Theory of knowledge

Specimen Titles

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1. "None of us is as smart as all of us" (Eric Schmidt). Discuss the extent to which you agree with this claim with reference to personal and shared knowledge.

2. "A map is only useful if it simplifies things." To what extent does this apply to knowledge?

3. To what extent are areas of knowledge shaped by their past? Consider with reference to two areas of knowledge.

4. "All knowledge depends on the recognition of patterns and anomalies." Consider the extent to which you agree with this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

5. "The possession of knowledge confers privilege." To what extent is this an accurate claim?

6. To what extent do ways of knowing prevent us from deluding ourselves? Justify your answer with reference to at least one area of knowledge.

Theory of knowledge

Examiner Preparation Notes: Specimen Titles

Preamble

These notes outline what members of the examining team had in mind when they devised each of the prescribed titles. They indicate approaches candidates might take in responding to the title chosen. Examiners are kindly requested to keep the following points in mind:

1. *While there may be good reasons for examiners to consult these notes **during** the actual marking of essays, it is vital that they resist any temptation to treat the points they contain as if they constituted a "checklist" of what is expected*

2. *It is expected that examiners will read carefully these notes **in advance** of the marking session so as to broaden and deepen their awareness of how responses to the prescribed titles might be developed*

3. *The approaches suggested in these notes are not the only ones possible, and may not even comprise the best ones*

4. *To a large extent they are couched in abstract terms because the intention is that they describe a whole **class** of actual essays – hence the lack of specific examples*

5. *They describe **ideal** answers – there are many points included where the candidate would have to work hard to make the arguments function, and most candidates are unlikely to be entirely successful in this task*

6. *The intention of the marking notes is, on the whole, not to describe flawed approaches or ways in which candidates may fail to respond successfully*

In summary, what is written here is only a framework to help examiners in their assessment. Examiners should be responsive to other valid approaches, but, in each case, examiners should consider **whether the candidate has presented an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title**.

Consider whether the candidate has:

a. *understood the title*

b. *understood the knowledge questions that are explicit and implicit in it, and/or linked the title to knowledge questions that arise naturally from it*

c. *developed and supported a comprehensive and cogent point of view about the topic and appropriate knowledge questions*

Nature of the Title

This title requires candidates to consider knowledge in terms of what can be known by an individual and what can be known by communities of knowers and how they compare. While ways of knowing and areas of knowledge are neither mentioned nor specified in the title, it is expected that candidates will refer to some of them as part of the structure of their responses. Contrasts between the categories of personal and shared knowledge will need to be elucidated, and candidates must also decide on the meaning of "smartness" for the purposes of the analysis. It is not expected that candidates will research Eric Schmidt, nor the context in which he made the claim in the title.

Knowledge Questions

Knowledge questions that a candidate *might* identify in the course of the development of a response to the title include:

- *Under what circumstances does a community of knowers lead to more (or less) reliable knowledge than an individual knower?*

- *What qualities are possessed by a knower who is considered to be "smart"?*

- *To what extent does specialisation limit or facilitate the construction or acquisition of knowledge?*

- *How robust is the distinction between personal and shared knowledge?*

- *Is personal knowledge merely a subset of shared knowledge?*

- *What roles are played by ways of knowing in the construction of personal and shared knowledge?*

- *What is the relative importance of personal and shared knowledge in different areas of knowledge?*

- *Are there circumstances in which an individual can know more than a community?*

Commentary on Possible Treatment

The simplest interpretation of the claim in the title is that no individual can ever be smarter than a community to which that individual belongs. Candidates might be wise to explore at an early stage what "smarter" might mean in this context – perhaps more knowledgeable, which could mean knowing more facts, or being able to wield a wider range of skills.

"Smartness" tends to be linked to intelligence – if candidates make this connection, it might be most profitable in terms of the essay to consider this property as the ability to process information into knowledge, or to find creative solutions to problems associated with knowing, or to apply knowledge in an appropriate way.

