

“Accepting knowledge claims always involves an element of trust,” Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

1599 words

We often make choices based on the trust that others' knowledge claims are valid and accurate. Throughout the essay, "knowledge" is defined as the opinion or expansion of information from a source and the ability to understand a concept, and "accepting" is interpreted as a person's criteria that makes them believe that a knowledge claim is accurate. Understanding the implications of always accepting knowledge claims is also important; the word "always" suggests agreement in all scenarios, eliminating avenues of disagreement from those with a different perspective. The prescribed question stipulates that an element of trust is always needed when accepting knowledge claims. However, what trust refers to may be ambiguous, necessitating clarification regarding what is considered trustworthy knowledge and how knowledge claims originate. Hence, this prompts me to investigate the interplay between trust and knowledge in the AOKs Natural Sciences and History. I will explore how authority figures influence our perception of knowledge and truth and whether our trust in authority figures may waver in differing circumstances.

In the AOK Natural Sciences, trust is seen as essential as the knowledge we glean from the past is taught by history or through teachers, philosophers, and other authority figures. Authority figures are individuals or groups with a large amount of influence who possess knowledge in a particular field - ordinary citizens look up to those authority figures and place their faith in them. This demonstrates the importance and role of authorities in our interpretation of knowledge; we trust the knowledge they provide is valuable.

Through the example of Lord Kelvin's theory of the earth's age, it is shown that accepting knowledge claims always involves trust. Lord Kelvin was "the best physicist of his time... his expertise on thermodynamics" (Rognstad). He concluded that "earth was between 20 and 100 million years old" (Lamb). However, there were "flaws in [Kelvin's] age models", and he dismissed geologists' input even after they determined "the timeframe... was too short for observed geological processes to create Earth's current geography" (Rognstad). Therefore, flawed arguments and data arose from Lord Kelvin's conclusions. Lewis (qtd. in Rognstad) stated that geographers were intimidated and hesitant to correct Kelvin or defend their theories stemming from Kelvin's elevated status in society at the time, which pressured many to adjust their theories as "most scientists [sought] agreement rather than conflict". Citizens who were not familiar with the intricacies of the issue placed their faith onto authority figures with superior understanding, trusting that they would provide them with the correct information – they trusted that the claim had ample reasoning behind it, as they were unable to fully dissect and interpret the information for themselves. Scientists determined that Lord Kelvin was wrong in hindsight, and his theory and methodology were later questioned by other scientists and undermined, displaying the strength of scientific peer review and how shared knowledge develops and changes over time. Moreover, multiple parties can replicate past experiments and studies to scrutinise their methodology and verify the authenticity and findings. Although accepting knowledge claims always involves trust as it is essential when interacting with others, potentially leading to incorrect knowledge claims, the rigour of peer review increases trust and faith placed by people through constant scrutiny of knowledge claims. The scientific method focuses on reason and attempts to exclude any emotional influences, which may influence trust.

A wealth of data proving that climate change is a prevalent issue in society shows that trust is not always needed to accept knowledge claims. Through decades of research and collated data, scientists graphed and determined an upwards trend in carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, with levels increasing “100 times faster than previous natural increases” (BBC). This fact is corroborated by data from peer-reviewed journals, where scientists of similar skillsets and expertise evaluate data and come with a shared consensus on whether the data is valid. The data analysed by scientists are collected using established scientific instruments, utilising data-processing techniques that “have undergone many peer-reviewed analyses”, resulting in “remarkably similar... records” (NASA). Thus, emotion and bias are removed as factors that may influence data processing or collection, leaving interpretation of results entirely to reasoning. Therefore, when multiple authority figures come to a consensus on climate change and the factor of emotion is removed, an element of trust is not needed to confirm the validity of results. Furthermore, as data collected and analysed by the scientists is freely available, citizens can utilise reasoning to make their own conclusions whilst utilising available shared knowledge – this reduces the degree of trust required to accept scientists’ knowledge claims. However, groups of people such as climate change deniers may challenge the veracity of scientists’ claims, as conspiracy theories and misinformation may appeal to their emotions. Consequently, this would lead to their arguments being based on emotion, requiring an element of trust. Therefore, elements of trust are not needed to accept knowledge claims based on factual evidence, however, emotional influences may lead to a false sense of trust based on misinformation.

