

Resurrecting June.

The first thing Lola noticed about the corpse was the dirt embedded in its nails. She'd scraped up every last cent out of her savings to pay the mortician, and yet the body still remained tainted. *Cheapskates*, she thought. She knew she should've just done the job herself. She could hear the rustle of Finn digging through his backpack; a wet, battered thing held together by clumsy stitchwork and silver pins. He pulled out a thick tome, its moth-eaten cover emitting a faint, moldy scent.

With a long sigh, she mustered up the last of her strength and dragged her sister's body into the centre of the pentagram. While she'd spent the better half of the night digging through the grave, Finn remained inside the church, painstakingly drawing the symbols to capture every minute detail. The remnants of the paint lay in a bowl placed haphazardly next to his backpack, the paint sourced directly from a deep cut running along Finn's palm.

Together, they unwrapped the white cloth tied tight around her sister's torso, their movements precise and methodical. They had spent hours going through every procedure, walked through every step to stay within their exact timeframe, and memorised the pronunciation and meaning of every word in that old tome. They knew they couldn't mess this up. A slight slip-up of the tongue, or a few seconds too premature, and they would lose the only chance they had of bringing her back. The two friends shared a look, and with an ardent nod from Lola, they tore the cloth in half and tied it over their shoulders.

Lola looked down at the precious thing she'd cracked all of her nails for, and just barely managed to swallow down the acidity that was crawling up her throat. June's body was starting to show signs of rotting. Dark purple lines trailed up her arms and legs, and her greenish skin had started to slip from her bones, as though she were a balloon that'd been deflating. *It's still June*, Lola reminded herself. Putrid, and decayed, and uncanny though it was, it was still June. She softly brushed back the stringy hair plastered to her sister's forehead and laid a soft kiss upon that elastic skin, savouring the first touch she'd received from her in a long while.

"Lola," Finn whispered, his voice a muted, gentle syllable that carried the understanding of all the unbearable burden inside her heart.

"I know," she replied.

She stood up, slowly propelling her feet further and further away from where her sister lay peacefully. They began removing items from Finn's bag: a weathered blue shirt, a handful of dirt stolen from her grave, an old, ragged stuffed rabbit, and a rock stained with a blood splatter. They aligned each item on every corner of the pentagram before coming to a halt at the front of the final corner. There, Finn planted the bowl containing his blood, and placed in her shaking hands the same knife he used to make himself bleed. She clutched it tight, hoping her strong grip could halt the fear vibrating through her body. Panic seized her heart, and valuable seconds ticked away as she was confronted with the knowledge that she could not cut herself. *Do it, you idiot*, she willed, but it was as though she was a marionette doll with its strings cut off, wholly unable to control her own limbs.

In the end, it was Finn who did what she could not. He stilled her shaking hands, and before she could react, tenderly slit a deep line along her palm. Blood dripped down her arm in a webbed pattern, and plopped into the bowl, each drop heavy with the sin they were about to commit.

“Focus,” he reminded, and squeezed her hand tight to increase the flow of the blood. They watched as her blood filled up the bowl, blending together with his until it was impossible to separate. Then, carefully, he picked up the tome and flipped through the pages with practised ease. When he began chanting in Latin, his voice was steady and low, his tongue rolling over syllables to form words that were foreign on his lips. It echoed through the hall, lingering on the marble walls and sinking into the crevices in the floor.

The more he chanted, the more the volume of his voice elevated. Soon, his chant was no longer human; instead, it was amplified by thousands of voices, some old, some young, all of whom Lola knew to be dead. The shadows in the church were encroaching on them now, creeping steadily closer to feast on the sacrifices they were readily offering: their souls.

The hairs on the back of her neck pricked up, and she felt the soft caress of a shadow at her heel.

They had an audience.

Lola squeezed her eyes shut, out of fear, out of the remaining human instinct left in her to cower. When the shattering of the window beside her reached her ears, she jumped, slamming them open again. Wind had started to pick up outside, its howl vicious in its anger at their actions. They prepared for this. They knew they were going to upset the balance of nature tonight. They knew the consequences of playing God.

Abruptly, Finn choked, his hands flying to his throat. She reached for him, but found she could not move at all. The wind augmented, louder and louder, until it was almost deafening.

