KQ: “Given that every theory has its limitations, we need to retain a multiplicity of theories to understand the world.” Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge

What is a theory good for? Peter answered this question on his editorial that he named with the question itself: theories inform the nature (process, relationship between variables, etc.) of an area of content. (2012) While theories are essential in the spread of knowledge, they lack generality and tend to be very focused on specific scenarios. This raises the question, is one single theory sufficient for describing all the knowledge that one needs.

In the natural sciences, theory represents how facts are interpreted, (Tanner, 2017) and this is often done through observation of trends combined with performing scientific tests to determine the reliability of the claim. The accuracy of the theories is ensured as new theories are published continuously when previous theories are unable to explain certain phenomenons. Newton’s gravitational equation sufficiently describe the effects of gravity on Earth. However, it fails to justify the elliptical orbit of Mercury around the Sun. (Siegel, 2016) Since Newton’s equations were broken in the cases of Mercury’s orbital, Einstein proposed a new equation relating the motion of mass and energy to the curvature of space-time. (Conover, 2018) The constant updating nature of scientific theories increases their reliability. This ensures that the theory represents shared knowledge and personal knowledge as accurate as possible, which makes its description sufficient for matching one's needs.

Conversely, there are also scenarios in which one theory is insufficient in describing the natural world. This is often the case for change in enthalpy questions in chemistry. To calculate the change in enthalpy, students need to recognize the theory of conservation of Energy (NASA, 2013) as well as applying Hess’s law during the calculations. (LibreTexts, 2019) This is not to mention the required understanding of atomic theory (describes the nature of matter) for these calculations to make sense. Consequentially, the presence of a multitude of theories is required in certain cases to model and explain certain phenomenons.

Interpretations of art often exist in many different perspectives. For anti-intentionalism, each person interprets art differently from everyone else, and have their theory of what the art means. (Szu-Yen, 2016) The Last Supper is a famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, (zelazko, 2018) and other artists have drawn out their interpretation of this image. Ben Willikens’ portrait is of an empty table, filled with emptiness, Salvador Dali’s “The Sacrament of the Last Supper” creates a serious and dictatorial mood. (Fast Pass Tours, 2018) These different theories while are all describing the same piece of knowledge, dramatically differ in meaning. Thus, to completely understand a piece of artwork, a variety of interpretations/theories are required.

Contrariwise from the interpretation of art, theories are also important in creating art. Artist has been long bothered by methods to create illusions of depth on a flat surface. Modern art, however, uses the theory of linear perspective to guide people in creating illusions of depth. (Blumberg, 2016) Before the 14th century, which is when the theory was proposed, great art pieces such as “The Calling of the Apostles” appeared flat. Linear perspective thus has played an important role as the most accurate way to portray the sense of depth to help advance art as a whole. (Op art, 2018) This therefore shows how one single theory is sufficient in informing knowledge for artists to portray depth in their paintings.

Keeping in mind that every theory has its limitations, the point that a multitude of theories help one understand the world stands. In the area of natural science, despite the high reliability of theories, retaining a range of theories can help even out the limitations of the single theories. The same applies to arts, as different perspectives are to be respected to preserve an all-rounded understanding of a piece of art

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