Alternatively, in the AOK History, trust is paramount to understanding what happened in the past. As historical events often cannot be replicated, historians are considered authority figures who possess knowledge required in the field. Therefore, people place their trust and faith in their findings and knowledge to give accurate and reliable depictions of the past.

Through the omission or simplification of historical events in Japanese textbooks regarding war events, it can be argued that accepting knowledge claims always involves an element of trust. As textbooks are often written by various historians, Japanese students trust that the events written are factual and complete. However, important war events painting Japan in a negative light may be intentionally omitted or reduced, for example, only having “one page on... the Nanjing Massacre” and “one line... on ‘comfort women’” (Oi). As Japanese students only have access to these types of textbooks and teaching materials with missing, incomplete information, their sense of national identity may be affected due to biased recounts of history. Some Japanese even “deny the incident altogether” (Oi), contrasting many others worldwide, especially in China and Korea where many victims originated. The disparity in beliefs between Japanese and their counterparts demonstrates that trust is needed to understand and interpret historical events; if Japanese students knew about the omissions, they would likely reject the knowledge; they trusted that the source of information was complete, factual, and reliable. Furthermore, as we often cannot experience historical events first-hand, WOKs like sense perception cannot be used to form our own conclusions. A loss of trust may occur if misinformation is brought to light, leading to knowledge claims being rejected and undermining the government’s power and influence. Therefore, trust is always needed when accepting knowledge

claims made through historical texts; there often is no alternative to the provided information.

On the other hand, accepting historical knowledge claims may not need to involve an element of trust. Historically speaking, events that have many people present may bolster the authenticity and veracity of its recount since many people can corroborate the knowledge claim's truth. Furthermore, if there is video evidence, its contents would be available for anyone to analyse and interpret. An example is the Hindenburg disaster, where an airship caught fire and crashed in 1937 when attempting to land. It was "established that there was a leak in the fuel cells... hydrogen escaped and mingled with oxygen... which then ignited" (Szalay). No trust is required in this recount; there were thousands of onlookers watching the ship dock, and "the crash was filmed by four newsreel companies" (Szalay). Therefore, it would be difficult to skew the facts as there was video evidence clearly showing the circumstances regarding the crash – people would be able to scrutinise the recording for themselves, removing the element of trust. However, a weakness of this theory is situations like the Mandela Effect, which is when many people believe that an event occurred when it did not. This may undermine the validity of an event happening the way they say it did, leading to unreliable recounts from parties present, an example being the "infamously misquoted line" (Gemmill) from the Matrix, where many believe Morpheus says, "What if I told you everything you knew was a lie?" when in fact, it was not present. This challenges the value of shared knowledge and consensus, reducing the validity of eyewitness accounts the value of trust. As people's information may not be trusted, the knowledge question may be refuted as an element of trust may not always be

needed to gain a holistic view of an event. Even though the validity of events is improved by shared knowledge, its value and accuracy may be brought into question.

In conclusion, both the Natural Sciences and History require trust to reinforce their knowledge claims' validity. However, unlike in the Natural Sciences, historical events often cannot be replicated; therefore, we would need to rely on authority figures such as historians. In the Natural Sciences, past experiments can be replicated by multiple parties to verify their authenticity and ensure that theories are altered accordingly, which acts as an additional way to prove whether an experiment worked or not. Accepting knowledge claims often involves trust, as it is integrated into our way of living and interactions with others, such as when utilising our senses to perceive the world around us. Therefore, it is seen as an invaluable resource in determining facts from fiction. Furthermore, we often cannot use WOKs such as sense perception in historical events, and emotion may cloud the results of experiments done in the Natural Sciences. Therefore, the prescribed title can be construed as mostly correct, as an element of trust is often required to accept knowledge claims.

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