Suddenly, everything stopped. Finn slumped against her, his heavy breaths the only audible sound in the room. They waited, anticipation burning through their every muscle.

Her sister’s eyes slowly opened.

“June?” Lola implored.

She stared back at her for what seemed like hours before a smile pulled at her lips, stretching over her teeth in a way that split her face in two. It was crooked, and wrong, and perfectly June all at once.

Word count – 988.

Year 12

"A rational approach to reality is better than empirical." Do you agree?

As a rationalist, Plato favoured the use of reason in understanding the true nature of reality as he believed that true knowledge can only be gained through the mind, without the interference of the senses. Plato believed that philosophical truths are known a priori - knowledge before sensory experience - and that knowledge gained through the senses is fallible as they mislead and deceive us, only giving a vague understanding of reality. Plato used mathematical problems to exemplify the rationalist approach as the answers we receive give no room for doubt and are ultimately always the same. However, Aristotle favoured the use of sensory experience to understand the world over the use of reason. He believed that the empiricist method allowed us to acquire philosophical truths more accurately using the senses, as these are based on the world around us. He explained further that our minds are, as Locke wrote, a 'tabula rasa' (blank slate) at birth and it is via sensory experience (posteriori) that the mind learns truths that help us operate in the world. For many people, Plato's rationalistic approach is better than Aristotle's empirical one because it is true that our senses deceive us. However, Aristotle's empiricism enables us to operate daily using the knowledge gained from sensory experience, and some may argue that it allows for reasoning to happen, as most practical knowledge is based on the world and sensory experiences.

Plato's rationalistic approach has been developed through his Theory of Forms in explaining the true nature of reality. Plato appears to be correct in his assessment that the physical world is perceived by the senses, always changing and cannot give answers to 'what is it?' questions. As a consequence, Plato concluded that there is an unperceivable world where absolute, immutable truths exist through reason, which is the World Of Forms. Inside the World of Forms, there's Forms, which are the ideal blueprints of the particulars we perceive in the physical world as they have their essence. The Forms are true knowledge pointed out by Plato, as they are absolute and unchanging, giving people in the World of Appearances (physical world) absolutes by which to live by, and helping to define and understand reality. To explain reality further, Plato rationalises that innate knowledge is not taught or known through the senses but happens because we have an immortal soul that has experienced the World of Forms before being trapped in a human body. We remember this knowledge (anamnesis) through the process of Socratic questioning, showing the importance of reasoning into seeing the true nature of reality. However, Plato's Theory of Forms and rationalism face many successful challenges, the most significant being Aristotle's 4 causes. Aristotle's empiricism explained reality through his 4 causes: material, efficient (the activity that makes something happen), formal (form / shape), and the final cause (purpose / telos). His teleological worldview is useful as it helps us to understand this world and the nature of existence, explaining why things may change from the Unmoved Mover which attracts everything through its pure actuality, or why things are like they are, helping to explain this reality.

