

1. "Accepting knowledge claims always involves an element of trust." Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Word Count: 1599

In our search for knowledge, regardless of the area, we must at some point or another accept or reject knowledge claims. The criteria for acceptance of claims differs between areas and types of knowledge, and one of these criteria is trust. It is important to note that while acceptance is of the knowledge claim itself, trust is about the source or the method used to find the knowledge claim. Seeing how both trust and acceptance are both involved in the process of acquiring knowledge, it begs the question if one can occur without the other. This essay will explore the relationship between trust and acceptance with reference to the Areas of Knowledge of History and the Arts to investigate whether trust and acceptance are mutually inclusive or if they can occur independently of the other.

To begin with it is important to address the different types of knowledge that can be accepted. In general, knowledge can be called implicit or explicit. Knowledge that can be articulated like propositional knowledge is called explicit, while knowledge that cannot be articulated such as procedural knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance are implicit. In order to ascertain whether acceptance always involves an element of trust, we must first consider whether all knowledge can be accepted or rejected. Implicit knowledge, in particular, can be said to be inherently accepted as it is unconscious knowledge and cannot be evaluated nor rejected. If implicit knowledge is articulated in order to evaluate it, it can no longer be implicit knowledge, and therefore becomes propositional knowledge, which is a fundamentally different type of knowledge.

Now looking at propositional knowledge, we must acknowledge that trust exists on a scale rather than a binary concept. Consider a school setting, where a student receives two knowledge claims, one from a teacher and one from a friend. Although the student may trust

both sources, can the two sources be trusted to the same extent? The idea of trust having degrees to it is likely what is meant by “an element of trust” in the title. Even the smallest degree of trust can be considered an element of trust. Naturally, we must then ask what factors influence the degree of trust. When learning about knowledge, trust is usually about the source of this knowledge claim and is influenced by factors such as credibility, reliability, and rapport. The level of preexisting knowledge on the subject (credibility) the source has or the accuracy of the source in the past (reliability) can be assessed by the student using reasoning or intuition to derive a degree of trust towards the source. Other components such as rapport may be influenced by other Ways of Knowing (WOKs) such as emotion. In the school scenario, the student would likely have a greater rapport with their friend, which might lead the student to assign a higher degree of trust to the friend. There is always some degree of credibility or rapport towards a source, and assessing these components using WOKs, the student would arrive at some degree of trust for each source. Consequently, when an individual evaluates an external claim, there is always some element of trust when accepting the claim.

Anyhow, the previous cases discussed are relevant only to an individual accepting knowledge claims, but what about a community, what criteria does a community have for accepting knowledge claims? In History, the criteria for accepting knowledge is primarily based on historical sources. The community uses reasoning and intuition on sources to form a unified “History”, and they accept interpretations due to trust in their WOKs. However, an alternative outlook would be that the historical community does not have to evaluate WOKs to accept an interpretation. It is possible that the claim is accepted through a majority rule situation, where only certain individuals of the community would be using and trusting WOKs, and the community as a whole is not using trust to accept the claim. However, it could be said that rather than placing trust in reasoning, the community is placing trust in the

conventions and institutions that were used to create the knowledge claim. An example of this is the story of Columbus and the claim that he was the first to discover the Americas. Until recently, this claim was the one taught at schools because a majority of the historical society were American. To American historians, Columbus “represents freedom, a guy who had turned his back on the Old World”(Handwerk). Because of this majority, it was this version of events that was publicized rather than the true version, that “Indigenous people had been living there for centuries”(Lee). In this scenario, the claim was accepted due to the trust in the American historical institutions.

Alternatively, there is the case of a historian accepting their own knowledge claims. In this case, the sources of the knowledge claim are historical data. For the non-historian, trust was a combination of components such as credibility and reliability and there was always some degree or element of trust in the source. Knowledge claims for a historian, however, do not stem from historical sources, but rather the WOKs the historian uses to form an interpretation. This, however, raises the question: is it possible to accept knowledge claims without trusting the ways of knowing used to derive the knowledge claims? To answer this one must consider the formation of knowledge claims. When first encountering knowledge, an initial knowledge claim is made. This knowledge claim is made instinctively through reasoning and intuition, and has no time to be evaluated through trust. This is similar to implicit knowledge as it is made without awareness, and because of this the knowledge claim is inherently accepted. Subsequently, a secondary knowledge claim is made, where the ways of knowing used to derive the knowledge claim can be evaluated, just as a non-historian evaluates the sources of a knowledge claim. With this, it can be seen that the initial knowledge claim is accepted without an element of trust, and a similar scenario occurs in the Arts.

In the arts, knowledge claims are primarily some form of opinion on the work of art. Individually, artists and viewers form knowledge claims through reasoning, intuition, and emotion, but we must again ask whether the knowledge can be accepted without trust in the ways of knowing. Let us approach this using an example. One discipline within the arts, music, is often said to evoke emotions from the listener. I have personally experienced this many times, one instance being when I heard Summer of Vivaldi's Four Seasons for the first time. When I heard the piece I felt sad or sorrowful, which meant I was using emotion. The initial knowledge claim of the piece being sad was inherently accepted through my emotions, and there was no element of trust involved. I then evaluated my emotions for a musical context using trust. Considering that I had been a musician for over 5 years and that my emotional interpretation of music has been correct in the past, my trust in my emotions and intuition was quite high, so I was able to again accept the knowledge claim that the music was sad. This provides a basis for the idea that when an individual uses their own WOKs to create a knowledge claim, the initial knowledge claim created is accepted without an element of trust due to the unconscious nature of the claim.

While the process of creating and accepting knowledge claims is relatively defined in History, with Historians creating knowledge claims, and the historians, historical community, and non-historians accepting these knowledge claims, the creation and acceptance of knowledge claims is not always so defined, as is in the case of the Arts. Firstly, the distinction between artist and non-artist is not so clear as in history. Artists often do not have any type of formal education to classify them as an artist, such is the case with the renowned artist Vincent van Gogh. The artistic community consists, therefore, not solely of artists, rather artists and those who view the art. This provides an interesting dynamic to critique on the quality of art or whether something should be considered art. For example, consider the piece of modern art known as "My Bed" by Tracey Emin. Many critics considered this piece

essentially garbage and many reacted like famous journalist Craig Brown, who “wrote a satirical piece about *My Bed* for *Private Eye* entitled *My Turd*” (“My Bed”). Yet this opinion coexists with positive opinions on the piece. This is due to the fact that there is no unitary community making decisions in the Arts. Art is open to personal interpretation, and no single interpretation is claimed to be the true interpretation. Ultimately, the community as a whole does not accept knowledge.

In conclusion, accepting knowledge claims does not always involve an element of trust. After considering the multitude of scenarios where knowledge is accepted, it becomes clear that although trust is often required for knowledge to be accepted, trust is not always involved in acceptance of knowledge claims. When knowledge claims come from an external source, there is a process of evaluating the source of the claim or the method used to derive the claim using trust, to determine if the claim is accepted or not, and there is always some degree of trust present. However, when the claim is created using an individual's WOKs, the initial knowledge claim formed is accepted without evaluation of trust as the claim is a form of implicit knowledge. With this, it can be concluded that accepting knowledge claims often, but not always, involves an element of trust.

Works Cited

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