

The ToK Prescribed Essay

Is there solid justification for regarding knowledge in the natural sciences more highly than knowledge in another area of knowledge? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

Key terms

Is there **solid justification** for regarding **knowledge in the natural sciences** more highly than knowledge in another area of knowledge?
Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

- Solid Justification - The important thing here is that justification is modified. This question is posing a higher test than simple justification. Your definition of this term should be welded tightly to your argument.
- Regarding - In this context, regarding denotatively means to consider, but has a strong connotative undertones of respect or reverence.
- Knowledge - This will be a key part of your argument. Is knowledge defined in an abstract and theoretical sense, or a practical sense?
- More highly - Consider what this means in practice - ie: funding, class requirements in education (graduation requirements), societal prestige. Consider local examples and historical analogues of what has happened when this has been done previously (Physics, 1950s math push). Consider not simply what more natural sciences means, but also what fewer resources for other subject mean.
- Knowledge in another area of knowledge - The most important choice you make is what his other AoK will be. Think about the value of the other areas in terms of how you define knowledge (see next slide)

Possible approaches with other Areas of Knowledge

- Math - Focus on how math and NatSci work together and one cannot be emphasized over the other. This paper would likely focus on the importance of AoKs working together.
- Human Sciences - A possible focus would be on how technical knowledge is not currently the biggest issue we face. Take COVID as an example. We had a vaccine in under a year, but 1/3 of the population will not take it.
Another approach here is to argue that a focus on the natural sciences turns knowledge into a purely instrumental pursuit, whereas human sciences keeps the intrinsic value (dignity) of humans front and center.
Another approach would be to argue that the natural sciences are the root of what it means to be scientific and thus the human sciences depend on this root for any claim to scientific legitimacy.
- History - A possible approach would be to focus on how understanding history means understanding the history of human knowledge and its consequences, without which, purely technical knowledge can go off the rails.
History teaches us who we are and how we became that way. It is an exercise in societal introspection. Non-reflective societies are dangerous.
- The Arts - Again, the focus here might be on how the arts explores what it means to be human, while the natural sciences is purely instrumental. Think about literature as a laboratory of the human condition. If we never reflect on what it means to be human, mistakes will be made, and the magnitude of those mistakes will be greater as our technological knowledge increases.

Interpretation (What does the title mean?)

Is there **solid justification** for **regarding knowledge** in the **natural sciences more highly** than **knowledge in another area of knowledge**? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

- The intent of this topic seems pretty clearly to be a reflection on the current emphasis on STEM fields.
- Another approach to this topic would be to think more generally about how AoKs work together and the dangers of emphasizing and one AoK over the others
- There is clearly an intent to get you to think about value and how value is established. Intrinsic value means something is valuable in and of itself (regardless of use). Instrumental value means something is valuable as a means to an end - as a tool. What are the consequences of emphasizing one of these definitions of value over the other when it comes to knowledge.