

ToK Essay

Sample

Citation Style:
APA

TOPIC:

To what extent do you agree with the claim that "there's a world of difference between truth and facts?"

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Topic 2. "To what extent do you agree with the claim that "there's a world of difference between truth and facts". (Maya Angelou) Answer with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Knowledge of truth and facts is central to knowledge acquisition process. People often misinterpret the two terms and treat them as synonyms. However, truth and facts overlap but do not merge and must be treated as separate terms. This viewpoint gives rise to the TOK title, which states, "To what extent do you agree with the claim that "there's a world of difference between truth and facts". (Maya Angelou).

Before the in-depth analysis of the TOK title, it is crucial to understand the key terms used in the essay.

The first term that requires attention is 'fact'. A fact is an objective element linked to reality. Objectivity is at the heart of the concept. A fact is, by definition is objective. Dictionaries differ, but we find this aspect of objectivity in all definitions. The fact is an element of the real, situated at the heart of almost every area of knowledge. We can thus oppose the fact and the representative subject. The fact is independent of whoever thinks it or knows it.

It exists whatever the idea that a subject has of it. The representation of a fact is therefore not the fact itself. We thus oppose the fact to several elements. Fact is not a construction of thought but a reality accessed before any intellectual construction. Theories, interpretations or hypotheses are not facts. They are constructions, elements that suppose a reflection, an intervention of a subject that goes beyond the given.

The second critical definition in the TOK title is 'truth'. It is possible to produce a simple explanation of truth: the adequacy between what is thought and what is. In other words, the truth is correspondence between a speech on an object or a representation of this object and

the thing to be accounted for. The true or false character always concerns a judgment, never a reality.

For example, we will not say that the presence of a tree in a garden is true, but that it is accurate. Conversely, we say that it is true that it is an oak tree: in this case, it is indeed the judgment on the tree that can be true or false (whether it is of an oak tree). In this sense, the truth does not tolerate a gap between thought and reality.

We can construct our knowledge question, which states - “why the distinction between truth and fact is important in the knowledge acquisition process?”

To study the TOK title and the knowledge question, the essay will consider two areas of knowledge - natural sciences and human science.

The first area of knowledge under discussion is a natural science. A common claim in natural sciences states that natural science is heavily guarded by certainty; hence, we can say that natural science and facts go hand in hand. One of the qualities that accompany fact is a certainty. Certainty can be defined as the subject’s adherence to what he thinks: to be sure is to hold something true.

For example, consider the field of physics. Almost all the principles and concepts present in Physics are backed with quantitative data in experiments, calculations and formulas. Newton’s first law of motion was a theory, but it became a law with factual data. Hence, it is safe to say that certainty in natural science can be achieved with the help of quantitative data and numerical values.

However, a counterclaim also exists in natural science, which states that certainty cannot be achieved every time in natural sciences. We must be attentive to the ambiguity of the notion of certainty: to say that certainty accompanies fact does not mean that certainty entails fact.

When we take something for certain, we presuppose that it is a fact: it is not always verified. Certainty is, above all, a form of belief. The relation of certainty to fact is inverse: it is the discovery of the fact that leads to certainty. Therefore, it is essential to question the criteria that make it possible to distinguish mere belief from knowledge.

For example, in the past, people believed in the flat earth theory. They were certain about it. But, due to advancements in science and technology, they came to realize that the earth was not flat. Hence, something that was a fact for them was actually a hoax.

The second area of knowledge under discussion is philosophy (human science). There is a common claim in philosophy that states that it is important to distinguish between opinion and truth. Truth is what opposes belief or opinion, because believing that one knows, as in belief or opinion, prevents one from questioning one's certainties, and therefore from seeking truth.

Plato, in his condemnation of opinion, strongly insists on the fact that men are attached to their opinions and beliefs that they hold the truth, thus prevent themselves from discovering it in reality. Opinion constitutes an obstacle to the discovery of the truth: to stick to opinion is to be satisfied with an appearance of knowledge. Because opinion is relative and depends in particular on places and people, which is not acceptable since the truth is universal.

But it must be added that opinion, even true, is distinct from the truth. To hold the truth is not to state it at random, but to know why what one says is true. Justification is therefore one of the qualities which accompany truth.

A counterclaim also exists in philosophy which states that only demonstration of truth is crucial. To be sure of the truth of what one thinks, it is important to be able to justify that what one says is true. In this sense, a demonstration can play the role of a model in the elaboration of truth. In

a broad sense, the notion of demonstration relates to any type of proof that a person can provide to support what he is saying. It can therefore have the meaning of justification.

A demonstration is a form of reasoning characterized by the fact that it presents itself as a system in which all the propositions are demonstrated and consistent with one another.

More specifically, the demonstration is a form of reasoning, a way of knowing in human sciences, that draws conclusions from premises (starting points of reasoning) according to strict modalities. The results of the demonstration are necessary: they have been proven inside the system. Hence, it is safe to say that the quest for truth is the very goal of philosophy. Thus for Plato, the True constitutes, with the Beautiful and the Good, an absolute value.

By keeping in view the two areas of knowledge, along with the claims and counterclaims, it is safe to say that truth and facts are two totally opposite entities that should be kept separate from one another. Both entities help in the acquisition of knowledge but each also holds a different purpose.

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