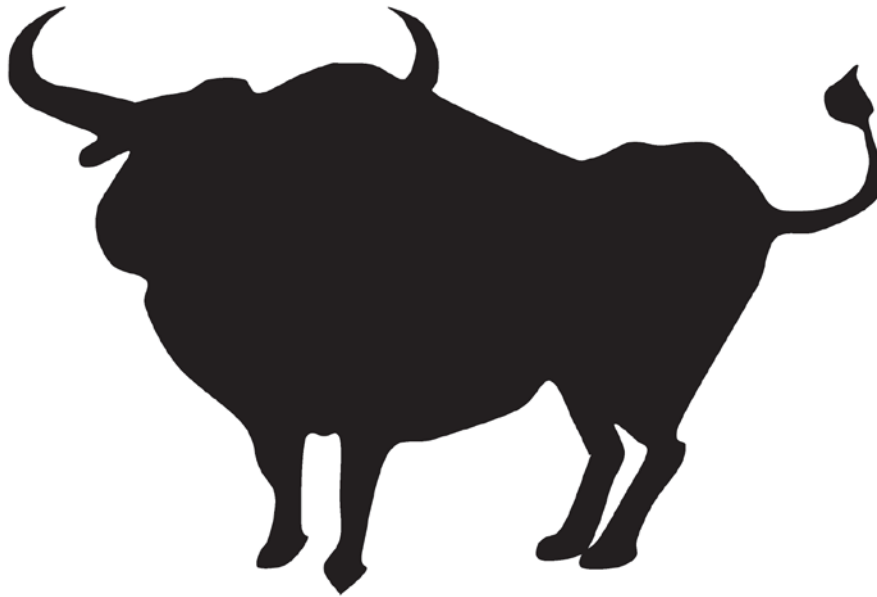


# KS Bull 2018

## Issue 1



# Raffles Institution

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**‘Business should have no place in politics.’ Do you agree?**

In today’s globalised world, commerce and economic prosperity are largely prioritised. It is not surprising to see that business has become a much more integral aspect of modern society, and has thus gained tremendous influence as a result, with giant international companies like Apple having a larger net worth than some small states. However, in line with the aim of many businesses to ruthlessly maximise their profits, we begin to see that many firms have turned their socio-economic influence towards meddling with politics, inciting great alarm due to allegations of corruption. Indeed, while I agree that the profit-maximising agendas of firms should have little role in influencing governmental policies, I disagree with the sweeping statement that business should have completely no place in politics, as the regulation and growth of businesses still remain a key aspect of any governments’ ability to accomplish its foreign and domestic agendas.

Those who fear corruption and nepotism argue that the profit-maximising agendas of businesses should never influence politics, as this can lead to inefficient and exploitative policies that aim to seek self-aggrandisement at the expense of societal welfare. When businesses enter politics, either via lobbying groups or by providing support to influential politicians, they can leverage their socio-economic status to bully governments into implementing policies that work to their self-interest, either by threatening to not cooperate with governmental agendas or withdrawing their financial support for political candidates and offices. For example, many businesses in the developing world pressurise their governments to lift restrictions on pollution so that they can persist in their destructive business practices, and enter an agreement with the government to support their re-election. Thus, this can lead to ineffective policies that threaten the greater societal welfare. More dangerously, the continued influence of businesses over governance can give rise to the commercialisation of politics, where the public-serving ideals of governmental

organisations and politicians have been utterly corrupted by the promise of selfish financial gains. In the case of revolving door politics, where there is a frequent transfer of personnel between positions as regulators and legislators and the companies being regulated and legislated, the motivation for politicians to reap personal gain has led to great amounts of corruption and inefficiency. In Japan, this practice and attitude has in fact become a dangerous norm in the form of “amakudari”, where the politicians and bureaucrats receive large salaries upon retirement to the private firms and use their connections with former colleagues in the bureaucracy to implement policies for the benefit of their employer companies, such as reduced taxation and skipping inspections. This has been argued to be a great source of economic inefficiency as resources are overly allocated for the private gains of these firms, leading to low growth rates and poor economic reform in Japan, precisely why the dismantling of “amakudari” has become one of the key tenets of Shinzo Abe’s progressive reforms. Hence, it can be argued that business should have no place in politics, as when businesses have a substantial influence over governance, it can lead to the compromise of societal welfare for their own corrupt ends.

However, while the corrupting tendencies of private enterprises in manipulating politics is highly undesirable, business still has a place in politics, as it is inseparable from effective governance.

In order to seek the key agenda of economic progress that is so highly regarded in our increasingly pragmatic world, governments have an incentive to work hand in hand with private enterprises. Economic achievements in the form of greater Gross Domestic Product growth, rising wages and increased employment are an essential expectation of governments by the populace that votes them into power, as financial and material gains are the most tangible way to improve the masses’ standard of living. Thus, to accomplish this objective, it is crucial for governments to work closely with the very enterprises that generate this wealth. It is the businesses that employ people and provide them with incomes, and it is the economic activity generated by the businesses that enable people to pay their taxes and allow the continued operation of the government and its ability to implement policies. Therefore, it is in the interests of governments to influence the continued growth and prosperity of businesses by means of implementing policies that can encourage this growth. For example, the expansion of the rare earths industry in China into a global monopoly has



been largely due to the key role of the government in backing the rare earth extraction and refinement firms and pushing for overseas acquisitions. Thus, the policies of the government have very much to do with stimulating economic progress, given that economic prosperity is increasingly perceived by the populace as an indicator of good governance. Thus, there is an interconnection between politics and businesses, in the form of how public authorities can operate with private sector to ensure economic growth. Therefore, business is an integral aspect of politics, and I disagree that businesses should have no place in politics.

Additionally, it is in the interests of governments to regulate selfish business practices such that they do not compromise the greater societal welfare. Without governmental regulation in the free market, business can often employ predatory business practices that undermine the survival of other business and exploit consumers, such as in the form of price wars to gain market dominance, or artificially inflate prices to gain more profits. Often, these business practices are in direct conflict with governmental aims of socio-economic stability, economic progress, and societal welfare in the form of employment and material living standards. More often than not, we have seen how giant corporations have been able to push small “mom and pop” business out of the economic markets, and undermine the incomes and livelihood of the people who are unable to directly compete with these financial powerhouses. Thus, governance that aims to maximise societal welfare and ensure the livelihood of its people will tend to implement policies that can regulate these unhealthy business practices. Often, we see the rise of anti-trust laws that seek to undermine exploitative monopolies, the taxation of firms that earn too much profits in order to more fairly redistribute these profits via governmental welfare programmes, and even the nationalisation of inefficient companies as often seen in China. Therefore, governments frequently intervene with business practices in order to enhance societal welfare by enforcing a code of moral business practices via law and legislation, such that the goals of business do not conflict with the goals of governance. Hence, business and its regulation still have a significant place in politics.

Additionally, businesses have become an integral aspect of foreign policy, as the economic rewards of international relations are now largely intertwined with businesses. Indeed, in an age of soft power on the stage of international politics,

the use of businesses as a bargaining tool that confers economic opportunities and progress is much more prevalent. As a gesture of seeking close relations, policies that benefit businesses such as bilateral free-trade agreements and the implementation of common markets, such as the Eurozone, are now part and parcel of any governmental foreign policy. Many international negotiations are now leveraging on business investments and allowing the entry of domestic businesses into foreign markets, as businesses and the economic advantages they generate are highly prized as a reward for compromise and agreement. For example, China aims to accomplish its imperialistic ambitions by means of extensive business projects such as “One Belt, One Road” that aims to rejuvenate business along the traditional Silk Road. Through its outsourcing of jobs to Africa via firms and investments in local businesses there, China has also managed to gain the favour of African states, which now only recognise China’s legitimacy and dismiss the sovereignty of Taiwan, which is part of China’s foreign policy agenda. Hence, businesses have a key role in politics, especially in the realm of international politics and foreign relations, and thus I disagree with the statement that business should have no place in politics.