Many people agree with the statement, 'a rational approach to reality is better than an empirical one' demonstrated through Plato's Theory Of Forms. Plato rationalises that in the World of Forms, there are absolute truths which are mathematical problems and the Forms found through reasoning. Mathematics exemplifies why Plato's rationalistic approach helps to explain reality as, once a premise has been found to be true the conclusion leading from the premise must also be true such as 'she always writes with a red pen' must lead to the conclusion 'her work is written in red pen'. Some would argue that this is more convincing than the conclusion being probable or likely rather than being absolutely definite with no variation of interpretation. This allows mathematics / logic to stand the test of time showing it to be true knowledge and helping define the nature of reality with absolute truths through rationalism. Plato's rational thinking through his Theory of Forms is also good at explaining reality further because it helps explain universal concepts like beauty, justice or goodness which cannot be fully grasped through empirical observation, for example we see many beautiful things in the world, but what is "beauty" itself? Plato argues that we have an innate understanding of these universals, which suggests a rational source of knowledge, not an empirical one helping to explain the universal truths behind things in reality. Additionally, Plato argues that since the discovery of the quantum world our understanding of the physical world from sensory experience is inconsistent and the knowledge we have understood has gained a new level of meaning. This shows that we can no longer be sure that our experiences of the world we observe through the senses are accurate and as a consequence we should rely on rationalism or reason to understand reality. Plato is further accurate when he states that anything in the physical world cannot provide true knowledge as everything is in a relational state with another, influenced by Heraclitism which states that something is no more 'X than it is Y'. This is shown through the example that it doesn't make sense to say that an individual is 'short' or 'tall' when there can be millions of examples where that individual is 'shorter' than something or 'taller' than another. This influences people to question the truths they perceive to know and reason to gain true knowledge shown through Plato's rationalism. Additionally, Plato's rationalism influenced the belief about God in Christianity and reason is often linked by theologians to God, helping to explain reality, purpose, existence and why things may change. Rationalists Anselm and Descartes draw on Plato's idea of God and innate knowledge for the basis of their ontological arguments for God's existence, arguing that it can be deduced from the very definition of God as the greatest conceivable being. Anselm's argument defines God as 'that which nothing greater can be conceived,' concluding that such a being must exist in reality, not just in the mind, because existing in reality is greater than existing only in the mind. Descartes, building on Anselm, defines God as a 'supremely perfect being' and argues that existence is an essential perfection, making it impossible to have an existence without a God. This supports Plato's rational approach to reality, as it shows how reason alone without empirical evidence can lead to knowledge of something as significant as the existence of God, and explains unexplained things at that time such as purpose, how things have existed or been made like the universe and demonstrates that Plato's rationalism through his Theory of Forms is a strong argument for reality.

However, Plato's Theory of Forms and his rationalist outlook encounter successful challenges with many disagreeing that empiricism is better for reality. One compelling challenge is Aristotle's empiricism as he expressed that sensory experience is primary as we cannot contemplate or reason without experience of the world first. The empiricist Hume agrees with Aristotle and stated that all of the content in our minds are impressions (things we experience) and ideas formed through this world. Only then are our minds able to manipulate these ideas and combine them, for example, we have never seen a unicorn but have knowledge of a horse and a horn consequently making a unicorn when added together. Aristotle and Hume concluded that if we have no experience of something then we are unable to think of it, reason, or truly understand it such as we cannot understand colour without experiencing it, explaining the usefulness of our senses and the reality around us. Furthermore, Aristotle explained that his view on a posteriori knowledge, which is knowledge after sensory experience, is better for understanding reality due to it being more practical and being applied to daily life unlike a priori knowledge, helping people understand this reality in more depth. Also, because Plato links understanding of the world to intelligence as only Philosopher Kings can reason and get to the World of Forms, this made his theory elitist and means that only few will truly understand reality. This is why some would argue that Aristotle's empiricism and 4 causes are better and more useful for understanding reality as Aristotle's views offer an understanding of the world to all people, since we can all tell via the senses and observe the 4 causes. Additionally, Aristotle's 4 causes help to understand this world further and the nature of existence as they explain why things change and why things are as they are. They work in all situations and help give a comprehensive understanding of the world such as the Big Bang being the efficient cause (made the world) and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover being the final cause or purpose of everything. This links to Leibniz' Principle of Sufficient Reason to which he explained that every truth or fact must have a reason, explanation or cause and that nothing happens arbitrarily. Aristotle's idea of the 4 causes built through Leibniz' Principle offers a complete explanation of the world which can combine both science and religion; therefore empiricism is good for explaining reality. Extending from this point, Aristotle's understanding of the final cause of the universe lied in his belief in an Unmoved Mover. This is derived from observable motion in the world and linked to the need for a sufficient reason for existence, helping to explain reality as it appeals to many who ask why we exist, such as the philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas built upon Aristotle's concept of the Unmoved Mover in his own cosmological arguments, particularly in his Five Ways, where he identified God as the ultimate cause and reason for all existence. Aquinas developed Aristotle's idea of an impersonal, eternal Unmoved Mover by arguing that this being must also be the personal and purposeful God of Christian theology. In doing so, Aquinas demonstrated the continuing significance of Aristotle's thought, as it provided the philosophical foundation for his theological explanation of why the universe exists and how everything ultimately depends on God as the first cause, showing the importance of empiricism and Aristotle's 4 causes for reality.

