

Linda Lapina
TOK final essay
Word count: 1584

“The arts deal in the particular, the individual and the personal while the sciences deal in the general, the universal and the collective.”

To what extent does this statement obscure both Areas of Knowledge?

Areas of Knowledge are the expedients possessed by individuals to form new knowledge. The given claim implies that arts can only be useful in obtaining personal knowledge, while sciences help us form universal knowledge that can be shared between all individuals. The given statement regards arts as only actual to an individual, while referring to sciences as something entirely universal. And we cannot deny that science basically makes generalizations from getting to know the particular, while the most powerful works of art make an emphasis on specific in order to influence individual observers.

Besides, **there is a vital difference between scientific and artistic knowledge.** There is much smaller possibility to raise empathy and thus have an effect on individual by using a generalization. Assuming that the whole point of the arts is to arouse new thoughts and feelings in the individual, to create a dialogue between the artist and the audience, arts also commonly create compassion. Even though, theoretically, possibility of recognizing oneself within the wide borders of a generalization is much greater, somehow it touches human emotions much less than identifying a part of themselves within a specific work of art, which is dealing with a personal issue. For example, a philosophical investigation on what war is and on human characteristics that cause aggressiveness will have a much smaller impact on most individuals' emotions than a single picture of a child mutilated in war. Generalizations may often be inescapable and needed, but they seldom affect our emotions and therefore can leave us unmoved, without having an impact on the knowledge we form. This demonstrates that the knowledge we gain from scientific sources does differ from “artistic” knowledge by the level of emotions involved, which seems to speak in favour with the statement given in the heading, verifying that arts are more personal.

Yet the given statement does not take into account that Areas of Knowledge are only tools in gaining knowledge. Each knower chooses his own AoKs to collect and form knowledge on particular objects; **the knowledge issue is what can be universal or personal. As AoKs are tools, they can have a certain connotation on the knowledge formed** (and they usually do, as it was described in the previous paragraph) **but are still basically neutral until applied in obtaining knowledge over a certain subject.** Thus, the knower, who has chosen both the object and AoKs to use, is the one to make the choice between whether his sources of knowledge will be used as personal or universal.

Focusing on arts, it is vital to note that **a certain issue being very specific does not mean that it cannot be applied to numerous situations to a certain extent and therefore classified as universal.** Further on, not all things that in a sense apply to all individuals (are universal) can be generalised, and here are some examples.

A novel by the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, "The Golden Temple", tells about a monk who burns down the temple in which he has served god all his life.

"All quiet on the Western front", a novel by Eric Maria Remark, tells us about a single soldier fighting in the Second World War.

"Anna Karenina", a novel by Russian author Lev Tolstoy, reveals a single woman's passion and its implications, resulting in a tragically fatal outcome.

These are just some examples of works of art from various cultures that are dealing with specific individuals in specific situations and yet have touched and influenced thousands of people all around the globe. Of course, one may say that arts can deal with something more universal (e.g., an issue of some abstract war on general), with a generalization of an issue, but still they will have to use specific, non-general details (e.g., a young soldier dying) to grasp the audience.

This proves that, as it was said, even though the arts may really be dealing with very specific, personal issues, they can still be very universal because they touch something cumulative to all individuals and are thereby collective. Being a human more or less means having emotions, and arts indisputably are attempting to deal with our feelings. Whether it is done successfully or not depends on each specific work of art and its audience.

An example of such personal, still cumulative issue is human conscience. It is a subject that arts often choose to deal with, but, at the same time, it cannot be generalised. Even two people from the same country and group of society do not share the same conscience, not even talking about different peoples and cultures. It is easy to find examples of different sets of principles. An American corporation can take away the land of native Indians to cut down their rainforests and find nothing unacceptable in it even though their dollar says "in God we trust" and the Bible says, "thou shalt not desire for your fellow human's property". Meanwhile, the Indian tribe can scalp their enemies while they are still alive and not find anything unacceptable in doing that. Of course, the same works of art will not affect these different cultures with different principles of ethics in the same way. Even though possibility to generalise this issue is very limited, **there is a universality in being a human** and having a conscience and it lays in having concepts of right and wrong and separating between the two, in having feelings that can be touched, also by works of art.

This proves that in order for something to be universal, it does not have to be easily generalised as most scientific issues are. There are universal issues beyond science as well.

Talking about science, this can be twisted around as well. **The broadness of an issue** or the fact that it can be applied commonly, not just to one specific situation, **does not serve as a reason for making this issue seem universal to its spectators**. An example is entomology, science about insects. Investigation in how long cockroach legs on average are will of course involve generalizations and can therefore be called universal to some extent but most individuals will not assign this issue as one of universal importance. The same can be said about other issues that are known to be investigated by science- the diameter of snowflakes in meteorology; invention of a new "beauty medicine" that can be attributed to chemistry; devising of a new, luxurious tin opener that can be said to be done

through use of physics. In all these cases, science, even though dealing with general issues, will lack universal importance or will even be serving consumerism (that can also happen to the arts- like the neutral paintings that can be seen at banks; under consumerism, art and science cease to be AoKs at all, they begin serving human comfort, not knowledge). **At the same time, human conscience, an issue so often dealt with by the arts and much more seldom examined by sciences, is not universal in a sense that it can be generalised (it can vary greatly from individual to individual), but is undoubtedly universally important.**

This proves that the **choice of AoKs has significance, but is still less important than what has been done before- choice of the object of knowledge itself.**

On the other hand, examining the nature of both AoKs, I have to admit that there is also the difference between scientific and artistic knowledge that was mentioned in the introduction and has to be taken into account. Scientific knowledge can be verified and is more objective, while knowledge originating from arts is often without proper evidence. Yet, as we know, proof is not always the most important factor in justifying what we need to know. Even though art, dealing with the particular as it is, seldom can offer general proof to something, it can be much more persuasive than science and therefore leave a much longer impact on the individual.

Therefore, a counterpoint emerging from this inference is an assumption that, as the scientific and artistic knowledge are different, art and science has each its own objects of knowledge that should not be mixed together and therefore the given statement is completely true. In other words, objects that require proof and logical justification should be dealt with using science, and more humane, less rational subjects should be left to be dealt with the help of arts.

However, I do not agree with this assumption because that would make the judgements and knowledge on these subjects too eliminated. For knowledge claims to be more justified and legitimate, they should be based upon on a wide variety of sources coming from maximally broad totality of Areas of Knowledge. Using one AoK per one issue would result in the obtained knowledge being obscure and deficient.

We can summarise that, to an extent, the given statement is true- **both Areas of Knowledge most commonly have different routes of approaching the knower:** science appeals to individual through generalizations while arts influence each individual by using the specific. However, art, even though showing us the specific, can lead an individual to form very universal, general knowledge, whilst from generalizations made using science we can also form knowledge about particular. Further on, both AoKs can be compatible in obtaining new knowledge, and it can make our knowledge claims wider, more genuine and justified. This demonstrates that **regarding arts as dealing solely with the particular and sciences as purely universal obscures the nature and eliminates the use of both AoKs.**