Taking the concept to be related in some way to the acquisition, possession or application of knowledge, the level of "smartness" of the community might be the outcome of various processes. It might simply be an aggregation of the knowledge held by its constituent individuals, or perhaps, through some synergistic process, it could become more than this sum. It could be that the volume of human resources available to a community simply might make knowledge acquisition, storage or application easier for groups than individuals.

Candidates are required to bring a distinction between personal and shared knowledge to bear on the discussion. Shared knowledge – to be found in a wide range of areas of knowledge – is vast in extent and needs to be stored in an accessible form for those who wish to use it. If "smartness" refers to the amount of this kind of knowledge that individuals and communities possess, it seems incontestable that none of us can be as smart as all of us, as personal knowledge could constitute only a small subset of shared knowledge of this type. Furthermore, it could be argued that personal knowledge is more limited than ever before (relative to the extent of shared knowledge) due to the inexorable process of specialisation of most fields – as a consequence of the expansion of knowledge over time and the proliferation of methods for generating it. Consequently it is more difficult to have an overall view of the shared knowledge we possess and less possible than ever to be "as smart as all of us". On the other hand, whole communities of scholars also suffer from this trend as they become increasingly constrained by the boundaries of their particular specialisms. This raises the question of who "all of us" might be taken to include.

Where areas of knowledge are invoked, candidates might explore the relations between communities that have a stake in the knowledge concerned, such as those who produce it, those who evaluate it and/or consume it. Artists, for instance, may be distinguished from art critics and from the audience that appreciates the art work. Some of these constituencies may adopt perspectives that attract greater respect than those held by individuals within them. In the natural sciences, the production and evaluation of knowledge tend to be carried out by the same general community of scientists, while technologists are more concerned with its use. Professional communities in the sciences are arguably stronger and more homogeneous than those found among historians or artists; this is despite the imperative of scientists to adopt a skeptical mindset toward findings – that might be thought of as encouraging an individual perspective.

Taking a different tack, candidates might argue that personal knowledge includes self-knowledge and personal skills that cannot easily be shared. If so, it could be argued that such knowledge is inaccessible to the whole community and thus the claim in the title might appear to be contestable. It is possible that certain ways of knowing may be similarly oriented – for example, intuition or imagination might be aspects of "smartness" that apply to individuals rather than groups. This might mean that, for example, individual mathematicians or artists are capable of insights that do not require the support of a surrounding community.

There may also be knowledge that could, in principle, be shared but those who possess it have decided to withhold it from the community at large. There may be economic or philosophical reasons for such decisions – which might undermine the idea that communities are always smarter than individuals.

The answer to the question of whether individuals or groups are more effective in acquiring knowledge can depend upon the relations between group members. When individuals within a group are encouraged to make independent judgements, the "average" of these judgements is often more accurate than most of the judgements made by autonomous individuals – the so-called "wisdom of crowds". On the other hand, sustained communication between members of the group can lead to a process of "polarisation" in which a shared judgement diverges from the truth further than would be the case for most individuals, had they been forced to make independent judgements on the matter – sometimes referred to as "groupthink". Such a situation might be resolved by a distinguished individual with the expertise and confidence to debunk the majority view. Candidates might attempt to evaluate the degree to which "crowd wisdom" and "groupthink" influence the production of knowledge in different areas. For example, the norms associated with scientific activity are designed to encourage individuals to form an independent opinion of published work, but there are examples of situations in which the scientific community becomes misdirected by dialogue that makes certain assumptions and leaves others unquestioned.

