

3. "History is always on the move, slowly eroding today's orthodoxy and making space for yesterday's heresy."  
Discuss the extent to which this claim applies to history and at least one other area of knowledge.  
Elizabeth Williams, James S Rickards High School

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"History is always on the move, slowly eroding today's orthodoxy and making space for yesterday's heresy.' Discuss the extent to which this claim applies to history and at least one other area of knowledge."

History has molded our perception of the world around us and changed our actions on a global level. Although history clearly has developed into an area of monumental importance, it is an area littered with unknowns. All of history is merely a compilation of evidence left: never is it possible to have the full picture. It is often possible to glean from the remnants what occurred at a given time; however there is a large room for error. In this "gray zone," historians regularly beat history into something acceptable for mainstream values. This degradation of knowledge is also apparent in both the human and natural sciences. With such an abundance of evidence, the facts are often interpreted to fit nicely into the current preconceptions. In short, when this quote is examined, it is evident that both history and science does change, first distorting the facts in order to shape it into the conventional opinion, and then slowly change that position as society changes theirs. Despite this trend, it is important to keep in mind that there are at the very least grains of truth in almost every historical account or scientific breakthrough.

First it is important to examine what is exactly meant by "today's orthodox" and "yesterday's heresy." The word "orthodoxy" comes from the Greek roots *orthos*, meaning correct, and *doxa*, meaning thought or teaching. When one examines heresy, it is evident that the two words are very similar; heresy is interpreted as a choice of beliefs. The only difference between these two words is that the choice of beliefs has been incorporated into the mainstream. Thus, it is very easy to have today's orthodoxy constantly renewed

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or eroded away to be replaced by yesterday's heresy.

There are two ways in which conventional knowledge of history and science becomes eroded: new beliefs replace the status quo or new information changes past suppositions. The former is more often seen in history and the latter in science. When going through American textbooks throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, history is constantly in flux as the moral values and political stance change. For example, during the Cold War, many history textbooks portrayed the USSR as brutal and corruptive. History, in that period of time, taught the youth that the Russians were people to be feared. Not only were they at fault for the Cold War, but also the USA was also blameless in the whole ordeal. When you consult the history books today, there is still a tone of American superiority and purity, but many concessions are made concerning the diabolicalness of the Russians. The historical accounts of the USSR have cooled (as well as warmed) as our political and social relationship has cooled and warmed.

Similarly, when representing Native Americans in history books, they were seen as "noble savages," if that. Their role in helping the pilgrims establish their homes here as well as survive is greatly diminished and they are depicted as little more than a backwards people that the European founders and conquistadors helped civilize. This is also represented in the rendering of African Americans before the Civil Rights movement. However, since equality is a high moral standard in the 21st century, history incorporates the story of the Native Americans and African Americans, as well as embracing their culture. Through these examples, it is evident that a shift in social and political beliefs results in an erosion of what might be the orthodox view. Even though

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that is normally the driving force, gained knowledge also leads to a rejection of the conformist view, such as discovering new artifacts that redefines a culture or ancient civilization.

Science too uses false theorems usually identified as truths to reflect the general sentiment of a culture. When wishing to justify slavery, many people used science. There were studies that reported the size of African Americans' brains to be one-third the size of Caucasians', or would imply that their mental capacity simply could not measure up to the minds of their owners. Women also experienced this subjugation through science. A few people would publish that women were biologically incompetent or too emotional to handle an independent life or one in the work force. These were, of course, replaced with the philosophy that everybody is equal and has the same potential. What seems absurd today was assuredly the previous orthodox, held in place by the moral standards of previous generations.

A more prevalent example would be global warming. The presence of this phenomenon was first widely rejected by the public and most reports published shunned the concept, saying it was only natural for the Earth's temperature to fluctuate. The White House even went so far to deny it officially. Yet once more scientists came out with evidence to the contrary, people started to listen. Now global warming is nearly taken for granted, and a global green movement has been established in efforts to combat it.

Nevertheless, today's orthodox is predominantly erased because of the multitude of scientific breakthroughs. Centuries ago it was first discovered that the world is not flat

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and the Earth is not in the center of the universe. In the last few decades alone, technology has gone from calculators to computers to the Internet to "iPhones," defying anyone's expectations from the 1950s. In these ways, the field of science has constantly and consistently replaced today's orthodox. As the science community learns more about the world around us, they realize how absolutely wrong they could be, and formerly unquestionable theories are being revised constantly. This is certainly a great accomplishment, but one cannot forget that for every few popular theories amended, there is at least one that either remains false or is created wrongly. The heresies of yesterday still can take root in today's society. Most noticeably, many "fad diets" such as Atkins or South Beach claim to be backed by science and normally take off. Surely not all of these diets can be the miracle diet, nor can all of the scientific evidence that supports the main tenets be correct for each.

Both history and science can so dramatically skew our perception of the world around us that it is of the utmost importance to take these problems of knowledge into consideration. As a knower, I compare what is reported about history and science with what I have observed and what I know rationally. Seeing as I do not normally have the means to disprove or prove most of what is presented to me--in the realm of science of history--it is essential to think analytically as well as keep an open mind.

In conclusion, the quote can easily be applied to history or science and applies to a great extent. It is another thing to keep in mind when approaching problems as a knower. Calvin from "Calvin and Hobbes" put it best when he said, "History is the fiction we invent to persuade ourselves that events are knowable and that life has order

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and direction. That's why events are always reinterpreted when values change. We need new versions of history to allow for our current prejudices."

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