Therefore, I agree that businesses should have little influence over politics, but they still have a large place in politics as it is intertwined with governance and international relations. Thus, I disagree with the statement<sup>1</sup>.

### Comments:

*Relevant, coherent and well supported with apt examples. Ideas are evaluated and well developed. Scope could be wider and address the characteristics of capitalism vs societal welfare/governance. An easy and coherent read with effective balance.*

*Excellent command and control and clarity. Personal voice is evident. Linking devices are effectively used. Some minor grammatical errors. Effective introduction and paragraphing. The conclusion, however, could certainly be better developed.*

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: A contradiction emerges here since you assert that businesses should have both “little influence” and “a large place” in politics! Also, the essay’s final sentence results in a rather abrupt ending.

### **Are machines making humans obsolete?**

News of the machine AlphaGo, a deep neural network, reverberated across the world as the program knocked the deep-seated chess champion off his crown seat. Today, we welcome machines which are faster, efficient and even smarter than humans seem to be. This raises the question of whether new artificial creations are making humans irrelevant or perhaps even useless today. Avid supporters of this new wave of technology believe that machines are far superior to humans and would easily render humans obsolete in the modern world. Pessimists too, brood over the unseating of humans from workplaces and society against the backdrop of the influx of machines. Nevertheless, we would be mistaken to presume that the rise of machines would completely displace humans in society. In some ways, it is undeniable that machines may outdo humans, but in others, there are still essential traits of humans that machines lack. These traits unique to humanity make us indispensable to the functioning of society, and hence, I would argue that machines do not make humans obsolete.

Besides AlphaGo, more artificial intelligence programs on the rise have also been rapidly redefining what machines are thought to be capable of. Machine learning techniques are equipping new robots with the skills to learn from past experiences and acquire decision-making skills. These new developments in artificial intelligence (AI) are allowing machines to pick up “critical thinking” skills that were once thought to be only possessed by humans. In some cases, the way these machines think may even be more desirable - computer scientists claim that machines are able to make more rational choices and more logical decisions, decisions that are based on hard evidence, in their databases. This is easily conceivable, as when compared to humans, machines are capable of storing much more memory of past data and are able to draw on these huge swathes of data to give much more accurate predictions than humans. These machines are hence less susceptible to careless mistakes and blunders that humans may be



more prone to committing. Take for instance the new AI medical programs that are advancing the medical health scene today. Collaboration between IBM and the University of Ontario's Institute of Technology has developed new machines that can detect nosocomial infections in premature babies such that preventive measures can be exacted in the early stages. By meticulously analysing heart rate trends, organ abnormalities and the slightest movements in foetuses, the Project Artemis machine can detect nosocomial infections in premature babies up to 24 hours ahead of the appearance of symptoms before the symptoms appear. And it is precisely this ability to objectively handle vast amounts of numerical work with precision that makes such feats possible in machines; in contrast, such hard and dry processing work is simply not humans' forte. While Project Artemis can be said to be the pioneer of AI for neonatology, it is definitely not the lone example of machines in the healthcare industry. Machines are already revolutionising the way we detect illnesses: SG Fullerton Healthcare adopts computer models to predict chronic diseases in companies and chart out appropriate primary care measures; the Human Genome Project presents DNA sequencers to recognise anomalous genetic manifestations and provide insights for new cancer treatment approaches. The ability to surmise conclusions from huge data which requires much processing power and memory storage is simply an advantage machines have that makes humans less useful today. Hence, supporters of technology believe that machines are superior to humans and are taking over their place in society today.

Furthermore, others assert that machines are much more efficient than humans in other ways, in addition to their processing power. The simple fact is that machines are able to move faster, work without sleep and conduct menial jobs much more efficiently. This makes machines more productive and cost-effective than humans due to our physical limitations. Throw in the extra perk of not having to deal with demands for wage increase, appease labour unions and fret for paying health benefits - machines seem to be far more attractive than humans in the workplace. Already, the displacement of humans from factories seem to be a reality today. Apple supplier Foxconn recently dismissed over 60 000 workers from a manufacturing plant in China by replacing them with robots. Over in the United States, bright orange Kiva robots are replacing workers in Amazon's warehouses - these robots can recognise parcels, arrange them on shelves and deliver them to their desired destinations. These new mechanical employees zoom across the warehouses and easily reduce hours of walking time

in delivery jobs to mere minutes and seconds now. The centre today churns out up to 50% more package orders than their human predecessors in the same time. Robots increasingly seem to be better alternatives than hiring blue-collar workers, especially in terms of quantitative productivity. Hence, it seems that a future where robots displace humans may not be far-fetched afterall.

Indeed, the barrage of technology today seems to be promising far superior features and functionalities in machines that humans are incapable of demonstrating due to our natural limits. Humans' role in society seems to be much diminished today and in the likely future too, ardent fans of technology claim. Nevertheless, I believe that humans also do possess traits that are lacking in machines, that ultimately make humans invaluable to the greater community.

Firstly, I contend that humans are unique in being able to demonstrate compassion and empathy, both of which are very much needed in society. The healthcare industry will not have a future with just robots and no humans - there is still a need for 'care' in healthcare. Machines may indeed boast of superior prowess in detecting diseases, but an essential feature of healthcare is still the delivery of treatments. There is a human factor involved in medical treatments that is not to be overlooked. Besides diagnosing illnesses and prescribing medicines, there is an element of care that goes into therapy. Patients need more than accurate diagnoses and cold, detached machines to recover - and it is humans working in the healthcare sector who are able to devote this care and concern that machines are not able to proffer. Many times, a conversation can be more powerful than technology. Clinical trials have repeatedly shown that people who opt for the more basic at-home palliative care usually experience a much happier end of life journey than those who undergo invasive surgical treatments or opt for life-sustaining machines that are offered by advanced technologies in hospitals today. Going without the extraordinary treatments, in some cases, also allows these patients to outlive their counterparts. This goes to show that there is much more to healthcare in today's world than simple medical prognosis and appropriate treatments. Machines may hold the future for making more accurate predictions and more accurate drug prescriptions, but the widely neglected fact is that humans are also needed to nurse patients to better health. There is much more to a doctor-patient relationship than what machines can replicate. Humans are needed for our ability to show care. Besides, the health industry is not the only sector that requires human care: the food and

beverage and service industries all require that human-to-human interaction and connection that machines are unable to provide. Humans' ability to empathise, express emotions and forge meaningful relationships with customers is an essential factor that makes us relevant and something machines cannot replace.