Nature of the Title

Titles that employ metaphors require candidates to take particular care in unpacking key terms. In this case, it is important that the essay makes clear how the idea of a "map" should be understood when applied to the context of knowledge. There are four main concepts in this title that need to be connected: map, simplification, knowledge and usefulness. A successful essay would either link usefulness to the simplicity of the map in some way, or would reject the claim in the title and show that simplicity (or complexity) has no bearing on usefulness. As the title makes no stipulation regarding areas of knowledge or ways of knowing, candidates might choose to respond to the title by focussing on map-like features of one category or the other, or both. They might also invoke the notions of personal and shared knowledge in the attempt to analyse the title.

Knowledge Questions

Knowledge questions that a candidate *might* identify in the course of the development of a response to the title include:

- *In what ways can knowledge be thought of as a map?*

- *Are all types of knowledge map-like?*

- *Do ways of knowing allow us to construct maps as part of personal knowledge?*

- *What kinds of use of knowledge require simplicity, and what kinds are hindered by it?*

- *How can maps give us knowledge if they are necessarily simplified versions of reality?*

- *What might be meant by understanding based on a simplified map?*

- *If a map (or model) is unable to provide predictions, can it still be useful?*

- *What is the connection between the simplicity of a map (or model) and accuracy?*

Commentary on Possible Treatment

Candidates might begin by making explicit the implication in the title – namely that knowledge can be thought of as a simplified map of reality designed to solve specific problems. Such an approach would require illustration, justification and critical reflection. In this context, "things" could refer to the complex world around us, and a "map" would be a metaphorical description of knowledge designed to be useful in solving problems relevant to a particular aspect of that world.

While the word "simplify" can be difficult to define satisfactorily, candidates might opt to show that the map does not represent the territory it purports to convey in a faithful manner – perhaps through the omission of certain features or dissolving the distinctions between different types of item – and then go on to show that this is no bad thing. It is not expected that students delve into technical definitions of simplicity and complexity.

One avenue open to candidates would be to classify knowledge as personal and shared. Following this line of development, candidates could show, using appropriate examples, how simplified maps of reality are built both in terms of personal knowledge (for example through ways of knowing) and in terms of shared

knowledge in the form of areas of knowledge (perhaps by visiting the various aspects of the knowledge framework).

Among the ways of knowing, sense perception, language and memory perhaps most readily appear to have map-like properties. "Common sense" conceptions of sense perception and memory suggest that these ways of knowing are faithful representations of the present and the past respectively. However, successful candidates will likely be able to show how a raft of influences renders this conception of "faithfulness" naive and unsustainable, and it may be that filtering processes are necessary in order to make these "WOK maps" useful. The goals of language, including useful categorisations of the world, are achieved through the construction of maps in which arbitrary terms are used as part of the representation. This feature may amplify the power of the map.

With respect to shared knowledge, it might be helpful to look at areas of knowledge with contrasting methodologies or subject matter. It seems fairly straightforward to identify the "territory" of some areas of knowledge – for example, the physical universe for the natural sciences, and the recorded human past in the case of history. However, this process is not so easy elsewhere – it may be more problematic to identify the "territory" of the arts or mathematics or religious knowledge systems.

The natural sciences and the human sciences come to mind as producing "maps" for rather different purposes, and hence they may provide different answers as to the benefits of simplification. Models in economics are highly simplified versions of a complex dynamic reality that are intended to aid understanding rather than be predictive. On the other hand, it could be argued that the simplicity of many scientific laws and equations is not the result of human involvement but exists in nature itself. These areas can be examined from the opposite viewpoint. Economic laws are on the whole just as simple as physical ones and there are some applications in the natural sciences where the map is highly complex. Whether usefulness is grounded in the simplicity of the map might depend critically on the sort of problem we want the map to answer.

Treatment can be extended to the arts, history or ethics. Archetypal models of the perfect art form in terms of story or principles of musical construction aid understanding of the mechanics of the form through simplification of the complexities of real stories and music. Ethical maps help us sort out complex real ethical situations and the general simplified explanations in history gloss over the myriads of uncomfortable or sometimes contradictory detail in the source material..

