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IB Theory of Knowledge Essay

Sample

Citation Style: APA

TOPIC:

“Is there a trade-off between
skepticism and successful
production of knowledge?”

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“Is there a trade-off between skepticism and successful production of knowledge?”

TOK

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“Is there a trade-off between skepticism and successful production of knowledge?”

The acquisition of knowledge is a very complex yet interest phenomenon. It goes through many phases and levels. Each level and phase polish the pieces of information and refine our overall knowledge. Knowledge is crucial for intellectual and personal development of a person. It shapes him or her and makes him or her a better and more suitable person for the society.

However, an important aspect that must be kept in mind is that the knowledge we are gathering should be objective and beneficial for one’s self and the overall society. In order to do so, it is mandatory to make sure that the bits of knowledge and the channels and means by which they are gathered are flawless and free from biases.

It is seen that people view skepticism as something that will hinder the quality of knowledge. They view it as something adverse and unnecessary while gaining knowledge. This brings us to our TOK title which asks that “Is there a trade-off between skepticism and successful production of knowledge?”

This title is implying that is this crucial to let go of skepticism to gain successful and useful knowledge? Is skepticism something that is not required at all? These questions bring us to our knowledge question which states that “It is not crucial to make a tradeoff between skepticism and successful production of knowledge.”

Before jumping into the critical analysis of the TOK title and our knowledge question, it is important to understand the terms that are being used in the main title.

Firstly, it is important to know what skepticism is. The original Greek meaning of skeptics was “an inquirer,” someone who was unsatisfied and still looking for truth. This word is widely used in western philosophy and theology. Skepticism occurs when the person is in doubt about the knowledge claims and he presents his or her counterclaims which he thinks are more accurate or realistic. In short, it is safe to say that skepticism is something that moves the person away from the old worn-out claims. The skeptic people have always challenged the set grounds of an area of knowledge. They attack the rational grounds attached to the widely accepted knowledge.

Second important word used in the TOK title is the tradeoff. According to the Cambridge dictionary, the tradeoff is a situation in which you balance two opposing situations or qualities. Another way to put tradeoff is: tradeoff occurs when one thing increases and other one decreases. It is a situational decision that involves diminishing or losing one quality, quantity or property of a set or design in return for gains in other aspects.

In short, the TOK is pointing out to a possible relationship between skepticism and successful knowledge by keeping in view the role of trade-off.

To understand this title and the knowledge question, this paper will take into account two areas of knowledge: natural sciences and art.

The first area of knowledge being discussed is the natural sciences. There is a common claim in natural sciences that suggests that skepticism must be removed to

gain successful knowledge. This school of thought thinks that skepticism will weaken the area of knowledge and people will question the validity of natural science.

For instance, let us consider the newton's law of motion¹. Newton worked hard and came up with his theory of motion but people are skeptical about his work. So, in order to gain the confidence of people newton exhibited his work with the help of experiments and calculations. These objective and observable tools helped newton to reduce the level of skepticism in people. On the other hand, the doubt and fears people had in their minds vanished when they saw objective and measurable results. In short, it is safe to say that to validate a concept in natural sciences it is important to back it with rational reasoning and logic.

But, there is a counterclaim that also exists in natural science that suggests that skepticism may enhance the quality of knowledge and may help the person to explore the broader horizons of the knowledge.

For example, let us consider chemistry. Alchemy² is a very popular concept linked with chemistry. Many scientists spent their whole lives to studying this phenomenon. They had skepticism and doubt in their hearts which led them to dig deeper and deeper. As a result, they were not able to produce gold and precious metals but they were able to make tremendous chemical discoveries. The doubt and skepticism in them motivated them and pushed them to study more and experiment even more.

¹ Sir Isaac Newton's three laws of motion describe the motion of massive bodies and how they interact.

² Alchemy, a form of speculative thought that, among other aims, tried to transform base metals such as lead or copper into silver or gold and to discover a cure for disease and a way of extending life.

The second area of knowledge being discussed in this paper is art. Unlike natural science, art is based on more subjective concepts. There are no objective tools and methods to measure the validity and reliability of art. Art is heavily influenced by perception and past experiences. Everyone will have their viewpoint and analysis of the artwork.

“Who is more humble? The scientist who looks at the universe with an open mind and accepts whatever the universe has to teach us, or somebody who says everything in this book must be considered the literal truth and never mind the fallibility of all the human beings involved?”

– Carl Sagan

It is a common claim in the art that there is no relationship between truth and skepticism. In short, it means that if there is skepticism in a piece of art, it does not mean that that art piece lacks truth or accuracy.

For example, let us consider abstract art. It may happen that one person fell in love with the artwork and the other person is rather doubtful about the art. Now, that doubt does not indicate that the art is wrong because there is no right and wrong in art. It simply means that the person was unable to make a connection with the painting or maybe he was unable to capture the theme of the painting.

A counterclaim also exists in the art which suggests that there is a relationship between skepticism and truth. Skepticism is an indicator that something is wrong or something does not fit. It does not mean that the whole knowledge concept is wrong.

it simply means that there is a need to carefully analyze the concept again to get rid of any gaps and flaws in the knowledge.

For example, let us consider sculpture art. A layman or a new student will not be able to make a piece of art in the first go. As a result, the teacher will be skeptical about his work. He will ask the student to try again and again to gain the truth i.e. a flawless piece of art.

It was also seen that both areas of knowledge being discussed in this essay are governed by certain ways of knowing. In natural science, the way of knowing is logic and reasoning. It is because natural science is a subject that is heavily based on formulas, graphs, calculations, and experiments. In order to gauge the performance in natural science, it is crucial to use logic and reasoning.

On the other hand, the way of knowing in art is imagination and sense perception. As mentioned before, art is a subject that relies on imagination, creativity, and human senses. It is a subjective area where there is no line between right and wrong. People use their imagination and their senses to study, understand and analyze the artworks.

By keeping in view the above-mentioned viewpoints, claims and counterclaims, it is safe to say that there is an existing relationship between skepticism and successful knowledge acquisition. However, a tradeoff is not always needed to justify the concepts in an area of knowledge. One does not have to let go of skepticism to gain valuable knowledge. Skepticism and successful knowledge can also go hand in hand. A trade-off might limit the knowledge acquisition process because the person will become confused and he tries to choose one variable from skepticism and successful

knowledge. Skepticism should not be viewed as something negative and brutal. It should be viewed as a tool that can be used to achieve great knowledge and learning points.

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