Furthermore, humans have the ability to imagine and create, unlike machines. It is a fact that even artificial intelligence programs have to be written and designed by humans to do exactly the task it is supposed to accomplish. In many cases, machines are still unable to stray from their dependence on instructions or guidelines set by humans, and are incapable of moving beyond them to generate out-of-the-box ideas. On the other hand, humans are dynamic and adaptable to situations; we possess innate creativity and imagination, qualities that are much needed in society for greater societal progress. Consider the nascent AI-powered journalism today - with natural language generation machines being developed for their potential in creating content for newspaper companies like the Post, the role of journalists and editors is increasingly also being threatened. Is it really the case that journalists are no longer needed? It may be true that machines may be capable of producing articles simply by stringing content and information together into sentences, but it is clear that a good piece of writing goes beyond mere statements of facts. The importance of ideas and the injection of human creativity into writing is what makes an article more than just a sum of its words. Machines are restricted to generating pieces of the same language style and diction which will ultimately bore readers. Take for instance sports coverage of matches where the intensity of matches and engaging narratives can only be produced by humans. To inform and educate, or to even make any change, emotional connection and creativity are a must, making humans far from obsolete in society today.

Moreover, machines are also unable to make moral decisions. Machines work with mathematical formulas and equations to maximise calculated payoffs in tangible and economic terms. However, ethical rights and morals are also crucial in all decision making - some things simply cannot be easily assigned a weight for machines to "optimise". Being incapable of evaluating such decisions, it is inevitable that humans are required to step in to resolve ethical conflicts. In unmanned vehicles, many AI programs face challenging moral dilemmas especially when human lives come into play on the road. This is where humans

are not obsolete and are required to aid machines in navigating ethical boundaries.

Overall, machines may be better than humans in some practical functionalities but humans possess traits that make them crucial in society and far less obsolete than it may seem.

### **Comments:**

*The conclusion is rushed! However, this was very well argued. Your points show clear knowledge and awareness of issues. There was a good range of ideas and they were clearly developed.*

*One area of improvement: some of your topic sentences could more clearly address the idea of obsolescence; after all this is one of the question's key terms.*



**“Scientific knowledge cannot be trusted because it is unreliable.”  
Is this a fair statement?**

The reliability of scientific knowledge has been called into question by a surprising number of modern communities. In light of numerous frauds and scandals, groups such as the so called “flat earthers” and “creationists”, with the unreliability of scientific knowledge as their ideological core, have expressed outright rejection of fundamental truths known to the scientific community for generations, which in these cases are the facts that the earth is round and that animals descended with modification from prehistoric ancestors. Even in countries such as Germany, a reputed hub of technology and research, studies have shown that up to 18% of young Germans believe in creationism despite evidence to the contrary. How justified is the seemingly common public sentiment that scientific knowledge, the information gathered by scientists through theorising and experimentation, is truly unreliable, meaning it cannot be depended upon to reflect truth? While scientific knowledge does have many flaws given imperfections in the field, we should not lose trust in scientific knowledge as it is by and large reliable.

Some may argue that many bodies of scientific knowledge have yet to be consolidated and thus see dominant schools of thought as being poorly substantiated by hard evidence, or even worse, as merely “theories” based solely on, in the words of some, the “hunches of scientists”. This misrepresents the scientific method of data collection and analysis, where schools of thought or even those “theories” have to be supported by evidence before being supported by the scientific community.

That aside, there are indeed situations where the scientific community can hardly seem to decide on what they agree on as fact based on a fixed set of observations. Notably, in the span of five decades at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, less than the blink of an eye in terms of progress in the field of Physics, Physics has undergone

a transition from Classical Physics to Quantum Physics, which is even now undergoing revision and modifications to better explain phenomena. It is perhaps unsurprising that people have increasingly lost trust in the verity of scientific facts of the day, given that those “facts” may be replaced by new ones in the foreseeable future. Scientists, as individuals, are fallible, and thus so is the knowledge they have gathered. This seems to be the mindset of many of those who rejected the truthfulness of science.

Moreover, many cases of scientific fraud over the years have tarnished the reputation of scientific knowledge as being a body of reliable facts, causing some to lose faith in scientific knowledge. The fraudulent study by Andrew Wakefield linking vaccines to autism was revealed 10 years after its publication, with the author having admitted to severely misrepresenting the results of his study. This raised a public outcry, with popular sentiment questioning how many cases of scientific fraud had gone unnoticed over the years and are already accepted as fact. Due to the pressure to produce results and succeed in the field, scientists are sometimes motivated by fame or funding to publish only the results most favourable to them. A meta-analysis of biology research papers published by the Cambridge University Press acknowledged that a staggering 40% of research conducted by academic labs cannot be replicated in industrial labs. While the reasons for it are many, it seems to cast reasonable doubt on how honestly and objectively scientists conduct their studies, with direct implications on the reliability of scientific knowledge.

However, a distinction needs to be made between what is viewed as accepted knowledge and an individual’s reporting of observations. Indeed, many studies may fail to be replicated, be it due to instruments or outright dishonesty, but results only translate into accepted knowledge once they have been thoroughly verified by other scientists. The scientific knowledge recognised by the scientific community today has been tried and tested for the express purpose of ensuring reliability. The infamous study linking vaccines to autism, might have been widely publicised and hence construed by the public as factual evidence, but it was nonetheless subject to criticism from other scientists, whose efforts culminated in an inquiry that debunked the study. Due to an understanding of human error and dishonesty at times, rigorous checks and balances are in place to ensure that information only becomes fundamental truth if it is reported by multiple scientists. The Singapore National Institute for Chemistry, for example, insists

that studies carried out in its labs that make use of past research replicate parts of said past research as well, to ensure their verity and reliability. With such extensive systems in place, it is only isolated cases that slip through the cracks and tarnish the image of scientific knowledge.

Next, given our imperfect understanding of various fields, the constant debating of observations and theories might be the best way to ensure greater reliability despite an outward appearance of confusion and subjectivity. The constant review of currently accepted theories expose their flaws and give rise to new ideas that explain these flaws, after which evidence is again used to support or reject them. In this constant process of improvement, we allow ourselves to progress closer to the truth. In the field of computer science, machine learning was viewed for decades as the most efficient means for computers to improve, yet when it was theoretically proven otherwise, further investigation was undertaken that formed the basis of modern, improved “deep learning” that revolutionised the field, giving rise to modern developments such as genetic algorithms. Thus while information and knowledge of the past could be viewed as unreliable, (for example, what was viewed as the best in the past could be far from the best in the present like in the case of computer science), this should not diminish our trust in scientific knowledge as we have to recognise innate constraints faced by various scientific fields in their ability to represent truth at any one time and acknowledge that many fields are still in development and progress.

Lastly, given the importance of corporations in funding modern research, one may be wary of vested interests distorting the verity of scientific claims. However, the majority of such claims with potential vested interests might yet turn out to be true since despite the power of corporations in projecting their self-interests, research institutions are wary of tarnishing their reputations for short-term funding. This can be exemplified by studies in university labs sponsored by Tesla Motors, an electric car company, to improve and report on the efficiency of their core technology, the lithium ion battery. The results, showing that the battery performance of Tesla Motors far outperformed that of its competitors was understandably met with doubt by many, but yet after the product release, such claims were verified by consumers to be true. This could be due to the need for university labs to preserve credibility. Hence it is reasonable to put faith in reliable scientific institutions to report factual and

undistorted knowledge, even if they are backed by corporations with financial incentives indicating otherwise.

In summary, even with the significant checks and balances in place by the global scientific community to ensure truth and reliability, there are bound to be cases that avoid detection, some of them high profile ones that cast doubt upon the reliability of scientific knowledge. However, this should not negate efforts made to ensure that scientific knowledge produced is by and large accurate and reliable. Ideas and theories in development should not be cast aside for being in development, but continuously improved to get closer to the truth.