Candidates may draw attention to aspects of knowledge that do not seem map-like at all, or situations in which the simplifications involved in map-making are unhelpful. There may be other metaphors for knowledge that are more accurate. Candidates may assert that knowledge in indigenous systems sometimes steers clear of excessive theorising, and speculate as to what this might mean for the map analogy.

There is a danger that candidates might be tempted to enumerate all the different permutations of types of knowledge, types of map, different usages and degrees of simplification. This would lead to overcomplicated and superficial essays. It is not expected that candidates give an exhaustive account of the question; rather essays should deal with a sufficient wide set of examples to substantiate the conclusion. Ultimately the success of answers to this question depends on how well the essay ties simplification to use.

3. To what extent are areas of knowledge shaped by their past? Consider with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Nature of the Title

Necessary goals with this title will include the need to spell out what is meant by the past of an area of knowledge and explore the extent to which this past might have had a bearing on its present form. Candidates are invited to do this for two areas of knowledge – freely chosen – and compare findings between them. Successful essays will exhibit a balance between the treatments of the two areas of knowledge selected.

Knowledge Questions

Knowledge questions that a candidate *might* identify in the course of the development of a response to the title include:

- *What exactly is meant by the past of an area of knowledge?*

- *How can the past of an area of knowledge influence its present form? What are the mechanisms that permit this?*

- *If an area of knowledge is influenced by its past, does that mean that its present form could have been different had things turned out differently in the past?*

- *If an area of knowledge is sensitive to its own past, to what extent can it said to be objective?*

- *If an area of knowledge is shaped by its own past, does that mean that it is more a reflection of human social activity than a representation of the world?*

- *How extensive is the role of chance in the evolution of an area of knowledge?*

- *How can we know how an area of knowledge is shaped by its history?*

- *What are the implications for reliability of an area of knowledge that is shaped by its history?*

Commentary on Possible Treatment

The key idea in this title is that the past of an area of knowledge might, to some extent, determine its present form. By the past of an area of knowledge, candidates might refer to the set of goals and applications that were associated with it, its concepts and the language in which they were expressed, the methods it employed, or its general state of development at some point in the past. Collectively, these aspects could be thought of as the knowledge framework as it would have appeared at a past date – although candidates are under no obligation to describe them in these terms. The title demands that these issues are examined for two areas of knowledge, and candidates may select them in order to be able to draw contrasts.

The notion that a causal connection can be drawn from some or all of these aspects to the contemporary state of an area of knowledge might be contrasted with the possibility that the current form depends only on present circumstances. This would imply that there could be no "accidents of history" that influence the present day form of the area of knowledge – perhaps leading to the even stronger assertion that the current form an area of knowledge is somehow inevitable. This would be an ahistorical view of knowledge. This dichotomy of views might be presented as the structure of contemporary knowledge being contingent or necessary.

Since areas of knowledge tend to have some sort of continuity over time, there are historical links that are stronger or weaker depending on the timescale. Even radical change preserves some aspects of an area of knowledge, and candidates should examine examples to determine in these cases what these aspects are. It will be insufficient just to describe change; there must be a sustained attempt to show whether past change produces present form.

Candidates exploring the possibility that the past of an area of knowledge has little significant influence on current form might turn to mathematics, in which a Platonist view is often expressed – that the subject is independent of human history and is objectively "out there" in some sense. Mathematical notation is man-made and subject to historical forces but this does not address the underlying question about the nature of mathematics itself. On the other hand, a distinction can be made between the physical universe that forms the subject matter of the natural sciences and the human knowledge of it that has been developed over time. Perhaps this implies that scientific knowledge is susceptible to the long-term influence of particular discoveries and how they are framed. Possibly the nature of the subject matter of an area of knowledge will exert specific effects on the development of that area – for example, the target of the subject matter of the natural sciences does not change, whereas in the human sciences the object of study itself may alter.

