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TITLE

IN THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE, IS IT POSSIBLE OR EVEN
DESIRABLE TO SET ASIDE TEMPORARILY
WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW?

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In the pursuit of knowledge, is it possible or even desirable to set aside temporarily what we already know? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and art.

Knowledge is often about negotiating a boundary between what is known and unknown. In the natural sciences, newer knowledge usually conflicts with an older piece of knowledge, whereas the changing nature of knowledge gives birth to new concepts. The fundamental question is whether one can temporarily set aside what we already know. This leads to a simple yet profound examination of how knowledge is acquired in these two contrasting AOKs.

Science improves theories by denying or rejecting one set of established theories to implement and focusing on newer ones as its paradigms. Relatable aspects are also suspended in the arts to generate further possibilities to challenge and engage more deeply with an audience.

The essay claims that a methodology whereby one consciously neglects knowledge becomes of primary importance in defining and understanding natural sciences and objects of art. The deliberate suspension of the taken-for-granted allows for innovative perspectives, ideas, and methodologies. Such acts do not disprove the past but assert that knower and knowledge may effectively evolve. This shows that setting aside the known is an avenue for the sometimes doubted possibility of knowing.

Natural science:

There is a claim that natural science must place aside prior knowledge to make any kind of progress. This epistemological shift allows for the development of new paradigms and breakthroughs. The historical development of quantum mechanics constitutes such a case: it

turned the classical Newtonian intuition¹ about the nature of reality on its head. Newtonian mechanics accounted quite well for everything that happened at macroscopic levels. At atomic and subatomic levels, however, this machinery failed. Scientists like Max Planck and Werner Heisenberg² revolutionized physics by suspending reliance on classical models, introducing concepts such as wave-particle duality and uncertainty principles.

In ToK terms, the most critical methodological consequences stem from it. In this sense, the natural sciences seek knowledge by inductive reasoning, wherein observations lead to hypotheses that challenge pre-existing theories. According to Thomas Kuhn, such paradigm shifts demonstrate the provisional character of scientific knowledge. Discarding the Newtonian framework for a while opened the scope for fresh methodologies and revised frontiers for the scientific perspective. Setting aside prior knowledge draws into itself the fundamental ideas of reason and imagination. Both ways of knowing will lead to scientific inquiry, which builds knowledge on uncertainty and anomaly. This does not prevent putting aside past knowledge. Instead, it pulls such expertise to propel the inquiry forward. One must set aside prior knowledge to advance understanding in the natural sciences, even though doing so may seem paradoxical.

The counterclaim states that progress in the natural sciences requires integrating prior knowledge rather than its temporary dismissal. For instance, developing mRNA COVID-19 vaccines³ rapidly during the pandemic is an excellent example of harnessing existing knowledge. Researchers did not throw away previous discoveries with viral structure, immune

¹ Cline, David H. Variational Principles in Classical Mechanics. LibreTexts, n.d., [https://phys.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Classical_Mechanics/Variational_Principles_in_Classical_Mechanics_\(Cline\)/02%3A_Review_of_Newtonian_Mechanics/2.01%3A_Introduction_to_Newtonian_Mechanics](https://phys.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Classical_Mechanics/Variational_Principles_in_Classical_Mechanics_(Cline)/02%3A_Review_of_Newtonian_Mechanics/2.01%3A_Introduction_to_Newtonian_Mechanics).

² "Werner Heisenberg: Controversial Scientist." Physics World, n.d., <https://physicsworld.com/a/werner-heisenberg-controversial-scientist/>.

³ Mayo Clinic Staff. "Different Types of COVID-19 Vaccines." Mayo Clinic, n.d., <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/different-types-of-covid-19-vaccines/art-20506465>.

responses, or genetic engineering techniques; they used this accumulated knowledge and translated it into the design and quick testing of the vaccines. Precedents such as mRNA advancements by scientists like Katalin Karikó helped anchorage swift innovation, especially during global crises.

This is an expression based on ToK. It remains apt to assume that AoK provides a terrain where the area collides. Besides, in the natural sciences, we learn that deductive reasoning stands in juxtaposition with inductive reasoning; it incorporates corroborating new hypotheses with older theories and since-perceived phenomena. The coherence theory asserts that it is through its linkage to older knowledge that something becomes information. Disclosing truth here is seen as a collision between reason and memory, as WoK emphasizes holding onto old knowledge and reshaping it rather than simply disregarding it.

Although the urgency and complication of scientific problems may demand rethinking some assumptions, a hallmark of continuity in knowledge crystalizes the idea that scientific progress is collaborative and incremental. A framework that champions effective and sustainable innovation builds on a means for integrating knowledge deemed trustworthy into solutions for emerging problems.

