PROMPT 14: Does some knowledge belong only to certain communities of knowers?

Word Count: 920

Object 1: Azimuth compass (García, 2014)

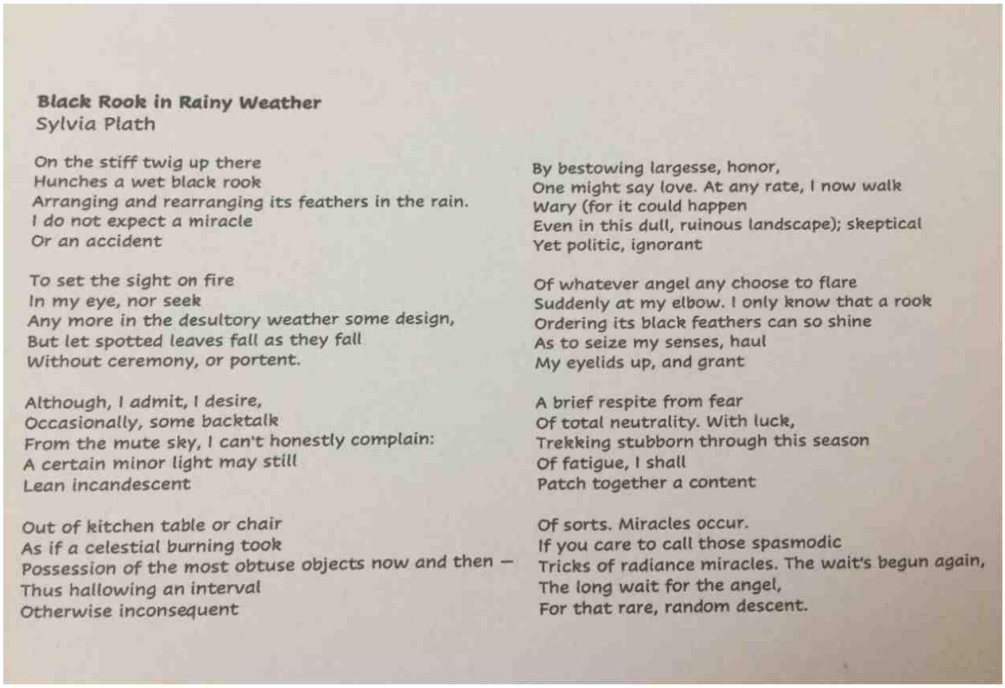


Some knowledge acquired through language only belongs to the community who speak a particular language as it shapes their manner of thinking and allows them to see the world from a unique perspective. This type of knowledge cannot be acquired through translation or interpretation as the phraseology used by the community of knowers is unique to their culture.

This object is an Azimuth compass, the kind used by British explorer Captain James Cook on his expedition to Australia in 1770 (Villers, 1999). It shows a great contrast between the western world and an Australian aboriginal community called Pormpuraaw. Unlike western languages, Kuuk Thaayorre (the language spoken in Pormpuraaw) incorporates location and navigation into everyday conversation (Boroditsky, 2018). For example, when talking about the position of an object, instead of saying left or right, one would say north, west, east, or south. Furthermore, instead of saying hello, one would ask "Where are you going?". This awareness of their location is therefore incorporated into their thinking. If asked to sort objects in a particular order, they would sort them differently depending on which way they were facing, sorting from east to west as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. This shows that members of this aboriginal community are much more aware of their location and surroundings, and therefore would have no need for a compass. This gives them power over those who are not part of this community of knowers, who have to rely on tools. Their awareness of their location is knowledge they possess because of the fundamental role navigation plays in their language and culture as it shapes their thinking and offers a different perspective of the world. This perspective values nature and their environment to a greater extent than most other languages, altering their thinking and subconscious, which gives them knowledge that others do not possess. This means that this knowledge only belongs to this aboriginal community of knowers.

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Object 2: *Black Rook in Rainy Weather* by Sylvia Plath



Black Rook in Rainy Weather
Sylvia Plath

On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain.
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident

To set the sight on fire
In my eye, nor seek
Any more in the desultory weather some design,
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall
Without ceremony, or portent.

Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Lean incandescent

Out of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then —
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent

By bestowing largesse, honor,
One might say love. At any rate, I now walk
Wary (for it could happen
Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); skeptical
Yet politic, ignorant

Of whatever angel any choose to flare
Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
Ordering its black feathers can so shine
As to seize my senses, haul
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
Of total neutrality. With luck,
Trekking stubborn through this season
Of fatigue, I shall
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur.
If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles. The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel,
For that rare, random descent.

Knowledge acquired through the arts belongs only to the community of knowers who have experienced a particular aspect of life, for example through their culture, as their perspective allows them to interpret the art in a particular manner and find a particular explanation for the artist's work.

This object is the poem *Black Rook in Rainy Weather* by Sylvia Plath, whose poems I studied as part of my English A DP course. It talks about an unpleasant feeling from which the poet needs a "brief respite" (Plath, 1957). It was interpreted quite differently by various students in my class. One student thought it was about depression, another saw it as a lack of inspiration, while another interpreted it as a lack of hope.

Art allows us to draw our own conclusions about the artist's work. In this case, it allows us to come up with our own explanations for the poet's words. Each individual interprets the poem in a unique way which is slightly different from everybody else's interpretations. However, the general idea or message drawn from the poem is common knowledge to a particular community of knowers who interpret the poem from a particular perspective, such as a cultural perception. As each perspective yields a different interpretation, the knowledge gained from it belongs only to this particular community of knowers. For example, people whose cultural backgrounds value artistic ability may interpret the poem as a search for inspiration, as they would know what it is like to get writer's block, or the equivalent in their preferred artistic field. Furthermore, they would have power over the non-artists, who would have to rely on them to gain that knowledge, as they may not be able to think of this particular interpretation themselves.

Object 3: Galileo's telescope (Museo Galileo, 2010)



Scientific facts are knowledge that belongs only to scientists and the community of knowers who use the scientific method as it allows them to justify their conclusions, support scientific theories and uncover truths objectively.

This object is the telescope that Galileo built and used to make his astronomical discoveries. Some of his many observations supported Copernicus's theory that the planets revolve around the Sun, contrary to the Catholic Church's belief that the Earth was the centre of the universe and that the Sun and planets revolved around it. The scientific method is what allowed him to uncover the truth as it forces scientists to make their conclusions from a more objective point of view. His instruments allowed for the collection of evidence with a high degree of certainty, which he then examined and used to justify Copernicus' theory. Although he never fully proved it, Galileo was able to come to reliable conclusions which supported it and undermined the Church's beliefs. For example, he proved that Venus and Mercury revolve around the Sun instead of the Earth (Van Helden, 2000).

Although scientists may sometimes feel pressured to interpret their results in ways that are not fully accurate, they have the responsibility to be objective, which is encouraged by the scientific method, and therefore generally leads to more accurate conclusions. They use the evidence of their results to support a conclusion which they can therefore justify. Furthermore, instead of choosing to believe any explanation for their observations, scientists acknowledge when more experimentation is needed in order for the scientific community to collaborate and uncover the truth. Therefore, this knowledge belongs only to the community of knowers who follow the scientific method as only they base their explanations on evidence and observations that are as objective as possible.

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