highest, emotional level of understanding to possess knowledge of a given subject. If you know the number of Indians that died on the Trail of Tears but have no direct experience with it, as the

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majority of us do not, the knowledge that you do have cannot be condemned as inadequate. However, Bennett's view seems flawed, due to the fact that in some areas of knowledge, only one level of knowing is possible. Although in some areas, such as human sciences, knowledge can be obtained on a variety of levels, in other areas, such as mathematics, no emotion is ever required, due to the fact that one can never really proceed past the first and second levels of knowledge. Although there is no emotion involved in obtaining this kind of information, it is still knowledge, and it is still "ours". So is Bennet suggesting that pure facts, raw data, are not enough to be considered knowledge, or does he merely fail to recognize the complexity of such a multidimensional word as knowledge? Although it is possibly valid to state that knowledge is "not ours" until we have taken it to its highest level, Bennett either fails to recognize or disregards the fact that many forms of knowledge obstruct an emotional association. For example, it is impossible to have an emotional connection with or empathy for Calculus or Algebra. Although one can love the subject and reach a level of understanding in which one can apply the knowledge, the knowledge of the material has nothing to do with emotion—there is a difference between loving a subject and understanding something better because of the emotion involved.

Bennett's statement is further complicated due to his disregard for the different areas of knowledge. To obtain knowledge in different areas requires a variety of emotion—in some areas of knowledge emotion is completely necessary to know, in others emotion is completely unnecessary in obtaining knowledge, and in others emotion may be helpful in obtaining a higher level of knowledge, yet not completely essential. For example, in the math area of knowledge, emotion is completely unnecessary. Math is

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composed of factual information and analysis with no "emotional level" that can be reached. Although math requires some level of understanding, this understanding results from knowledge of many facts—trigonometric identities, times tables—and no matter the advancement of the course, knowledge can be obtained merely by studying a book—no emotion whatsoever is required to thoroughly understand the material. In the area of the arts, however, emotion is critical in order to know. One can know facts about the artist or the time period in which a certain piece was created with no emotion, however that is only to know the piece's background, not the piece itself. Although we know what the art is and can recognize the subject it depicts, one cannot claim to be knowledgeable about a subject if he or she knows only what it is. Art is only art if the artist intends for it to depict a certain meaning, however simple that meaning is. Therefore, the only way that we can really understand the art is by interpreting its meaning, which can only be discovered through the emotions that the artwork invokes. To see a painting is just that, to see it, but to understand it requires interpretation of the emotion that the painting evokes. Likewise, one can give a summary of a poem or tell the key in which a musical piece is performed; however, one still does not really know the material, he or she only knows the mechanics of the subject. The role of emotion in knowing is not so straightforward in all areas of knowledge. Some areas of knowledge, such as human sciences and ethics, require varying levels of emotion.

Although Arnold Bennett was correct in that some types of knowledge depend entirely on emotion, and also verified in his opinion that, in some cases, without emotion, knowledge is not truly "ours", he did not specify his assumption to certain situations, and is therefore guilty of generalizing. Had Bennett better defined what he

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meant by "knowledge", and further explained his view of the possession of knowledge, his statement may have been more correct; however, the vagueness of his statement leaves room for arguments.