The arts might also provide a rich source of examples. The formation of artistic traditions or movements might be analysed in terms of the production of meaning through convention and practice. Similarly candidates might want to consider events that produce shifts in tradition. But it is important that the essay does not offer mere description but links examples to production of knowledge. The excellent essay taking this approach would offer some insight into how the arts can be thought of as systems of knowledge.

Candidates may also decide to explore the effects of the development of one area of knowledge on another (the wording of the title does not seem to preclude this approach), in which case relationships such as that between the development of the natural sciences and that of history or religious knowledge systems might be analysed. A further factor that might be taken into account is the extent to which areas of knowledge have a past – for example, the contrast between ancient religious knowledge systems and the more youthful human sciences (that may to some extent have overlapping areas of interest).

There are some pitfalls to be avoided in this title. One danger is that candidates might be tempted to describe the evolution of an area of knowledge in detail without linking it to the knowledge questions implicit in the title. Describing some serendipitous discovery will have no value unless it is linked not only to the possible role of chance in the evolution of the natural sciences through a discussion of the mechanics of the scientific method but also to a discussion of the implications that science is shaped by discoveries that might not have happened. Another pitfall might be to analyse uncritically the prescribed title in terms of paradigm shifts. Students should define what they mean by paradigm shifts and offer evidence that this is a useful way of thinking of the evolution of particular areas of knowledge. They would also be required to spell out the implications for the nature of knowledge in this case.

Nature of the Title

The title requires candidates to consider the connections between patterns and knowledge, on one hand, and anomalies and knowledge on the other and then to analyse the extent to which they link and how they do so. Both key concepts will need to be explored to a similar degree in terms of their relationship with knowledge. Although no areas of knowledge or ways of knowing are specified in this title, the question presents good opportunities for making worthwhile connections between ways of knowing and areas of knowledge which will enable candidates to answer the question satisfactorily.

Knowledge Questions

Knowledge questions that a candidate *might* identify in the course of the development of a response to the title include:

- *Under what circumstances should patterns or anomalies take precedence in the construction of knowledge?*

- *What forms do patterns assume in different areas of knowledge?*

- *What mechanisms do areas of knowledge adopt to deal with anomalies?*

- *Is there any knowledge that does not rely upon the apprehension of patterns?*

- *How sure do we need to be about a pattern before we accept it as a basis for knowledge?*

- *What roles do the ways of knowing play in the recognition of patterns and anomalies?*

- *How can we know if we are mistaken in our recognition of patterns or anomalies?*

- *Are patterns recognised in the world or imposed upon it?*

Commentary on Possible Treatment

Candidates might begin with a discussion of the importance of patterns in the areas of knowledge of their choice. This will necessarily involve demonstrating an understanding of the concept of pattern and the extent to which a pattern serves as a basis for knowledge. It may be claimed that the construction of knowledge in all areas of knowledge requires recognition of patterns, and, if so, exploring how that is achieved will necessitate a consideration of certain ways of knowing. Alternatively, candidates may dispute the importance of pattern-seeking in some areas of knowledge.

Patterns give us generalisations which allow us to make sense of the world around us. We cannot just look at particular instances, for without seeing connections and similarities – without these, it might be difficult for us to claim to know anything worthwhile at all. Moreover, in order to be able to understand particular instances we need patterns as we they provide the context for understanding them.

The nature of patterns may vary between areas of knowledge, and candidates might explore examples that go under the categories of models, theories, laws, principles, or interpretations. Such an analysis might facilitate an answer to the question as to whether these patterns are indeed recognised as features of the world or rather act as organising principles for the data or information we collect. Other kinds of patterns might throw some light on this matter – such as the organisation of events into stories or narratives.