Art:

An interesting claim to make is whether the setting aside of prior knowledge sparks innovation and transforms art expression. An interesting paradigm is the development of Cubism in the early 20th century, which Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque championed⁴. In this movement, artists broke off from the Renaissance bifurcations of linear perspective and photographic realism, threw overboard the accepted knowledge about spatial relationships in art, and experimented with forms of fragmentation and distortions of multiple perspectives and geometric

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Cubism." Britannica, n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/art/Cubism>.

abstraction. This is noteworthy considering one of Picasso's works, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907).

Imagination, therefore, serves as a Way of Knowing (WoK) in the arts by further emphasizing this leap of creativity from a Theory of Knowledge perspective: a jump over the established artistic paradigms of Cubist artists and letting intuition, perception, and conceptual thinking guide their work. Picasso, for instance, drew on abstract ideas to probe the human form and emotion in revolutionary ways. This process altered the knowledge framework: one substituted representational accuracy with subjective interpretation to show that prior knowledge can be suspended for transformative changes in understanding. Such paradigmatic shifts, as defined by Thomas Kuhn's notion of scientific revolutions, fit the arts as well, showing the iterative nature of creative progress. However, putting aside previous knowledge in the arts accepts the past; it suspends so people can move beyond prescribed boundaries. This interplay between disruption and creativity explains how the arts flourish from epistemic flexibility and the inclination to question what is already known.

The counterclaim states that the arts establish progress by cultivating and integrating existing knowledge, not abandoning it. While abandoning the past allows for innovation in the arts, much progress results from the regeneration and reinterpretation of long-applied traditions rather than their desertion. The dialogue of artists with the past makes the production of works render contemporary yet eternal reality. The Italian Renaissance exemplifies the fusion of classical Greco-Roman learning with inventive technical and substantive ideas. Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504) testifies to that mix⁵. The work is normative, moral, and glorified. Drawing upon the ancient past, Michelangelo fused anatomical precision with equilibrium in his statue, simultaneously infusing it with humanist and individualist notions of the Renaissance. That

⁵ "The Statue of David." Accademia, n.d., <https://www.accademia.org/explore-museum/artworks/michelangelos-david/>.

progression in the foundation created by past knowledge made it possible for him to conjure up a residue present in any context.

From a ToK point of view, acknowledgment of shared knowledge in the arts also poses an argument that memory counters as a way of knowing. Artists move from one cultural framework to the next, borrowing from their predecessors while grounding loans into meaning and context much cleaner than themselves. Michelangelo's reliance on this body of classical ideals goes so far as to imply that, indeed, deductive particulars, in turn, render absolutist inductive essences. Hashing out that truth entirely extends the contraction of depth in his artistic expression.

Further, collaborations and mutual comprehension serve best the arts. The David by Michelangelo was an intersection between historical traditions, contemporary attitudes, and practical considerations, demonstrating that progress is fundamentally collaborative and cumulative. Thus, suspending what was previously learned without carrying fusion and meaningful fusion ends with a weak nexus between past and present. This leads to empty well-offs devoid of the life breath of resonance and depth.

Appraising the claim and counterclaim clarifies what both approaches mean to the arts' progression. One could say that abandoning this knowledge could challenge the conventions, but integrating the established tradition creates a continuation of meaning and a history guide for the artists and their artworks. The art world represents a place where knowledge is all interlinked. Here, invention is not an isolated act but a trust buster—a dance between the past, present, and future.

Cubism and the Italian Renaissance are probably examples of this duality, showing how destructive forms disrupt and join forces with the continuity of memory for continued development in the arts. While Picasso's abstractions offer a prolonged picture of imagination and intuition freed from right and knowledge, Michelangelo's process exemplifies what memory, coherence, and continuity can cement in cultural evolution.

Ultimately, the arts offer a profound exploration of the question: Is it possible or desirable to set aside prior knowledge? The answer lies not in a definitive rejection or acceptance but in the nuanced interplay between questioning and preserving, disrupting and integrating. This dynamic balance enriches artistic expression and underscores the complexity of human creativity.

Conclusion:

This title reveals how both the natural sciences and the arts explore whether or not one sets aside previous forms of knowledge to understand at all. Paradigmatic shifts, the establishment of quantum mechanics, for instance, are made possible by carving away established frameworks in the natural sciences; innovation through continuity and collaboration is exemplified by mRNA vaccines, which opened up new ways of doing things but relied on previous knowledge. This is also true of the arts: breaking tradition has inspired significant movements like Cubism, just as the amalgamation of tradition and creativity, illustrated by Michelangelo's David, tells how ancient knowledge has influenced and formed contemporary expression.

It highlights continuity and rupture and locates the dynamic within knowledge itself. It exemplifies how the arts and natural sciences could show that temporary epistemological suspension could have a creative function and how joining established truths often affords depth and coherence. Both Areas of Knowledge balance what imagination and reason, intuition, and memory could offer in extending frontiers toward more profound understanding.

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