### **Comments:**

*Content: Relevant, coherent and well-supported. An easy and smooth read. All the core issues and tensions are addressed. Balance is relevant but could be more coherent.*

*Language: Help the reader understand your arguments/essay. Good command and clarity. Good use of complete sentences. Adequate introduction; conclusion could be improved. Clear paragraphing and coherence. Consistency is key. Personal voice is evident.*



**“In an increasingly uncertain world,  
there is little point in predicting the future.’ Discuss.**

Following the shock results of the US presidential election and the Brexit vote, many analysts have come to point out that in the increasingly volatile world we live in today, none of the theoretical predictions made by experts were played out in actuality. They attribute this to the unprecedented volatility in our world, faced with a surge of major issues ranging from the political to the economic, environment and even social realms. While it may be true that we are indeed living in a world forced to grapple with such uncertainty today, I believe that there is still merit in predicting the future, no matter how hard it may seem.

Pessimists might argue that in our globalised world today, it would be pointless to predict future trends as there are simply too many permutations and possibilities to pinpoint the precise outcome in the future. As our world becomes increasingly globalised and interconnected, our borders, both virtual and geological, have become more porous and volatile. These people point to the fact that there is hardly any way we could have foreseen the collapse of the global economy and trade during The Great Depression, where the sheer extent of interconnectedness of the global economy precipitated the recession. This was only allowed by the massive capital and financial flows that is characteristic of our increasingly globalised and interconnected world today, where a country's currency and economy is so dependent on that of others that an event within a single country like the USA is able to cause so many economies to go into recession. This was also later repeated in the Asian Financial Crisis, which caused the entire collapse of the Thai Baht. Proponents of this claim argue that this could hardly have been predicted by anyone, as the interconnectedness of the world's economies today only means that unless one has access to the knowledge of each and every move of every country's economy, one would be unable to predict when and where the next global

economic crisis will precipitate from. Accurate prediction is made even more challenging in that today, more and more countries are adopting freer trade, and opening up their economies, thus increasing the number of permutations that must be taken into account, rendering prediction of any future trends useless.

Furthermore, proponents of the view that prediction is of little use in today's world point to the rise of belligerent nations, and claim that even if one can predict the future, there will always be shock events or actions that goes against the grain, and invalidate any prediction done previously. This increasing prevalence of shock events can be alluded to two main sources, that of the rise of increasingly belligerent nations, and the evolving nature of terrorism. Be it international aggression, or lone wolf attacks, none of these are what one would deem the norm. Predictions are always based on past events, by studying trends and relationships, but instead, shock events like the Russian Annexation of Crimea or the recent spate of terrorist attacks by self-radicalised individuals tend to occur at random. While predictions are usually based on the assumption that all acting players are rational and consistent, one can see that there has been an increasing tendency for this assumption to be broken. It can hardly be correct to claim that individuals, or even whole countries are likely to follow what is the 'norm' and to act in a consistent, rational manner. Therefore, opponents of trend prediction argue that it is unlikely that we are able to make accurate predictions of human nature, as both the lone wolf attacks and the aggression by belligerent nations can be attributed back to individuals- their lack of rationality and consistency. As evident from the recent spate of schizophrenic foreign policies of USA today under the leadership of Donald Trump, rationality and consistency can no longer be taken for granted. This therefore invalidates the very assumption that predictions must be based on - that of rationality and consistency.

Lastly, these people also deny the usefulness of predictions because current issues are becoming increasingly difficult to control and may even cause pessimism and inaction. Proponents of this view argue that even if we were to make accurate predictions, the nature of the issues we face today simply makes it out of our control and render any efforts futile<sup>2</sup>. They point to the inaction

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<sup>2</sup> Phrasing here is awkward and also needs more clarity - it is not clear what efforts you are referring to.

of countries on the issue of climate change, an issue with repercussions only felt in the future. Analysts time and again have claimed the devastating effects of global warming, and predicted that if we were to continue with our current trajectory of global emissions, it is likely that global temperatures will rise by 4.5°C. These predictions claim that there is no feasible way (as of now) that we can halt or change the planet's fate, which for many people, seems to be an inevitable problem that is impossible to solve. This has thus led to the relative inaction of countries, and the pessimism of the prediction is what has hampered global leadership (notably the USA) and the collective actions of the international economy to cooperate and resolve this together. Global warming has also resulted in the increase in instances of natural disasters, adding to the volatility and pessimism we see about resolving these issues today.

However, I believe the view that predicting the future is utterly useless is overly pessimistic, as the fact that governments can learn from these lessons and improve our social and financial systems seem to prove that there is still merit in predicting the future. This can be observed from the actions of the Singapore government, which is known to learn from other countries' mistakes and use it to predict and make improvements on their own systems and take precautions. This is evident in the case of the SGD, which is fixed on a weighted basket of many other currencies, instead of being pegged on a single one<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, as Singapore's forward-looking government predicts that in the globalised world we live in today, there are bound to be a lot of financial instability, Singapore has taken extra measures and precautions to diversify our economy, and not be overly dependent on any single economy. This trend of predicting that our future is going to be increasingly volatile has led us to set in place many extra precautions, such that we are able to brace ourselves for the future. Thus, we learn from observing patterns and taking actions to ensure that our future is secure and our systems functioning.

Furthermore, although there has been a recent rise in the irrationality of global players, like belligerent nations and terrorists, we have also seen an increase in the consensus that, after studying these trends, the global community has stepped up its efforts to cooperate and stand together to face these shock

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<sup>3</sup> Include more details in this example as well as the next few examples to show convincingly that predicting the future was key to averting negative impact. There is room for you to better anchor your examples in your paragraph's key ideas.



events. Internationally, there have been efforts to predict and push back against the rise of ISIS, whether through increased surveillance and checks at national boundaries, where communities of every country band together to observe and monitor the behavior of suspected individuals. Regional efforts from ASEAN countries to address the rise of belligerence in our region have also risen, such that we can form an effective bloc to prevent and anticipate China's increasingly hostile actions regarding the South China Sea conflict. In the same vein, the EU has also slapped sanctions on Russia for their annexation of Crimea and have worked to foster greater cooperation and stability by pressuring individual countries from overt aggression that threaten political and global stability, thus working in a global effort to predict trends and identify and guard against these actions that disrupt global stability.

