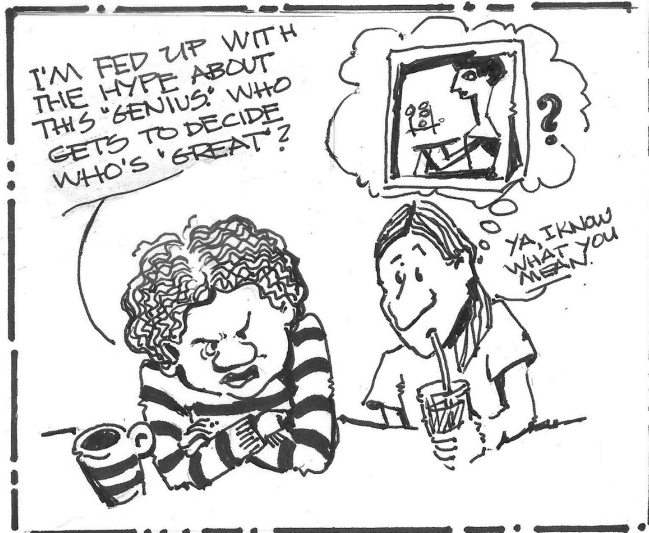


# "How am I supposed to appreciate it?"



*“How am I supposed to appreciate it?”*

## Theory of Knowledge Questions for Discussion

1. The angry speaker in this cartoon is unlikely to represent attitudes that any of us in a TOK class hold personally. Nevertheless, can you recognize in yourself even a minor inclination to make some of the same judgments as shown in the cartoon -- towards some famous works of art, or towards **any** other areas of knowledge? Do you yourself respect and often admire achievements in different areas of knowledge, even if you don't personally understand them?

2. Is there a difference in your expectations of the sciences and the arts in this regard? Do you assume that you *should* be able to understand both -- or maybe neither? What does “understanding” involve for gravitational waves – that is, for those of us who are not physicists? What does “understanding” involve for abstract art – that is, for those of us who are not artists or art critics?

3. Before we can evaluate whether a new development in an area of knowledge is an exciting contribution – or even worthwhile -- how much background knowledge do you think we need to have? Is a judgment with *no* background knowledge just as good as one with *a lot of* background knowledge? Which would you expect to be more accessible to you without much study: an artwork (whether a painting, a novel, or a musical composition) or a scientific discovery? Which are you more inclined to judge for whether it's worthwhile?

4. What makes a scientific discovery or scientific explanation be accepted as valuable in its area of knowledge? Who judges? What is meant by the “scientific community”? What are their criteria for evaluation and judgment? What is meant by “scientific consensus”? What is meant by an “expert”?

5. What makes a work of art – a painting, dance performance, novel, film, musical composition, for instance – be accepted as valuable in its area of knowledge? Who judges? What are the criteria for evaluation and judgment, and are they communally shared? To what extent does an audience in the arts expect consensus? What is meant by an “expert”?

*Note for further reflection: The cartoon is based on four of the most innovative, iconic -- and mocked -- twentieth century artists. You might want to check out some of the works of Pablo Picasso, Henry Moore, Andy Warhol, and Jackson Pollock and consider why, in defying the norms of "traditional art", they have been so susceptible to mockery. What about their work could have made them seem beyond the fringe for even those who felt they possessed considerable knowledge of art and artistic standards?*

6. Based on your responses to #4 and #5, in what ways is evaluation of work in the arts and work in the sciences *similar*? In what ways is it *different*?

7. But so what? Are developments in *either* field any use in our lives? Do we expect that knowledge should be *useful* above all? What do you think are the best things that the sciences and the arts contribute to our lives?

cartoon by Theo Dombrowski, questions by Eileen Dombrowski. Oxford Education Blog

<https://educationblog.oup.com/category/theory-of-knowledge> and Activating TOK <https://activatingtok.net/>