In the natural sciences, for instance, patterns might refer to those regularities observed in nature with such consistency that they are deemed laws of nature. They form the basis on which predictions are made, so reliability is of utmost importance. In the human sciences we also look for patterns but, given the nature of the area, the prospects for consistency may be more modest. Here we are talking about patterns of behaviour in humans and the regularities observed will be broad. In the natural sciences explanations aim to show the workings of the natural world, but in the human sciences we explain, not just to describe human behaviour, but with a view to providing a better basis for society. In the arts candidates may reflect that the function of patterns is different from the sciences as they may take the form of styles which will guide but not aim to give certainty in conclusions. Patterns in history may take the form of progress or decline according to particular criteria, or perhaps some sort of cyclical regularity.

Candidates will need to address the role of anomalies in the construction of knowledge. While recognition of patterns may seem to fit in with an inductive model of generalisations and probabilities, falsificationism requires the search for anomalies as the way to make progress. An anomaly provides evidence that lies outside what is expected, and may be regarded as an observation that contradicts, or seems to contradict, a generally accepted claim or perspective.

Candidates might investigate the various responses that can be made to discoveries that seem to undermine patterns. A strict falsificationist position would demand that allegiance to the pattern be abandoned in these circumstances. Alternatively, the anomaly may be regarded as an advance indication that a different pattern lies just beyond discovery. Finally, the anomaly might be explained away as some sort of procedural error. Practitioners in the natural and human sciences are faced with decisions of this kind on a regular basis. School students doing experimental work also encounter such situations – in which attribution to experimental error is usually the most plausible explanation.

Candidates may conclude that our picture of the world is dependent upon a deep imperative to derive patterns from experience, and on our decisions as to how to handle anomalies in the context of these patterns. Knowledge is not static and we do not possess absolute certainty, but the extent to which both patterns and anomalies may work side by side may throw some light on the processes by which we achieve knowledge.

5. "The possession of knowledge confers privilege." To what extent is this an accurate claim?

Nature of the Title

The title requires candidates to consider whether there is a causal relationship between the possession of knowledge and the accumulation of privilege. As neither ways of knowing nor areas of knowledge are mentioned in the title, candidates are free to make unfettered choices, and could use solely ways of knowing, solely areas of knowledge or a combination of the two. Candidates will need to unpack what is meant by the concept of privilege. Successful responses will examine grounds for supporting or taking issue with the claim in the title. It is possible that the concept of privilege may have different interpretations depending on where and how it is applied.

Knowledge Questions

Knowledge questions that a candidate *might* identify in the course of the development of a response to the title include:

- *To what extent do different areas of knowledge or ways of knowing confer privilege in different ways?*

- *Is the possession of privilege a positive or negative state of affairs? For whom?*

- *To what extent is it true that it is the application of knowledge rather than its acquisition that confers privilege?*

- *If the possession of knowledge does confer privilege, what role can ethics as an area of knowledge play in determining the nature of privilege?*

- *If the possession of knowledge confers privilege, how does this relate to the idea that knowledge is power?*

- *To what extent might privilege that can accrue to the knower change the nature of the knowledge that we gain in different areas of knowledge?*

- *To what extent does the conferring of privilege on the knower affect attitudes of the knower to that knowledge?*

- *How has the privilege we gain from possessing knowledge changed over time and how does this compare and contrast in different areas of knowledge?*

Commentary on Possible Treatment

Candidates will need to give thought to what might be meant by "conferring privilege". It is possible to address this concept through the interaction of specific ways of knowing in specific areas of knowledge, the interaction of ways of knowing with each other, or a combination of areas of knowledge. "Privilege" might have slightly different meanings depending on the way the analysis is structured around these components. The title asks candidates to evaluate the extent to which privilege accrues from the possession of knowledge. Whether privilege is in itself a good or bad thing is a subsidiary but nevertheless relevant issue.

Candidates may consider the different kinds of knowledge that might be addressed in response to this title. It may be that factual knowledge is the key variety, but candidates may decide to address the idea that procedural knowledge can confer privilege as well.