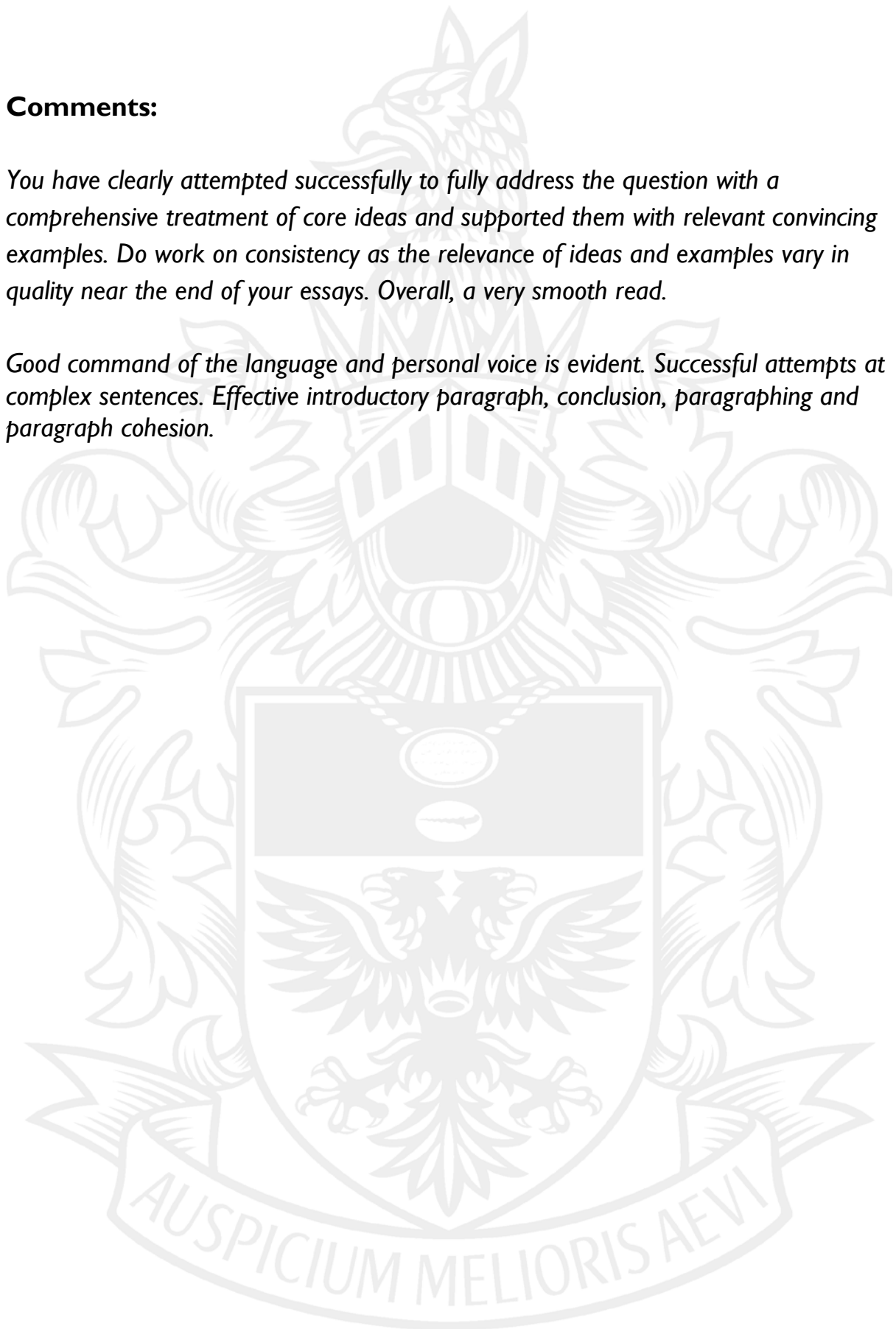
Lastly, the argument that our predictions cause us to be overly pessimistic as we realise the inconsequentiality of our actions does not seem to hold water. This is because although there are indeed some events such as natural disasters, where the eventual calamity of global warming is beyond our control, there still remains room for us to mitigate the impacts these events have. Take the example of earthquakes today. Although the frequency and magnitude of earthquakes have by no means become less significant, we now see much fewer casualties and injuries than we did a decade before. This is due to the fact that our improved technology and detection systems and infrastructure have allowed us to use devices like satellite imaging to detect large incoming natural disasters and predict when and where they will hit next. While these by no means can stop the natural disasters from happening, they serve well to allow us to mitigate the effects and reduce the casualties. The fact that the control and containment of diseases like MERS and Zika have been allowed, is also based on our ability to track and predict where the next infection will be at, and together, these steps of prediction and tracking of natural calamities can mitigate the negative implications they bring. Therefore, while there are indeed valid grounds for people to believe that there is little point in predicting the future given the unprecedented nature of our world issues today, I believe that there is still merit in doing so. Predicting the future allows us to play, even if a small role, in mitigating the negative implications that come with the problems. I believe that with global collaboration and pre-emptive measures in place, predictions actually serve an even more vital and essential role given our globalised world today.



### Comments:

*You have clearly attempted successfully to fully address the question with a comprehensive treatment of core ideas and supported them with relevant convincing examples. Do work on consistency as the relevance of ideas and examples vary in quality near the end of your essays. Overall, a very smooth read.*

*Good command of the language and personal voice is evident. Successful attempts at complex sentences. Effective introductory paragraph, conclusion, paragraphing and paragraph cohesion.*



2017 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ Passage

*Janice Turner examines the challenges adult children face in caring for their elderly parents.*

In Tate Britain is a painting by the Victorian artist George Elgar Hicks of a woman ministering tenderly to her invalid father titled *Comfort of Old Age*. The work is the final panel of Hicks's triptych *Woman's Mission*. The first panel, *Guide of Childhood*, in which the same figure teaches her little boy to walk, has been lost. But the second panel also hangs at the Tate in London: *Companion of Manhood* shows our heroine consoling her husband after ghastly news. In all three panels, Hicks depicted "woman" in her three guises – mother, wife, daughter – and in her ideal state: the selfless provider of guidance, solace and care.

I have spent a long time in the first two panels of the triptych\*: a partner/wife for 30 years, a mother for 21. (My two sons are grown and pretty much gone.) And I have seen, in the course of my adult life, enormous progress in those two domains. Now I have reached the third panel, the trickiest bit of the triptych. My 93-year-old mother is 200 miles away in Doncaster, and since my father died, five years ago, she has been living alone. She is – I must stress – admirable, independent, uncomplaining and tough. A stoic. Someone who doesn't mourn her lost faculties but relishes what she can still do. However, almost everyone she ever knew is dead, and I am her only child: her principal *Comfort of Old Age*.

After finally having wrestled her into (almost) daily care, I returned to London to find a letter of indictment. As a *Times* columnist, I have faced my fair share of barbs. But this letter, I must say, particularly stung. It was from a man who lives in Cheshire (he had supplied his name and address), and he wanted me to know what a terrible person I am. "I have been puzzled when reading your column over the past months how you have been able to leave your mother – whose serious health issues you have used as copy... to holiday in Mexico, East Anglia and Norway." I was "selfish and self-regarding", and I should be ashamed.

I was once again reminded when my children were young and I was a magazine editor. The judgement shown through the pursed lips from older relatives and the subsequent guilttripping. At best, my kindest kin manifested a befuddlement: why bother having kids if you work full-time? So let me warn you that just when you're free from being judged as a mother, you'll be judged as a daughter. It is the last chance for reactionary types who resent women's career success, or just their freedom to live how they choose, to have a dig. Look at this selfish woman, weekendening in East Anglia when she should be a *Comfort of Old Age*.

The truth is I don't want to be a full-time carer, any more than I wanted to be a full-time mother. And I don't want to live with my ma any more than she wants to live with me. Now that I've served out my parenting years, I want to do other things with my life besides looking after people. Why can't I

follow the rest of northern European society which has evolved an individualism that often transcends notions of family and duty?

Members of the baby-boomer generation recoil at living with their parents. We spent our teenage years trying to escape. What if your upbringing featured divorce, personality clashes, arguments, abuse? What if, like me, you left your working-class culture for a completely different life – what if you have little in common? Or your widowed father now expects you to run around after him like a skivvy, just as he did your mum? You can reject your roots for your entire adulthood, then your parents' frailty yanks you home. It tears up my heart. Yet it is complicated. What if you live far from your home town: should you be expected to return? My unmarried aunt came back after an interesting single life to live with my grandmother until her death. Her siblings didn't thank her for this sacrifice. Indeed, without the status of marriage, she was treated with disdain.

