

5. How can we distinguish between good and bad interpretations? Discuss with reference to the arts and one other area of knowledge.

Interpretations are predominantly subjective due to differences in individual perspectives. However, interpretations can be influenced by external factors that contribute to the good and bad paradigms into which they can be classified. These paradigms can be shaped by experts, the purpose of the interpretation, supporting evidence, and methods used in the interpretation, resulting in differences in how individuals can distinguish between good and bad interpretations. Labelling an interpretation as good or bad may be difficult. But, due to external factors, a good interpretation can refer to a judgement that could provide a perceptive and detailed scope of an observation, unlike that of a bad interpretation which may only refer to a judgement that does not provide a thorough insight of the observation..

Art comes in different forms that are open to interpretation. The various methods with which art is created give rise to the many interpretations which can then be distinguished into good and bad. These interpretations can also come from the artist as he is the first person to 'appreciate' his work. This judgement can be distinguished by the method used to come to that conclusion. For example, the artwork *Comedian* by Maurizio Cattelan features a banana taped to a wall at "37 degrees and about 68 inches above the ground."¹ This artwork was considered unconventional and also turned out to be art that had been done before by other artists and thus it could be considered unoriginal. Cattelan, in the distinction of his art, argued that his precision in attaching the banana to the wall and his dedication to making sure that

¹Cascone, Sarah. "Maurizio Cattelan's Much Adored (and Maligned) Banana Artwork Is Now in the Guggenheim's Collection Thanks to an Anonymous Donor." Artnet News. Artnet News, September 18, 2020. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/guggenheim-banana-cattelan-1909179>. accessed November 28 2021

the art continued to exist (regular replacement of the banana) is what made his work better. It can be inferred that this distinguishing through methods is what made Cattelan's interpretation of his art good. It was not a matter of his ingenuity or perspective when creating this art that made him interpret it as a good piece of art but rather the method that resulted in the finished art. His acknowledgement of his method made his interpretation of the *Comedian* good. His interpretation relied on the fact that even if this same banana was put up by someone else, it could not surmount to that of the *Comedian*, thus rendering the art to a special place that allows its judgement of it being good to stick to it. This emphasis and confidence allowed other individuals to also distinguish his work as good because "good interpretations are persuasive arguments that get us to see and understand a work of art in the way that the interpreter sees and understands it."² Also, the broader criteria of a method being good in art lies in its originality being that regardless of the unoriginality of the art work produced, his method justifies the distinction of good. Thus it is plausible to say that one way in which good and bad interpretations can be distinguished is the method that was used to produce the work to be interpreted.

In contrast to the use of a method to distinguish between good and bad interpretations, there is a likelihood that it limits the ways in which distinctions can be done. This is illustrated in the art of Fela Kuti, a musician in the genre called Afro-beat which is a critically renowned form of art. According to a review by SongLines, "the high consistency and relatively small stylistic variation made it hard to distinguish one album being better than another"³ There has never been a claim of a distinction between good and bad regarding

² Barrett, Terry. *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary*. New York, NY, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. accessed November 28 2021.

³ Williamson, Author: Nigel. "THE COMPLETE WORKS OF FELA ANIKULAPO KUTI." Songlines. MA Music, Leisure & Travel Ltd , March 2011. <https://www.songlines.co.uk/review/the-complete-works-of-fela-anikulapo-kuti>. Accessed November 28 2021)

Fela's music mostly because his work remained consistent over the years and thus left very little space for allocating good and bad distinctions to his work. The listeners got accustomed to this sound and so their inference was that Fela's work was good. The minimal variation may not have not allowed for different distinctions of Fela's work.

On the other hand, the purpose of Fela's art changed as he became "considered a political activist through his lyrics that spoke against the government of Nigeria"⁴ Fela used his art to speak up for events that affected a majority of his audience and this led to the distinction of his art as good by them. The essence for which the art was created became a formulation of a powerful statement hence creating a harmony of his art with their real-life situations making their interpretations of his art 'accurate' and thus a good one. Their intimate association with his art made his purpose justified. And thus allowed for an exclusive and direct interpretation of the art allowing for a distinction between the different works. The combination of music and lyrics was Fela's interpretation of the 'bad' situation in Nigeria but considering his purpose was to bring a change, it was distinguished as a good interpretation. Even though the art was centrally negative, it was assigned a positive elucidation which highlights the role of purpose in distinguishing between good and bad interpretations.

Alternatively, in the natural sciences, scientific theories are established based on interpretations of data recorded during the investigation of the hypothesis. According to Karl Popper, for a scientific theory to be considered relatively accurate, "it must be able to be tested and conceivably proven false."⁵ An example is the theory of evolution by Charles Darwin. This theory is concerned about the development of humans through "responsiveness

⁴ Pallardy, Richard. "Fela Kuti." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 11, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fela-Kuti>. Accessed November 28 2021.

