

IB Theory of Knowledge

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### Evaluating Areas of Knowledge

Music can affect us in many ways. It can evoke emotion or bring back a long-forgotten memory. It is present in nearly every aspect of life. Anywhere you travel, you come into contact with music. Whether it is on the radio in the car, in the supermarket, or on television, there is no escaping the constant presence of music. Music is composed for various reasons and purposes. Sometimes, composers are compelled to create a musical work to express their emotions, or even opinions. Music is also created to express the cultural aspects. Since there are so many reasons music is created and purposes it is used for, how is it possible to know music and in what ways can music be known? According to the International Baccalaureate Theory of Knowledge, there are several specific ways of knowing that allow knowledge claims to be evaluated. The infinitive, to know, can be evaluated by using reason, language, perception, and emotion. All of these ways can be utilized when evaluating the claim "I know this music." Also, most of these mentioned ways of knowing can be applied to other areas of knowledge besides the arts.

To begin, knowing music can be evaluated by using reason as logic. Obviously, if someone were to make this claim, he could simply be referring to the fact that he had heard it before. But logically, looking on a deeper level, the claim could mean that he had played through the music before. Often when musicians play a piece of music, or especially when it is performed, it has greater meaning to them and allows them to know

it more intimately. When playing a piece of music, artists can put their own personal feeling into it. They can vary certain aspects such as tempo and phrasing. Not only does playing music speak to a listening audience, it speaks to the artist. This makes playing music a very psychological process, as it evokes certain feelings from listener and performer. Very gifted musicians are sometimes able to merely look at a piece of music, to analyze each note and rhythm, and be able to claim they know the piece. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was able to know music in this way. He would compose entire symphonies and concertos entirely in his mind before ever writing them down. And when he did write them down, he never changed a note. Mozart never had to physically hear a piece of music to know what it sounded like; he could hear it in his mind. Likewise, this was true for Beethoven, who composed and conducted his ninth symphony after becoming deaf. This process of knowing occurs on a much more intellectual level than actually playing music. However, both methods present knowledge of music.

Besides using reason as logic, one can also consider the reason in the purpose of music in order to fully know it. Music is usually always created for some purpose. Composers are inspired and feel compelled to express their creativity. However, despite the composer's initial purpose for the music, its purpose to society may become completely different. For instance, many early classical composers were hired by courts and forced to compose music for the king. Often they would just write so as to get paid and to save themselves from poverty or execution. They would never have imagined that their music would, hundreds of years later, be listened to in the homes of middle class

families as their children fervently practice the current assignment from the piano teacher. Music can be written to express opinions of society, culture, and authority. The popular rapper Eminem, constantly criticized for his outspokenness, articulates his views through his controversial lyrics. Similarly, the members of the heavy metal band Rage Against the Machine are known for their radical views of government and have even been arrested several times for protesting on the steps of the capital. Rage uses their music to communicate their opinions and speak to others who feel the same. Altogether, the purpose of music can be used to evaluate how it is known.

Next, the claim can also be evaluated by analyzing certain aspects of language. Semantics is a term often applied to the study of meaning in language. In order to study language, one needs to consider two aspects of language: denotation and connotation. Denotation can be thought of as the way in which a word is defined, as in the dictionary. Connotation, on the other hand, is thought of as the color of the word, or what it implies. Therefore, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the definition of the verb 'to know' is: to perceive directly, or have direct cognition of, to have understanding of, to recognize the nature of, to recognize as being the same as something previously known, to be acquainted or familiar with, or to have experience of. The denotation of a word is very straightforward and differs from the connotation in that it lacks emotion. For example, when trying to explain love to a child, it does no good to give them a dictionary definition. On the other hand, the connotation of knowing can be explained in countless ways. For example, the word can infer that there is a strong emotional connection, whether it be positive or negative. The connotation also involves many other

areas other than just the word, such as the tone of voice it is said in, or the context in which it is placed. When evaluating a claim, one cannot fully depend on a single aspect of semantics. Both denotation and connotation need to be taken into account in order to evaluate knowledge claims.

In addition, perception is another way of knowing. Perception varies between all individuals. Perception makes each person unique. Therefore, it is difficult to make a generalized statement about perception besides the fact that it can drastically change the way identical events are interpreted. Perception can be influenced by many different factors such as culture, economic status, and religion. These factors can be described as filters through which the world is perceived. When applied to a knowledge claim, perception mainly varies between individuals' views of what it means to know something. Take, for instance, the individual making the knowledge claim, "I know this music." One person's perception of what it means to know could vary from the perception of the person being told. The only way to bridge this gap in perception, is to become tolerant of others' views.

Applied to others areas of knowledge, these ways of analyzing knowledge claims are valid yet sometimes irrelevant. For instance, the methods work for theoretical, language, and creativity based areas such as politics and the arts. However, when applied to more factual areas like mathematics and the natural sciences, the above methods are not suitable. For these areas, processes such as proofs and the scientific method are used.

Word Count: 1171