Largely, our elderly also do not want to be infantilised by their children, or bossed around by their daughters-in-law. (The claim that Indian parents are "revered" is undermined by rampant elder abuse.) My ma wants to watch TV and eat her favourite food, not feel she is in the way. "I like to please myself," is her refrain. Her home of almost 50 years is her shell: her central fear is of being too ill to stay. Despite the much-discussed return of "multigenerational living", the most popular British solution is the "granny annex", where an old person maintains autonomy behind her own front door. We must also remember that they are the ones who will be moving. And, this can be difficult emotionally. They will be watching as their belongings are readied for donation. They are the ones leaving their homes for communal living arrangements in unfamiliar cities. Surely, it's not as simple as just "come live with me then?"

Yet politicians of left and right wing are always telling us that the solution to our screwed-up social-care system is the family for different reasons. Left-wing leaders dislike the "care industry" because caring for others cannot be totted up according to a calculus of cost and returns. Right-wing politicians, on the other hand, worry that we will not care for our parents as unquestioningly as we do our children. In practice, these all amount to the same thing: women, chiefly daughters and daughters-in-law, toiling away unpaid.

Compared to looking after my ma, tending to children seems simpler and more exuberant, although the parallels are striking. From stair gates to stairlifts; from pushchairs to wheelchairs; the incontinence provision; the helplessness. But raising children is largely a cheerful, upward trajectory. Elderly care is an uneven descent towards some hidden, grim crevasse. There is no boasting, no showing cute snaps on your phone. You learn not to mention geriatric travails. People either look uncomfortable or bored.

And like our parents, it will be our turn soon. Worse, we are living longer, often fading out in medically preserved decrepitude over many years. I can't understand why both as individuals and as a society we refuse to plan. Well, actually I can. It's horrible and also as my mother always says: "When it happens, it happens."

Yet there is so much we could do. Provide more comprehensive funding of social care. Develop friendship schemes and clubs, so the elderly aren't so dependent on faraway children. Rip up the care-home model in which the elderly are objects in a chair.

Above all, we must redraw that final panel of the triptych. Don't wield the family as a glib solution. Instead, acknowledge that it is hard, heart-rending work, being a Comfort of Old Age.

*\*\*A triptych refers to a set of three associated artistic works intended to be appreciated together.*





Janice Turner examines the challenges society faces in caring for the elderly.  
How relevant are the issues raised for you and your society?

Turner posits that the current care-home model should be ripped up as the elderly are treated like “objects in a chair”. In making such a statement, Turner alludes to the challenges her society faces in building a strong elderly-care industry to relieve family burdens due to the lack of quality care-home services. The situation is very much relevant to China, where many elderly care-homes are notorious for their poor quality and the lack of individualised care, with several high-profile cases of abuse of elderly by care-home staff making headlines in recent years. This poor quality of service could possibly be attributed to a lack of demand for elderly-care services as most families, especially those in the rural areas, prefer to take care of the elderly at home due to influences of Confucian teachers and the social expectation of filial piety. As such, most residents in elderly-care homes tend to be homeless or without stable income or family support, making it commercially unviable to provide high-quality care-home services. Indeed, most care-homes in China tend to be poorly maintained due to meagre government funding and suffer from a lack of qualified personnel who are capable of providing high-quality care, leading to poor services or even cases of abuse. However, this cannot be said of more developed cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, where demand for quality elderly care has been surging due to the increasing affluence of the new middle class as well as the expanding number of dual-income families who have little time to take care of the elderly at home. Luxury care-homes have emerged in 1<sup>st</sup>-tier cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, charging prices as high as 10000RMB per month per person. However, these tend to be the exception rather than the norm and improving the quality of care-home services remains an urgent issue across China. Perhaps the key issue lies in a lack of acceptance to elderly-care services that is rooted in traditional values, leading to a lack of commercial demand and monetary incentives to improve the quality of service. Hence, I acknowledge that Turner’s view is largely applicable to China.

In addition, Turner proffers the view that elderly-care by families through co-living may face various challenges, on part due to the fact that parents do not want to feel that “they are getting in the way”. This could be due to the distinct habits and lifestyles of parents and children, a phenomenon particularly relevant to China due to the drastic changes that the society has undergone for the past 30 years, especially in cities that have been at the forefront of changes. Differences in lifestyles, habits and hobbies may potentially become a source of inconvenience when it comes to co-living, which explains the fact that many Chinese parents choose not to live with their children, posing challenges to the sharing of elderly-care burden by family members. In fact, such differences have contributed to incidences of conflicts between parents and children, a hot topic in modern China which has inspired a whole range of literature, movies and TV series such as “Woju” (蜗居) depicting souring family relationships and intergenerational gaps, which adds a further layer of complication to elderly-care by families. Hence, Turner’s view is particularly relevant to China.

In conclusion, a number of issues mentioned by Turner find their manifestations in China, a reflection of the fact that caring for the elderly is a common challenge faced by many societies in today’s world. There is indeed, no easy solution to these problems, as such challenges, as mentioned, tend to be deeply rooted in cultural and social aspects of a nation and call for a multi-pronged approach in ensuring quality elderly-care and dignity for those in their golden years.

**Comment: An enjoyable survey of the broad range of issues that is knowledgeable and insightful. Well done!**

**‘Looking for foundational beliefs to ground knowledge is futile.  
It is better to examine if our beliefs cohere with other beliefs.’  
Discuss.**

Justification is indubitably necessary for establishing that a true belief can be considered knowledge. The question of what kinds of justification can be used to grant claims their knowledge status is a more contentious question, and is not one that blanket statements such as the quote in question can answer satisfactorily. This is especially so given that the extent and type of justification required to prove the validity of different knowledge claims vary, depending, for example, on the certainty that such knowledge demands, as well as whether a correspondent truth is likely accessible. Thus, I would argue that while the search for foundational beliefs might appear futile on the grounds that the scope of knowledge justifiable from such beliefs may be limited, whether our beliefs are better justified based on coherent means is ultimately dependent on the nature of the field of the knowledge, as this in turn defines the scope of knowledge obtainable through either means of justification as well as the usefulness of such knowledge in those fields.

Let us first establish the case for why seeking foundational beliefs to ground knowledge could be considered futile. In the first place, the establishment of a bedrock of indubitable beliefs is already a way to mitigate the uncertainty caused by the problem of infinite regress of justification, wherein I can never claim to have complete justification for a claim. One claim requires other claims as justification, which require further proof and reasoning to prove the truth of those claims. Yet, in the search for the foundational beliefs that are meant to ground our knowledge in strong foundations, the first problem arises – what beliefs can be considered as foundational? Hundreds of years later, philosophers are still divided on this issue – are our foundations established on the grounds of necessary and eternal claims such as “I think, therefore I am” that can be obtained purely through the processes of reason and thought, or are our foundations established on the basis of empirical experiences that are incorrigible? The inconclusiveness of such a debate already poses a problem to

us if we think that knowledge must rest on a foundation, if we cannot even agree on which foundations to use. On the other hand, if we mitigate the problem of infinite regress based on a coherent theory of justification, the discussion becomes more straightforward – as long as my beliefs agree with many (ideally, of course, all) of the other claims in the belief system, I would be able to consider my belief to be knowledge.