⁵ McLeod, S. A. (2020, May 01). *Karl popper - theory of falsification*. Simply Psychology. www.simplypsychology.org/Karl-Popper.html Accessed November 28 2021

to change in the environment.”⁶ This theory is a popular science that has yet to be disproven. Consequently, falsifying a hypothesis through experimentation or direct observation is an integral part of distinguishing between good and bad interpretations in natural science. There seems to be a precedence placed on the intention of falsifying one’s hypothesis for it to be distinguished as good. The theory of falsification then seems to be the standard on which interpretations in natural sciences can be differentiated into good and bad. With no intention of following its criterion in validating a theory or hypothesis, there is no allocation of a distinction.

On that account, there were several efforts made towards falsifying Darwin’s theory through extended investigations of his work carried out by succeeding scientists. The observations continued to support the hypothesis that Darwin put forward claiming the accuracy of his theory. But the act of trying to falsify his theory which resulted in a validation of the theory made for a distinction of a good interpretation of evolution by Darwin. It is now considered to be one of the most accepted evolutionary theories as it is one which efforts have been made towards falsification. This concedes a more accurate explanation thus verifying how the distinction was made.

In addition, scientists base their distinguishing of good and bad interpretations on evidence. It is thus inherent that, in order to distinguish a good interpretation from a bad one, it would necessitate procedures to be followed when considering evidence provided. The quality and quantity of evidence produced from an experiment could decide on how the distinction is made. This may also include scientific methods which can vary as much as in the arts. However, scientific theories have requirements such as “having enough evidence to

⁶ Cornell, Brent. BioNinja. BioNinja, 2016.
<https://ib.bioninja.com.au/additional-resources-2/learning-modules/52-natural-selection.html>.
 Accessed November 28 2021

back up the claims that would suggest accuracy of the theory and backed up with a pre-existing theory that could have been tested in order to prove its validity.”⁷ This makes distinguishing between good and bad interpretations happen on a rigid and small scale. And thus, the classification of a scientific theory as a good one or a bad can depend on the externalities surrounding that scale.

A counter-claim that the intention to falsify science and the scientific methods used make for a good interpretation of the data collected is based on another evolutionary theory called the Lamarckian theory of evolution. This was discovered before Darwin’s theory and it is concerned with “evolution that encourages species to change their features owing to dominant use”⁸ This theory has been disproved by other scientists who insist on the limited evidence available regardless of the action of falsification. For example the scientist August Weissmann, falsified Lamarck’s theory and thus reduced the validity of Lamarck’s interpretation of the evolutionary process in organisms. This led to an implication that Lamarck’s theory may be false. Notwithstanding, there may be some truth to Lamarck’s theory. It has withstood repeated investigations of its preliminary beliefs but insufficiencies such as its inability to “account for all the observations made about life on Earth”⁹ have made it hard to accept. These gaps have raised skepticism surrounding the theory in the scientific community making it hard to distinguish the theory.

⁷ Wilkin, Douglas, and Niamh Gray-Wilson. “Scientific Theories - Advanced.” CK. CK-12 Foundation, November 20, 2019.
<https://www.ck12.org/biology/scientific-theories/lesson/scientific-theories-advanced-bio-adv/>.
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⁸ Cornell, Brent. BioNinja. BioNinja, 2016.
<https://ib.bioninja.com.au/additional-resources-2/learning-modules/52-natural-selection.html>.
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⁹ Bitesize, BBC. “The Work of Lamarck - Evolution - Aqa - GCSE Biology (Single Science) Revision - AQA - BBC Bitesize.” Accessed February 2 2022. BBC News. BBC, 2022.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zcqbdxs/revision/2>.

Regardless, there was also corroborating evidence in this theory in relation to Darwin's theory as both theories accepted the "inheritance of acquired characteristics."¹⁰ Yet, Darwin provided a different hypothesis to clarify the claims of similarities between the two theories. But, it may be said that not all scientific interpretations belong to the paradigms of good and bad due to their inability to have "valid evidence."

In light of the arguments, the conclusion is that distinctions of good and bad interpretations can involve a consideration of the purpose, methods, and evidence used in the interpretations of the areas of knowledge to be assessed. These factors may supersede the use of perspective to distinguish good and judgements as subjectivity may not allow for such separations. To some extent, it is also possible that not all interpretations can be distinguished into good and bad because interpretations can also be simple observations instead of an understanding or an analysis thus making it hard to discern into which category a certain observation belongs.

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¹⁰Ray, Michael. "Lamarckism." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 11, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/science/Lamarckism>. Accessed November 28 2021.

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