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There are many general points that can be made in favour of the idea that knowledge confers privilege. At a very practical level, the fact that so many people around the world place a high premium upon education suggests that knowledge provides an important advantage to those who acquire it. Throughout history, certain communities of professional scholars have enjoyed enhanced status from the understanding that they possess advanced knowledge in their fields. The status enjoyed by practitioners of certain disciplines has waxed and waned over the course of the recorded past. A de-professionalisation of privilege may currently be underway with the development of new channels of communication in which non-specialists have opportunities to enter public discussion in specialist fields (e.g. "below the line" comments in online journals and newspapers). At a much more collective level, it can be argued that humanity has attained a highly privileged status with respect to the rest of life on earth (and the planet itself), as a result of the accumulation of knowledge – perhaps the signature achievements of our species.

On the other hand, it might be argued that privilege is attained or maintained without connection to the possession of knowledge. There are many examples of ignorant and unenlightened people who exert disproportionate influence on the world. To the layman, much specialist knowledge may seem esoteric and without obvious practical application. Societies seem to be stratified in ways that are self-perpetuating, despite efforts to promote the idea of meritocracy. This state of affairs might be couched in terms of self-serving relationships, which might well be regarded as a type of knowledge – by acquaintance – and thus support the claim in the title.

Candidates might note that the word "privilege", as it appears in the title, comes neither with positive or negative connotations. A possible line of approach would be to structure the essay through this dichotomy – arguing, for example, that knowledge in some areas can confer a notion of privilege that seems negative, as opposed to situations in which it might be positive. Following this line of development, candidates may also try to argue that specific areas of knowledge have both positive and negative aspects of privilege, and this might form part of the comparison of areas of knowledge. Through this line of thinking a candidate may come to the conclusion that the possession of knowledge itself does not confer privilege and that it becomes relevant only once the knowledge is used. Equally, this distinction between possession and use of knowledge could be a starting point for analysis.

If knowledge does confer privilege – either through its acquisition or its application – then perhaps it also confers an ethical responsibility on the knower. Alternatively, if knowledge does come with ethical responsibility, then this is why it confers privilege. In this way, candidates could pass comment and engage with the idea of knowledge as power or knowledge as producing or allowing power among those who possess it. There may be different cultural perspectives to be considered here.

A different approach might be to start from the assumption that knowledge does confer privilege and then explore how a consideration of how this privilege potentially changes the nature of the knowledge we have or the use to which the knowledge is put. Again there could be a focus on areas of knowledge, ways of knowing or both. This might lead to candidates making reference to the concepts of personal and shared knowledge and how privilege potentially affects both or explore how it could be used as a distinguishing feature between the two.

Candidates could also link their analysis to the question of the reliability of knowledge. If knowledge brings privilege and consequently brings power, then it is possible that the producer of such knowledge may not be fully concerned about its reliability. The counter-argument that knowledge being related to power leads to greater reliability might also hold water. Candidates may also argue that knowledge changes over time and that this process is influenced by privilege or that the change itself can influence privilege.

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6. To what extent do ways of knowing prevent us from deluding ourselves? Justify your answer with reference to at least one area of knowledge.

Nature of the Title

The title requires candidates to apply ways of knowing to at least one area of knowledge. Although the number of ways of knowing is not specified, the plural form in the title indicates that more than one is appropriate. Candidates may select one area of knowledge or more than one – depending upon the general structural intentions of the essay. The possible meaning of "deluding ourselves" will need to be unpacked in some detail in order to provide a foundation for the analysis.