Further, suppose we step away from the question of whether the foundations of knowledge lie in reason or experience, and consider each of them briefly. We will soon realise that each of these theories of justification produces a collection of knowledge claims that is incredibly limited in scope. For one, the type of knowledge that can be obtained through rationalism is of analytical nature and *a priori* – such knowledge, as in the case of the knowledge that “a bachelor is an unmarried man”, is, in general, true by definition, and does not require much justification anyway, due to its self-evident nature, but is very limited in scope as it does not tell us whether someone is a bachelor or whether bachelors even exist. On the other hand, empiricism appears to give us knowledge that is most useful and commonly found in the real world, since knowledge is based on sense experiences. However, while I cannot doubt that I am having a sense perception of feeling breathless while running after a bus, for example, it is conceivable that my sense perceptions are not infallible. In addition, both rationalism and empiricism’s limited scope is further fleshed out in the argument that both methods of justification eventually lead to the threat of solipsism – I am thinking, so I know I exist (rationalist), or I am experiencing sensations, so I must exist (empiricist), and the same could be said of you, but I cannot know that you exist inasmuch as I cannot think for you and feel what you feel.

A coherent system of justification, on the contrary, does not fall prey to such issues of limited knowledge, as evident from the prime example of the significant progress in fields of knowledge that have used coherentist frameworks, such as in Science and History, for example. While rationalism and empiricism will never be able to escape the trap of limited scope of knowledge, beyond the certain knowledge that we exist, we can construct much of our current knowledge today by ensuring that individual knowledge claims can fit into the web of other knowledge claims present – In science, for example, we have successfully created a consistent system of knowledge in classical mechanics, describing the laws of gravitation and the action of forces, which enables one to generate more knowledge consistent with such laws, such as “the reason that I am able to sit



without falling due to the upwards force exerted on me by the chair”, or more impactful claims about the planetary motions of celestial objects around the Sun. Thus, in view of the scope of knowledge that can be generated, it may indeed be better to examine if our beliefs cohere with other ones.

However, while it appears that we can obtain much more useful knowledge of the world through coherentist means than through foundational claims, coherentist frameworks might, upon close examination, turn out to be limited as well, albeit in a different way. This mainly arises from the problem of under-determination of which system of beliefs can really be considered as knowledge in the face of competing systems. If we can really establish knowledge by simply examining whether a belief is consistent with other beliefs in its system, then beliefs that describe a single phenomenon, even if they are contradicting, must all be the true and considered as knowledge. For example, a person who has only been exposed to the revisionist history in Japan must be equally knowledgeable in claiming that the Japanese did no wrong in World War Two as opposed to another person in China who believes that the Japanese committed heinous crimes; but it is impossible for both of these claims, as contradictory as they are, to both stand true, even though they are equally well-justified in their belief systems. The incompatibility of belief systems to be compared suggests that knowledge obtained through coherentist means may be much less certain, especially when the correspondent absolute truth is inaccessible and knowledge claims such as those in History cannot be easily verified due to a lack of credible evidence.

Hence, we arrive at a crossroads – knowledge acquired from foundational beliefs and justification is ridiculously limited in scope; while coherentist frameworks have an advantage over foundationalism in this regard, they are also limited in being able to ascertain truth in the face of contradictory, equally well-substantiated theories. Perhaps, then, we can turn to another criterion to examine if our beliefs are better justified using coherentist or foundationalist means – the usefulness and purpose of the knowledge generated through each framework. After all, we cannot off-handedly dismiss foundationalism as being completely futile or useless – the credibility of the mathematical enterprise rests on the deductive means by which mathematical theories are deduced from axioms that are necessary truths. However, we realise that even in math, the

pinnacle of the rationalist enterprise, whether more complex mathematical theories are accepted as knowledge is still bound by how well it coheres with other beliefs. The ABC conjecture is a prime example – even though the proof can ostensibly be said to have been found, the radical and unusual tools used in the proof have prompted many mathematicians to reject Mochizuki's proof. The lack of consistency between Mochizuki's method of proof and the usual methods has caused it to be rejected as untrue mathematical knowledge, thus demonstrating that even an enterprise that is primarily foundationalist in nature is eventually subject to peer review and requires justification through coherentist means. This seems especially so in math where comprehensible proofs and verifiable theories are demanded, as is increasingly the case in today's world where the need for pragmatic knowledge application is prioritised.

Thus, while foundational beliefs might be extremely limited in the justification of further knowledge, foundationalism does guarantee the certainty of its claims and has been rather successful in enterprises like math that demand certainty in knowledge. However, in view of considerations of applicability and usefulness, coherentist frameworks do seem to triumph, although not without its own shortcomings of a trade-off in certainty.

### **Comments:**

*Great discussion here, Beini! Lively engagement of the main issues raised in the question, with constant reference to both ways of justification and thorough evaluation of each, leading to a well-justified conclusion. Consistently clear piece here as well. Well done.*

**Critically assess the view that human knowledge is too complex to be analysed – and known scientifically.**

Science and the Scientific Method have always been prized for its rigour and objectivity in analysing the natural world, providing theories and predictions that have been proven to work countless times. It is not difficult to see why humans would want to apply such a robust method to everything that they study, including the human society – so that they can generate useful findings that share the same objectivity and rigour as that of scientific claims. Hence, the positivist approach to social sciences was adopted to study human society in a scientific way, using graphs and statistics to quantify human behaviour. However, by adopting such a method, we inevitably lose some of the natural variance present in society and assume that there is a social reality that we can objectively study, which may not be the case as there is a qualitative difference between the natural world and social world.

First, unlike in the natural world, experiments concerning human society are practically impossible. Experiments are carried out in the natural sciences to verify or falsify a certain relationship postulated between two variables, by controlling all other variables involved and isolating the effects of the independent variable on the dependent. However, in a social world, the number of variables to be controlled far outnumbers what the social scientists can control and some just cannot be controlled. For example, to investigate the effect of upbringing on the academic success of a child, to strictly follow the Scientific Method would require social scientists to create two families that are identical except for the type of upbringing the parents offer to the child to isolate the relationship between the supposed dependent and independent variable. However, this is not only impractical, it also invites ethical debate on treating humans as just test subjects. Furthermore, even if identical conditions such as type of housing, quality of life, or number of siblings can be simulated, there are human factors that cannot be controlled by specification, for instance, the temperament of the child. Hence, setting up experiments to study human society is not possible given that the human world is so complex and multifaceted. Social

scientists are then forced to pick out natural case studies, but those do not come by often and will limit the amount of knowledge that social scientists can produce. Therefore, scientific experimentation cannot be wholly applied to the analysis of human society.

Next, to study human society scientifically, positivists often adopt the use of numbers and statistics to analyse correlations and trends, or quantify certain concepts. However, the usage of numbers, as interpretivists would argue, strip social phenomena of their meaning and motivations behind social actions. For instance, in the natural world, the fall of a comet can be quantified by the distance, speed at which the comet falls but in a social setting, one same action, the raising of a hand for example, can mean many different things – to ask for permission, to interrupt, to clarify something – and these are the meanings that should be investigated in the pursuit of knowledge of social science, instead of how many times hands have been raised or how fast a hand is being raised. More often than not, the reasons and motivations why a person acted a certain way tell us more about the social phenomenon than how often a person does them. Numbers also fail to capture the meaning of many abstract concepts, for example the concept of ‘power’ cannot be quantified using numbers from 1 to 10, not to mention the fact that different individuals will have different interpretations of how much ‘power’ each number on the scale represents, showing the inadequacy of using clinical, value-free methods of scientific analysis being applied to the study of human society.

Additionally, human society is constantly subjected to change and transformation, hence an attempt to study human society using scientific methods to gain some sort of generalisation will be unsuitable. Humans do not always act rationally as assumed in Economics, and may not be bound by the rules of a society. Humans are unpredictable and everyone may have a different response to a similar stimuli. Thus, studying effects of, say, a war on citizens of a country may not be able to yield significant statistical generalisations above the overall effects, because people are bound to have varying opinions that can hardly be quantified using scientific analysis.