Thus, it can be concluded that Aristotle's empirical approach is better to reality than Plato's rationalistic approach. Plato's rationalistic approach has good concepts such as the senses deceiving us, explained universal concepts such as beauty and allowed for absolute truths defining right and wrong. However Aristotle's empirical approach is better due to the practicality

of the 4 causes, understanding the senses being used in everyday life for everyone not just philosophers, and explaining purpose and why things happen or as they are, eventually helping other Philosophers like Thomas Aquinas build more ideas influencing parts of Christianity. Empiricism overall helps to explain reality defining truths and basic knowledge that can be verifiable and used.

Word Count: 1827

Year 12

Is the English language sexist?

When people ask if the English language is sexist, they are really asking the question: “does the way people communicate show a difference between men and women in society?” Some linguists argue that the English language reflects the fact that men had more power, which has affected the way people communicate today. However, others argue that men and women just communicate differently, and that the language itself is not the issue.

In the 1970s, linguist Robin Lakoff argued that language is a reflection of a woman's lower societal status. Lakoff said that women are taught to communicate in ways that make them sound less confident. For example, women are more likely to use tag questions such as “It's cold today, isn't it?” or polite phrases such as “I'm sorry, but...”. Lakoff claimed that this kind of language makes women appear unsure or lacking authority. She also pointed out that words for women often have negative meanings, more so than words for men. For example, the word "master" has a strong, powerful meaning, while "mistress" often has negative connotations. Lakoff said that this shows the English language developed in a male-dominated society, which has affected the language we use today.

Zimmerman and West carried out a study that seemed to support Lakoff's ideas about male dominance. They recorded conversations between men and women and counted the amount of interruptions made. They found that in mixed-sex conversations, men interrupted women more often than women interrupted men. They argued that this showed men trying to control conversations and assert dominance. If men interrupt more, they may be taking more power in interactions, which could suggest that everyday communication reflects unequal gender roles.

This research supports the idea that language can be sexist because it shows men dominating conversations. However, this study only involved a limited number of conversations. Therefore, this study cannot be generalised to all people. Later research has shown that interruptions can depend on the situation, the topic, and the people involved.

However, not all linguists agree that language differences between men and women are due to power. A linguist named Deborah Tannen came up with the theory known as “Difference Theory.” She argued that men and women are raised in slightly different social groups and therefore learn different ways of communicating. Tannen argued men often use “report talk,”

which focuses on giving information and showing knowledge. Although, she says women are more likely to use “rapport talk,” which focuses on building relationships and connections. For example, when discussing a problem men often offer a solution, while a woman might show sympathy and understanding. From this point of view, the English language itself isn’t sexist. Rather, men and women may simply use it differently.

Another linguist who studied women’s speech was Jennifer Coates. She studied speech in all-female groups. Her findings were that most of what women say in conversations is cooperative. Women may finish another woman’s sentence not because they are rude or want to interrupt her, but because they are showing agreement and closeness. According to Coates, women’s speech is not powerless and weak as Lakoff had proposed.

Coates’ research challenges the idea that the English language is naturally sexist. Instead, society’s misunderstanding and judgment of women’s communication style are to blame. Therefore, it can be proposed that the problem lies not in the language but in society’s values. If society values directness and competition more than cooperation, then it can be said that women’s communication style is weak.

There are also examples in vocabulary that show that the English language changes over time. In the past, words like “chairman” or “policeman” were the norm. Today, most people use gender-neutral terms such as “chair-person” or “police officer.” The use of “they” is now more common as a way to avoid using “he” as the neutral third person pronoun. Therefore, it can be seen that language changes with social attitudes. This implies that if the English language were sexist, it would be difficult to change it. This contrasts with languages like French and Spanish, as they build gender into their grammar (e.g. masculine/feminine nouns), which normalises gender distinctions but can still favour masculine forms for mixed groups.

In conclusion, the question of whether the English language is sexist does not have a simple yes-or-no answer. Words and conversations show that men had more power in society in the past. Certain words and patterns of conversation suggest that men have historically held more power, and this has influenced how the English language has developed. However, according to Tannen and Coates, differences in communication styles may not always involve power, they may involve differences in communication goals and social styles.

Although the English language can’t be said to be sexist on its own, it has been affected by inequality. As a result, the English language is always changing. As society becomes more aware of gender equality, the English language continues to change. Whether the language

is sexist may depend less on grammar and vocabulary, and more on how people choose to communicate.

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