Knowledge Questions

Knowledge questions that a candidate *might* identify in the course of the development of a response to the title include:

- *To what extent do the different ways of knowing prevent us from deluding ourselves and how does this differ depending on the area of knowledge under discussion?*

- *To what extent and how do the different ways of knowing interact to stop us from deluding ourselves?*

- *Is there a difference between deluding ourselves and deluding others and how might the ways of knowing help us to make the distinction?*

- *Are we more likely to delude ourselves in some areas of knowledge than others? What role is played by the ways of knowing?*

- *To what extent could deluding ourselves change the knowledge we gain and what are the implications of this for the reliability of this knowledge?*

- *If ways of knowing prevent us from deluding ourselves, what is it that makes us susceptible to delusion in the first place?*

- *Are there any circumstances in which self-delusion could be considered positive?*

- *To what extent have ways of knowing contributed to self-delusion, and to what extent have the methodologies used in different areas of knowledge acted as a corrective to this problem?*

Commentary on Possible Treatment

The title suggests that candidates need to use the ways of knowing in tandem with the areas of knowledge – hence candidates need to make decisions as to how to make effective connections between them. A number of different approaches are possible, where candidates structure the essay through specified ways of knowing and apply them to an area or areas of knowledge. Equally, the structure may come through choosing specific areas of knowledge and then giving consideration to the ways of knowing associated with them. Candidates will need to give consideration to the idea of what is meant in the context of the question by "deluding ourselves". This might be different from the idea of "deluding others", and candidates should ensure that the emphasis is on the former.

Candidates might consider whether "deluding ourselves" is always a negative thing or whether there are situations in which it is desirable or even necessary. Our ways of knowing may well have evolved in ways

that promote survival rather than the dispassionate search for the truth, and hence might be flawed instruments for the pursuit of certain types of knowledge. There is also the question as to what would cause us to become deluded in the first place if our ways of knowing are the entities that prevent this from happening.

Candidates might consider the role played by the ways of knowing in shaping personal and shared knowledge. Perhaps the interpersonal dialogue (language as a way of knowing) that is implied by the idea of shared knowledge could guard against delusion in ways that personal knowledge is ill-equipped to do, or perhaps the independence that comes from personal knowledge can help to ward off collective delusions. Either way, the contributions of ways of knowing to the reliability of these two categories of knowledge might be worth investigation.

Candidates should select ways of knowing about which they can make the most telling arguments. Some suggestions follow here. The use of sense perception is the foundation for an empirical approach to knowledge that historically has undermined the scholastic and authoritarian attitudes that preceded it. In this sense, the emphasis on sense perception as a key way of knowing might be regarded as a major factor in the success of science in dispelling delusions. Examples of empirical knowledge in indigenous knowledge systems might also contribute to an argument for the positive impact of sense perception. It might be argued that the great strength of reason is its ability to manipulate knowledge claims in ways that preserve truth. Language – especially in written form – can counteract the shortcomings of memory – indeed it seems likely that the complete absence of memory might cast us into the deepest imaginable pit of delusions. Recent findings in psychology show that judgements derived from rapid intuition can be more reliable than more considered conclusions arrived at through reason. It might be argued that faith, construed as a suspension of judgement, has a positive role to play in helping induct individuals into the practices of a religion, such that they subsequently gain insights from their participation in it. Such observations about ways of knowing can be connected to specific areas of knowledge – highlighting the contributions they make to the creation and application of methodologies that might prevent us from deluding ourselves.

On the other hand, candidates may defend the claim that ways of knowing do not, generally speaking, prevent us from deluding ourselves – perhaps, as suggested above, as a consequence of their evolutionary origins. Indeed, they may be the sources of our delusions. For example, it has been established that sense perception is strongly influenced by prior expectations. Conclusions reached through reasoning cannot be more reliable than the premises provided at the start, although careful application of reason can often lead to correct conclusions that seem counter-intuitive. Emotion is often cited as a way of knowing that interferes with the objective pursuit of knowledge. Some would claim that faith promotes gullibility and unquestioning acceptance of authority. In the light of these alleged shortcomings of ways of knowing, it might be further claimed that the methodologies of the areas of knowledge have been developed in response to an awareness that knowledge acquisition cannot be left to the vagaries of our innate capabilities.