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How Can We Distinguish Between Good and Bad Interpretations? Discuss with Reference to the Arts and One Other Area of Knowledge.

“If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.” This seminal quote, lyrically coined by the band *Rush* from the philosophical teachings of René Descartes, is -by all means- an interpretation of interpretation; a call to dig beyond meaning and achieve progress. Hence, one can decipher that the purpose of a knowledge seeker is to pursue the consistency of an interpretation and to thus comprehend its level of significance. By making choices based on our situational interpretations, such progress can be hindered or further explored in a meaningful light. In particular, good and bad interpretations must be examined altogether, though this challenge itself is a rather daunting one. When one chooses to believe in an interpretation, whether theirs or another, they must take heed of the quality of this thought process. After observing the correct lens on how to efficiently judge interpretation, it seems fitting to neglect the labels of “good” and “bad” with more suitably determining the validity, safeness, and reasoning for a variety of stances. Two of the best knowledge areas to view this idea through are with the arts and human sciences, as artistic perception is the strongest matter of value and human sciences is one of emotional connection. Between these two individual outlooks, a knowledge seeker can better comprehend the merit of interpretation, and will furthermore seek truth beyond that of biased or rigid facades.

Pertaining to the arts, analysis of creative works is generally viewed within the scope of a creator’s own talent range; depending on the level of expertise one displays within their work, an interpretation of the work will be more or less respected as a genuine mastery of an artistic skill.

Overall, this can be seen as one of the more practical ways to interpret craftsmanship, as it singles out emotion from the equation of artistic prowess. However, with art being such a subjective matter due to personal attraction, one can argue that the existence of good and bad interpretations towards art is rendered irrelevant, hence the common phrase “within the eye of the beholder.” However, the underlying truth to art is that its field is one of an endless talent variety, akin to that of a competitive sport. While the disabling of interpretations towards personal art is sensible, judging interpretations of art forwarded towards the masses holds a different tone. With art that purposefully competes for an attentive audience, it must be held accountable for its virtue in comparison to the bottomless pool of other artists and their artworks.

To further this argument, one must simply view the art of music. Evidently, it is common knowledge that everyone has their own interpretation of music, some more strongly so than others. Like any art, music is one facet of it that has a stronghold on the listener’s nostalgia. In general, it is not often to see someone of a specific time period dislike the music of their youth; opposingly, these same listeners tend to find music of a more modern or older period from theirs less enjoyable. It is this nostalgia that can produce a less than positive interpretation of song. What a listener like this may not come to realize is the actual quality of what they hear. Based on the ideology of good interpretations stemming from enhanced craftsmanship, merit must overpower the will of emotional connection and even nostalgia to interpret the quality of music composition. Particularly, nostalgia creates one of the key concerns encircling interpretation: emotion. In theory, emotion clouds our judgment to the merited quality and level of artistic sophistication, thus arguing that good interpretations must always stem from quality over a personal connection. However, the sheer concept of interpretation could not exist without the presence of prior attachment, which varies between all individuals of all walks of life. Hence, I

have come to the conclusion that when considering how quality versus content is highly personalized, interpretation is neither good nor bad when factoring in an individual's experiences or specific tastes.

An example from my own life which best demonstrates this ideology is my father and I's taste in music. Between the two of us, music plays as one of the most crucial facets of our lives -one which we would be devastated to live without. Growing up, my dad would always play the psychedelic and classic rock of his generation and not much beyond the rock genre as a whole. However, as I entered my pre-teen and teen years, the increase of music access and variety has far expanded the wildest dreams of my father's late 20th-century life; overall, I along with my entire generation are more open to musical diversity and the favoring of multiple genres. Today, while I still enjoy my father's music profusely, I can't help but feel biased towards my own broadened tastes and find his tastes narrow-minded in comparison. In accordance with my prescribed title, neither interpretation is inherently wrong. While my music tastes are more expanded across decades and genres, the quality of my music isn't necessarily stronger due to some of it lacking the instrumental and lyrical prowess of my dad's music. For example, *Rush*, a 70s and 80s band mentioned earlier, is one we both enjoy the lyrical and musical strength of together. Yet, nostalgia is not what keeps me listening, but rather a different perspective of liking separate facets of the band than my father. Though stronger his music may be on an artistic level, however, there remains a stronger sense of nostalgic attachment to his music that keeps him from interpreting other art as worthwhile. Both interpretations are flawed, yet correctly partial to each his own. To finalize this thought, it can be safely said that interpretation as a conceptual idea must stem from either personal enjoyment or genuine respect for the craft of the art or idea in

question, and good interpretations must include one or a combination of these factors to be validated.

Evidently, art and human emotion are intertwined in the largest sense. However, I have found that human sciences, the other direction of the TOK prompt, presents as more of a solution to how interpretations cannot be solely distinguished upon whether they are good or bad -words too equivocal to be taken under serious repute. It is clear, though, that some interpretations of societal standards, unlike art, can produce harmful environments where certain groups of people may be discriminated against for less than acceptable reasons. A no better example of this ideology would be through the two very recent uprisings in the United States: the January 6th Capitol Hill attacks, as well as the Black Lives Matter protests. While a difficult point of contention to discuss, as human sciences such as global politics and cultural anthropology play heavily into the strong emotions on display, it is nevertheless substantial to the concept of critical interpretation.

With regards to the events held on January 6th, 2021, most would quote that a significant portion of the US population holds negative views toward the violent actions of protesters which ensued in Washington D.C. Resulting in 5 dead and several injured, it can be argued, according to my theory, that a quotum quote “good” interpretation of this event should be negative towards those in which the event was caused. However, I can not speak of their political interpretations as being right or wrong in the general sense, though this factor acted as the main force to the event occurring. The reason for my deduction stems from a comparison to the Black Lives Matter protests months before the attack. In BLM protests, though many were non-violent, several had quickly turned to damaging riots which harmed many innocent businesses and homes. In comparison to the attack on Capitol Hill, both events seem to mean well by the group of those

involved in their cause, though a good interpretation of the event should be seen as to whether or not violence was necessary to promote their respective messages. In both cases, peaceful protest proved or would have proved to be the best response, thus countering my opinions on the absence of good and bad interpretations. In my own household, this concept has stood true, as each member of my four-person family had differing opinions on the matter. While we all argued about our different ideas, peacefully deconstructing each other's thoughts would have shown to be more helpful and constructive to consider the events. In short, good interpretations in human sciences should come from a place of a risk factor to others, and whether or not our opinions can produce beneficial variety over extremist ideology void of differing thought.

Overall, interpretation is divisive on whether or not we can think of it correctly, but it is not impossible. Like any lifestyle, habit, or ideology, there is a certain extent to where it should exist and how. "Good" and "bad" descriptors are generally vague, but they can be a good place to start when deciphering a subject. Opinions and interpretations of any kind, whether it be to art, human science, or another area of life, should consider whether it produces a stance with safe, effective, and non-abusive content for others to expand and grow from.