Understanding

This article is about the psychological process. For other uses, see Understanding (disambiguation).

“Understand” redirects here. For other uses, see Understand (disambiguation).

Understanding (also called intellection) is a process related to an abstract or physical object, such as a person, situation, or message whereby one is able to think about it and use concepts to deal adequately with that object. Understanding is a relation between the knower and an object of understanding. Understanding implies abilities and dispositions with respect to an object of knowledge sufficient to support intelligent behavior.[1]

An understanding is the limit of a conceptualization. To understand something is to have conceptualized it to a given measure.

1 Examples

1. One understands the weather if one is able to predict and to give an explanation of some of its features, etc.

2. A psychiatrist understands another person’s anxieties if he/she knows that person’s anxieties, their causes, and can give useful advice on how to cope with the anxiety.

3. A person understands a command if he/she knows who gave it, what is expected by the issuer, and whether the command is legitimate, and whether one understands the speaker (see 4).

4. One understands a reasoning, an argument, or a language if one can consciously reproduce the information content conveyed by the message.

5. One understands a mathematical concept if one can solve problems using it, especially problems that are not similar to what one has seen before.

2 Understanding as a model

Gregory Chaitin, a noted computer scientist, propounds a view that comprehension is a kind of data compression.[2] In his essay “The Limits of Reason”, he argues that understanding something means being able to figure out a simple set of rules that explains it. For example, we understand why day and night exist because we have a simple model—the rotation of the earth—that explains a tremendous amount of data—changes in brightness, temperature, and atmospheric composition of the earth. We have compressed a large amount of information by using a simple model that predicts it. Similarly, we understand the number 0.33333... by thinking of it as one-third. The first way of representing the number requires an infinite amount of memory; but the second way can produce all the data of the first representation, but uses much less information. Chaitin argues that comprehension is this ability to compress data.

3 Components of understanding

3.1 Cognition and affect

Main articles: cognition and affect (psychology)

Cognition is the process by which sensory inputs are transformed. Affect refers to the experience of feelings or emotions. Cognition and affect constitute understanding.

4 Religious perspectives

In Catholicism and Anglicanism, understanding is one of the Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

5 See also

- Active listening
- Awareness
- Binah (Kabbalah)
- Chinese room
- Communication
- Epistemology
- Hermeneutic circle
- Informational listening
- Ishin-denshin
- List of language disorders
- Meaning (linguistics)
- Natural language understanding
- Nous
- Perception
- Thought

6 References


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