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## Is It Possible To Make A Neutral Question

It is extremely difficult to believe that a neutral question exists. Neutral is synonymous with objective, and being neutral means asking questions without being influenced by personal opinion or emotion. Just asking a question involves bias, which is favor for certain ideas over others, because everyone has different interpretations of knowledge. This makes most questions the complete opposite of neutral, which is subjective, or influenced by personal opinion and emotion. One usually asks a question out of curiosity with an assumed answer in mind that fits with pre-established beliefs. There is even an ironic biased assumption in the title; because the speaker is claiming there is no neutral question in an attempt to be as unbiased as possible to get his or her point across. Art and Religion are two areas of knowledge where neutral questions seldom appear. For art, imagination and emotion are ways of knowing that are interpreted differently for every individual, therefore making neutrality difficult. Religion is mostly based on two ways of knowing: memory and faith. Memories are used differently for everyone, and faith is complete emotional trust in someone or something, making both ways of knowing highly subjective.

Art evokes one large way of knowing, which is imagination. Imagination is being able to create new ideas without really understanding how or why. While I was studying Marcel Duchamp, the creator of Readymade sculptures, he piqued my curiosity: how can a man go from painting like Picasso to turning shovels into art? I did not understand it. I assumed that his sculptures were only famous because he was. However, I realized our imaginations are both different, and I learned that Duchamp purposefully did not explain the reasoning behind his Readymades, so his audience could create their own meaning. Duchamp was giving his audience free reign to come up with their own questions about his art, and all were subjective to their imagination and opinions.

However, since his Readymades are just utilitarian objects with (almost always) nothing else done to each object, then why are they evoking biased questions? If I see a shovel in the store, I just think, "it is a shovel". It stays neutrally in my mind as just a shovel, but when I saw Duchamp's shovel I began asking questions, such as: "Why a shovel, and why a snow shovel? Is it an extension of Duchamp? Is it an extension of the arm and all of its capabilities?" I am making underlying assumptions about the shovel, which are subjective. Perhaps art evokes subjective questions because without art, objects would not even be questioned at all, especially since personal and public questions are very different. By myself, I would ask imaginative questions, perhaps making up meanings about the purpose of a shovel, but with other people, I would not seek further meaning past the shovel's sole purpose, because my imagination is very personal to me, and the questions to myself I ask are subjective to my state

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of mind.

Art also conjures another large way of knowing, emotion, especially during the rise of the Fluxus movement in the 1960s. Since emotions are an initial response to a situation, they can bring up very subjective questions. Fluxus is an art movement consisting of all forms of artists, which disagreed with the assumed views that art is more than raw enjoyment of material. Ben Vautier, a Swiss painter and large participant in Fluxus wanted society to “feel the truth about art. [Society] will understand beauty afterwards.” Vautier believed that art should not be restricted to pure technical skills, because he felt that everyone deserved the chance of broadening their minds to see the world in a new and unique way by enhancing their conceptual skills. Fluxus stood for asking questions such as: Why does what I feel is beautiful need to be used for something fancier and bigger? Even these artists were highly subjective: they believed people needed to delve into their emotions to fully understand everything. Others believed what was already taught was enough to make sound judgments. Since these artists felt so strongly about ‘free art’ it subsequently resulted in an influx of new ideas about what art is and how it can be made more personal, therefore more subjective. Neutrality in art does not help to progress art, because feelings would not be used for creation.

British philosopher Dennis Dutton countered Vautier’s claim by believing art is just the objective use of human skill. Dutton rejected the idea that art is a social construct, but merely a way “for humans to hone technical skill, and develop powers of concentration”. Dutton would ask, “How can one enhance drawing ability?” whereas Vautier would ask, “What does this drawing say about me?” For Dutton, art is merely an established appearance in human nature, without influence from personal opinion. Art did not appear before humans, and is only around because humans are able to hold art utensils, not because their imagination and emotions need to be shown through visual representation.

The way of knowing that is strongest for me is memory. I grew up in a small town in Oklahoma as a Southern Baptist. This is a strict religious group, which lacks tolerance for others. One week I would be in Sunday school learning about how I should love everyone, because God is love. The next week I would be learning how premarital sex is a sin, and I should not befriend to those who have it, because they will poison my mind. Teaching intolerance to me went against the basic principle of Christianity: contentment should be a hallmark of belief in God. There is a paradox of discontent by people who are always speaking of security. With these two contrasting lessons in my memory, I had to ask myself, “What is virtuous?” This seems like a pretty neutral question, because virtue is having high moral standards. This could not have too many variations. However, the answer to this question leads to a pre-established answer by the church: love others as long as they are like us. To me, it is obvious that tolerance should rule over intolerance. As someone who has chosen to rely more on the memories of love, acceptance, and hymns of helping another, I can use my memory to console and comfort others

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in hopes that when they come to ask: “what should my moral standards be?” they can use their memory of me to make what I believe is a right choice of tolerance.

Memory is coupled with reason, or what is considered right and wrong. “Is homicide wrong?” can almost always be answered neutrally, regardless of if one is religious or not, because everyone has been taught that illegality is wrong. Emotion does not strongly play in this question, because the law dictates reason, not emotion, making this question mostly neutral. However, “is killing wrong?” can have two different answers. Christians will say yes, because life is God’s will. Some say no, because they could remember how assisted death brought peace to a terminally ill person. Memory is very difficult to keep neutral, because emotion comes before reason when recollection occurs.

Christian Religion is based on having faith in God. Having faith involves having full confidence and conviction that God will be there for his followers in all aspects of life. It brings up the question, “does faith provide true knowledge?” Faith can lead someone to have a content life, because it is generally the unknown or unexpected that produce the greatest panic. If one has faith, however, this would not be an issue. 2 Timothy 1:7 states “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power”. According to the Christian Bible, just believing can give someone strength to do anything.

Eliezer Yudowsky discredits Faith as true knowledge in his writings about human rationality, and states, “if you regard evidence as a constraint and seek to free yourself, you sell yourself into the chains of your whims”. He believes having faith makes you close-minded, creating subjective people, because they are not allowing themselves to see different viewpoints. Being faithless, however, will allow us all to move forward in life. He compares faith to drawing a map to a city. With faith, one would draw the city in a closed room with no windows. Without faith, one would draw the city outside on a large hill overlooking the city. Therefore, being faithless makes objective people, because they are more open-minded to viewpoints and ideas, not allowing their personal opinions to become the only answer to a question.

The imagination provokes questions from everyone, and each question will be different, but the imagination of one individual could produce a piece of art with such an obvious purpose that the meaning could become universal, therefore objective. Memories will always be conflicting, and the Christian religion is filled with paradoxical viewpoints. However, memory paired with reason can enable a person to make a sound judgment, which is an answer to the subjective question, “what is right and wrong?” Faith is blissful, and involves one viewpoint: trust in God. There are no neutral questions, only trust. Being faithless enables one to look at things objectively without the constraints of a religious doctrine. Neutral questions do not exist, because the statement itself creates an obsolete assumption, and anything that obsolete cannot be objective, because it does not leave room for further argument.

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