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Sample

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"Knowledge gained through
direct experience is powerful
but problematic."

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TOK Sample Essay

Topic: "Knowledge gained through direct experience is powerful but problematic." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Knowledge is the name given to the information that human beings gather over the years. Human beings are on an endless quest for knowledge that starts the day that a person is born. The pool of knowledge is so vast that even if human beings spend their whole lives trying to acquire knowledge, it would not be enough. Knowledge is the greatest asset that a person has because it gives them power that can be taken from them under no circumstances. There are many ways that people gain knowledge; they either study or they gain through experience.

The title of this essay is one that talks about knowledge being gained through 'direct experience.' In essence, direct experience is the name given to experiences that we partake our own selves. For example, to find out how running makes us pant or breathe faster, we would have to run ourselves for that to count as part of direct experience in this regard. The title suggests that while these kinds of experiences may be powerful, they can also be problematic. 'Problematic' in this situation means that they may confuse us, or many tend to affect our beliefs in ways that weren't meant to.

So in line with that, it can be seen that direct experience can teach us a lot, but at the same time can also be problematic. This can be seen in terms of the difference between sensing and perceiving things. Sensation happens when we as human beings make use of our senses to find out about something. Perceiving is something else entirely, on the other hand. It is the name given to selecting and organizing information for purposes of interpretation (Partos, Cropper, & Rawlings, 2016). When we perceive things, we make use of the preexisting knowledge that we have, which is extremely relative from person to person and situation to situation. So in line with that, the idea is to be able to look at information in a different way. In order to be better be able to explain my point of view, I will be making use of two areas of knowledge: human sciences and religious knowledge systems. The knowledge question that I aim to answer here is 'how can perceiving different things become problematic for us?'

I will now be talking about the first area of knowledge which is human sciences. We can see that direct experience tends to make a lot of people learn very different things, in line with the perception that they have. Looking at this from the point of view of racism, it can be seen that racism is something that has been practiced from the beginning of times. The blacks have been discriminated against in the US merely due to the color of their skin, which is why there are major differences in the privileges that they have. An example that brought to light the Black Lives Matter movement again was the brutal killing of George Floyd that happened last year (Deliso, 2021). It was seen that everyone had a direct experience with the live footage of what happened. All news channels covered this, and people saw everything that happened. In this case, the perception of the majority was that of supporting the movement and standing up against racism due to what happened. People saw the kind of brutal killing that he had to go through due to his origin of being a black person. So most people made use of reasoning and were firm believers in the fact that this is something that is extremely wrong, and that it needs to be stopped under all circumstances. So here, we can see that the direct experience that people had with this was what led them to have a powerful opinion with regard to racism and how everyone needs to collectively stand up against it. The way of knowing that I used to come to this conclusion was reasoning. I am someone who is strongly against racism, and so when I watched this myself, I perceived it in a way that made me further stand up against racism.

However, a counterclaim to this can be seen in the fact that there were people who were strongly against this movement as well. Critics of this movement believed that this movement was one that was just for purposes of getting attention. Some people who even had a direct experience with the incident of George Floyd started speaking up against it, attributing all of the incident to Floyd himself (Ferguson, 2021). This explains how and why people believe things to be different in line with the perceptions that they have. Their beliefs tend to be affected by those perceptions, and that can evidently be seen in the way that they react. So from here, it can further be seen how direct experiences can also be problematic, in terms of people having beliefs that are completely unethical.

I will now be moving on to the other area of knowledge which is religious knowledge systems. People all over the world follow different religions, and it is seen that all of them

have their own reasons for doing so. Different sensory experiences of religion are also there for different people. While people may sense those in one way, the way that they perceive those are very different from each other, the main reason being that everyone has their own unique back story, due to which their experiences are explained differently. An example that can be seen here is that of different religious experiences that people have (Lewis, 2017). Some people tend to feel that God has intervened and saved them in a certain situation. If a person has lost his way, or if a person is saved by a deadly accident, they sometimes tend to feel that this is mainly because God intervened to save them. Their sensory experience is what tells them this. The way they perceive it is then the explanation they give themselves, which is how they explain the whole situation to themselves and then end up believing just that. The way of knowing that I used to come to this conclusion is sense perception. Many times, I feel I am stuck in a situation and am not being able to come out of it. In times like these, I immediately feel that I am being pulled out of it by an invisible hand, and that I feel is God's hand.

A counterclaim to this can be seen in the fact that people's way of perceiving things is very different from each other. In light of that, it can be seen that sometimes people perceive things in a very different light, which explains why there are atheists in the world too. While they might have the same type of sensory experiences, they choose to have their perceptions play a very different role in that, and that is when their experiences play a part too. They do not believe in the existence of God at all, and that is because of the way that they perceive the experience that they have. They do not think that a divine hand had any part to play in any of it. In fact, they believe that it was something else. So here, we can see that the direct experience they had, in this case, was not enough to make them feel positive things, but in fact, they felt negative about it, which is something that is rather problematic.

So, on the whole, it is seen that direct experiences, on the one hand, can make people believe strongly about things, but on the other hand, they can also lead to people having very problematic beliefs in line with that, because people tend to have very different beliefs with regard to things. This is mostly in line with the pre-existing notions that people have with regard to things. So while direct experiences can lead to people having very powerful beliefs, it can also lead to the opposite in terms of problematic beliefs. This can be seen in line with the examples that have been shed light on as part of this essay.

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