

“Too much of our knowledge revolves around ourselves, as if we are the most important thing in the universe” (adapted from Carlo Rovelli). How might this be problematic?

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Society often holds those who are selfless in high regard. But as we often view and experience the world through our own perspective, it can be difficult to distinguish who and what is really selfless. The prescribed title to me, is an interesting concept that is highly relevant to our current society. This is because knowledge that currently exists is generally focused on ourselves, as viewing the world through our own perspective may limit our awareness for our surroundings. Therefore, I believe that “too much” knowledge revolving around ourselves will be problematic. This will be discussed through the Arts and the Human Sciences as I believe that personal input is integral in the development of knowledge in these AOKs. Subjective terms such as knowledge that “revolves around ourselves” is defined as knowledge that is self-centred and focused on the individual. Furthermore, “problematic” is defined to be a cause of limitations for knowledge acquisition.

The scope of Human Sciences often aims to investigate a knower’s behaviours in the natural world. However, “too much” personal knowledge might be problematic as it can negatively influence a knower’s behaviours in the natural world. For example, as a part of my Economics course, I am learning about the effectiveness of foreign aid in developing countries. A common viewpoint towards aid is that it is effective as it allows for an increase in economic development. However, many economists such as Angus Deaton disagree with this and argue that aid is not effective (Swanson, 2015). Deaton’s opinion towards aid has stemmed from an overreliance in his personal knowledge of studying links between aid and corruption. Consequently, allowing for him to formulate his own personal process to reason with knowledge within developmental economics. Contrary to Deaton’s aid argument, there have been situations where aid has been effective such as through micro-credit lending schemes,

(Swanson, 2015). Hence, Deaton relying on his personal reason to distinguish that aid is ineffective might be problematic as it could potentially limit the scope of knowledge in developmental economics through discrediting previous successful aid initiatives. Therefore, “too much” personal knowledge that revolves around ourselves might be problematic in the Human Sciences as it limits the depth of knowledge that is able to be acquired. This could have further negative ramifications where the scope of knowledge that is available in this AOK could be limited by our self-centered knowledge.

Contrastingly, the influence of personal knowledge in artistic creation can allow for knowledge in the Arts to influence an artist’s audience to possess a new outlook towards a specific style of art, and hence perform a social function. One example of this is through Lily Yeh, an artist who has curated various artworks that were inspired by the personal experiences and stories of various refugees (Williams, 2020). Yeh’s choice to represent refugees’ stories is based on her own personal emotions towards the subject matter. While Yeh’s artwork is focused on her connection to the stories of refugees, it is still able to create significant meaning for the audience even though they also possess their own personal knowledge. Besides, our self-centred knowledge can influence the way that we interpret an art piece. This allows for Lily Yeh to perform a social function through her artworks as the audience can share the experience of gaining an understanding from her artwork and adopt a more open-minded perspective of the world. Hence, she is shaping her audience’s understanding of the world. In the Arts, the interpretation of an art piece by an audience is subjected to the knowledge which revolves around themselves. Art is loosely defined and often has a myriad of interpretations. Investing too much personal knowledge in the Arts can provide material and allow for the audience to form their own emotional connection an art piece. Hence, allowing for the arts to perform a social function by shaping the audience’s view of the world through being subjected to new knowledge in an art piece.

My personal stance has not changed after analysing the scope of knowledge in the Arts and Human Sciences because there is still a problematic element of bias which can be attributed to knowledge revolving around ourselves.

On the contrary, possessing “too much” personal knowledge might be problematic as it can restrict the acquisition of knowledge in the Arts. The acquisition of knowledge within the Arts can result from personal biases which is linked to our personal knowledge. I always find that my music taste is different to my friends and family. Perhaps, self-centred knowledge can also influence how we appreciate and draw connections to music. Upon further research, I found an article which suggests that there is a link between music and self-identity (Siemann, 2017). This viewpoint is compelling as it considers that emotions may influence our ability to connect with an artist’s creativity and imagination. As a result, our personal emotions can determine whether we can draw knowledge from a piece of music and how we understand the piece of art. Consequently, “too much” personal knowledge could hinder our ability to acquire an open-minded view towards knowledge in the Arts as it can often be difficult to separate knowledge from personal identity. This might be problematic as it can result in disagreements about the value of art in society. But it also allows for there to be a wide-range of genres in music which cater to the different tastes and experiences of each individual, allowing for the arts to be enjoyed by more people in society. As a result, there are instances where too much knowledge revolving around ourselves can negatively influence the appreciation we hold for knowledge in the arts through our ability to emotionally connect to it. However, the ability for there to be individual, self-centred knowledge has allowed for there to be a large range of art which can appeal to a wider audience through an emotional connection.

Additionally, my personal stance has not changed but I need to also consider whether the influence of personal knowledge is always problematic in every situation.

Despite personal knowledge restricting knowledge acquisition in the Arts, in the Human Sciences, self-centered knowledge may not be problematic as the development of personal knowledge can facilitate the achievement of an understanding of human behavior. Knowledge in the Human Sciences can allow for an achievement of an understanding of self, as a conscious individual which often possesses their own personal knowledge. For instance, in an article written by Forbes (2020) there was an exploration of the benefits of humans behaving to be self-serving in business. The article discusses how being “selfish” can be motivating in a business as it can allow for there to be increased chances of success and that prioritizing oneself can allow for motivation to focus on weaknesses in a business which can allow for the growth of a company (Burns, 2020). Typically, these behaviors would be seen as negative as they are only beneficial to an individual. However, this may not be problematic as too much self-centered knowledge can still facilitate human motivation which can allow for the knower to acquire knowledge that may increase their motivation. This can allow for the growth of knowledge in an individual which can be beneficial to both the individual and society. Hence, the possession of self-centered knowledge might not always be problematic in the Human Sciences as it can allow for an understanding of an individual’s behavior and the acquisition of knowledge which is beneficial to an individual and their personal motivations. In general, this does not completely support my initial stance as it demonstrates that obtaining more self-centered knowledge can facilitate the further acquisition of knowledge in the Human Sciences. I think that my conclusion towards my personal stance needs to recognise that personal knowledge still plays an essential role in knowledge acquisition despite potentially being problematic.

Whilst it is important to understand that personal focused knowledge could potentially have a problematic influence, it is important to note that it will never always be problematic that “too much knowledge revolves around ourselves.” This is largely due to the essay

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exploring perspectives where self-centered knowledge has been problematic and where it has not been problematic through claims and counterclaims. However, these claims and counterclaims were explored through my own personal parameters for the prescribed title and hence, another person's understanding of the prescribed title may result in a different conclusion.

Additionally, this can be explored in many different perspectives such as through other AOKs such as mathematics, where too much self-centered knowledge may not be problematic as knowledge in mathematics is reliant on logic and reason. For instance, a mathematician, Po-Shen Loh, developed a new formula for the quadratic formula through relying upon his personal knowledge which revolved around his interest in mathematics. This allowed for him to change the scope of understanding surrounding the quadratic formula as many individuals may find this formula "*easier to understand*," (Loh, 2019) compared to the standard formula. Hence, I believe that the degree of problems that may arise with too much self-centered knowledge is dependent on the AOK and the actual scenario.

My initial stance has slightly changed as there are many examples where it is not problematic that too much of our knowledge revolves around ourselves as it can assist in knowledge acquisition and contribute to our understanding of self. Despite this, there are still scenarios where too much personal knowledge can be problematic. Hence, I now believe that although having too much self-centered knowledge might be problematic, its existence is still crucial for the process of knowledge acquisition and allows for us to communicate our knowledge to other people.

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