Lastly, a social reality may not even exist to be studied or known scientifically. As mentioned, society is made up of unpredictable humans, and social norms and rules are constantly changing, for instance, in the political world or the anthropological world. The ever-changing nature of the social world suggests that society may not be bound by hard and fast rules that govern society, as August Comte believes. Terms used in the social scientific world or in society



can just be concepts constructed by humans, to better understand or explain the social world and what is going on around them. Moreover, the nature of the social world is double hermeneutic – such that the theories we learn and hold true will inevitably shape the world that we are trying to study. Hence, as the social world seems to be so elusive and ever-changing, affected by the theories that we attempt to come up with, a scientific approach, which strives for surety, generalisations, predictive ability and objectivity cannot be applied to the study of human society.

However, this is not to say that *nothing* can be known of human society through scientific analysis. While Science cannot fully capture the extent of complex human behaviour, attempts at analysing the human society using Science can still provide us with useful, applicable knowledge of human society in certain fields of social science. For instance, in Economics, while not all human beings act rationally, there tend to be general trends that large populations of people conform to, like when the price of a good increases, society tends to demand less of it naturally. Hence, while specific analysis of why each individual chose to do so is missing, in Economics, the Law of Demand is still a useful observation that can help predict market changes when price of something increases, and is a justified, true belief of the human society alike scientific facts. Thus, while scientific analysis of our human society cannot give specific predictions like it can in natural science, general trends and patterns can still be elicited through observations and less than perfect experiment conditions, giving rise to knowledge of human society.

In addition, we should consider the purpose of analysing human society scientifically. In the positivist approach to social science, the aim of scientific analysis is not to obtain 100% absolute laws that society lives by but to conclude plausible generalisations and relationships between factors in the social world. Hence, in this sense, where the term ‘analysis’ has been defined as the systematic observation of the human society, scientific analysis of the human world is still possible.

Last but not least, it is important to note that scientific analysis of a human society is rarely used on its own and is often corroborated with theoretical evidence and quantitative analysis to generate knowledge of society together. While scientific analysis may not be able to produce conclusive knowledge about human society due to the limitations mentioned, by cohering with other ‘facts’ established in the social scientific community, propositions put forth by scientific analysis can also be viewed as justified and true. Despite not knowing if a social

reality exists to be discovered, this does not compromise the applicability of knowledge obtained by scientific analysis, such as the applicability of Keynesian theory of Economics, and this part of human society can still be known to be true through its countless effective predictions of how the social world will react generally.

Therefore, while there are parts of the human society that cannot be analysed scientifically, for instance the purposes and emotions of social creatures, scientific analysis can still be used when investigating general trends of human behaviour to generate knowledge of human society. The extent to which scientific analysis can be used will then differ across different fields of social science, depending on the aims of the field.

**Examiner's Comments:**

*A very good response here, Joey! Squarely relevant essay that deals with the issue head on and spot on, demonstrating a clear understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge in Social Science. Examples provided are relevant, although the links to the argument can be clearer. Some really good insight was offered, too, but some could have been better explained. Overall, good job!*

**“Media regulation is needed now more than ever.” Discuss.**

“Exclusive! Exclusive! Read on to find out more!” How many times have we seen these types of headlines in the media today? In our newspapers, television and social media, these types of sensationalised headlines and stories which contain few truths dominate, misleading readers and advancing their own agendas. Given these problems, we are forced to consider media regulation as one way to resolve some of these issues. However, I would argue that despite serious problems observed, the media should not be subjected to more regulation, as the media serves a vital purpose in society, checking the government and supporting worthwhile causes. Furthermore, due to the rise of new media, it might be impossible to fully regulate media in this day and age.

Those who support the regulation of the media argues that it sows divisiveness amongst citizens and, if left unregulated, would do more harm than good. I agree that the media does cause harm at times and is guilty of advancing its own causes at the expense of social unity. For example, media outlets such as FOX News, an alternate right-wing news agency, were the loudest proponents of the conspiracy theory that then President Obama was a Muslim. FOX also reported on a “terrorist attack” in Sweden, to draw a link between mass migration and terrorism. While it was later found that no such attack had occurred, the report had caused irrevocable damage to relations between the already paranoid white community and the migrant population. This, in turn, resulted in an increasing amount of racial attacks on migrants by the alternate right, causing a climate of fear and mistrust amongst the American people. Perhaps, as Lee Kuan Yew once said, “freedom of the media” is really just “freedom of news editors to advance their own agenda”.

However, despite the damages that an unregulated media can cause, I believe that it is vital for the media to have enough freedom to carry out its functions. A truly free media can act as an important check and balance on the government, helping to convey the opinions of the public to those in power.

As the saying goes “Absolute power corrupts absolutely”; any government that can do as it wishes would not be beneficial to its citizens in the long run. The media, the government and the citizens are often said to form the three pillars of democracy. A government that is able to control the media would be able to control the flow of information to its citizens, advancing its own agenda through the media. One clear example would be North Korea, where the media is completely subservient to the Party and is used as a tool to brainwash and control its citizens. To prevent such an Orwellian scenario from occurring, the media must have a certain amount of freedom from regulations and government control.

Also, the media must have the ability and space to support and champion positive causes<sup>4</sup>. The media can unite people behind beneficial campaigns, such as the appeal for donations after the Nepal earthquake. A media that is not able to do so would not be as effective in causing change. For example, after the Rwandan killings, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) ran a story about the massacres. However, due to government regulations against blood and violence, the BBC was forced to censor the report, omitting many of the worst pictures and videos. This caused the public to think that the situation was not that serious and severely reduced the public outcry that would have followed, resulting in less action from the international community. This clearly shows that regulation, however well-intentioned, would hamper the ability of the media to effect change for positive causes. Thus, the media should not be further regulated.

Finally, we have to consider the feasibility of regulating the media today, especially social media. With the rise of new media, more and more people, especially the young, are getting their information from sites such as Twitter and Facebook instead of traditional newspapers and television. Whilst newspapers and television are relatively easy to regulate, with editors determining the types of information that are put out, new media is much more difficult to control. With new media, news are shared with a click of a button, making it nearly impossible to regulate the spread of information. On social media, bogus sites look as legitimate as real ones, with fake news - such

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<sup>4</sup> Editor’s comments: This is a statement on what the media should be able to do, in an ideal situation. It would help if this topic sentence, as well as the paragraph, explicitly engaged the question’s key term “now more than ever”. E.g. why is this championing of positive causes particularly necessary in today’s context?



as Donald Trump being endorsed by the Pope, a claim which was shared a million times - being disseminated quickly. Government regulations of online media is often inadequate; even supposedly fool proof firewalls are not 100% effective. A small change of a websites IP address would allow sites to circumvent bans and continue to operate. Thus, we can see that government regulation of the media is not entirely feasible.

In conclusion, although media could be used as a tool to sow divisiveness, I believe that it can also be used to do good, acting as a check and balance on the government and supporting worthwhile causes. Furthermore, I believe that complete regulation of the media is not feasible, especially new media, as it is impossible for anybody to completely suppress the flow of information online. Thus, I believe that the media should not be regulated.

**Comments:**

*Fluently argued. Your response shows good insight and a good range of examples was employed. Keep it up.*

**Consider the value of parks and natural spaces in your society.**

Within Bukit Timah Nature Reserve alone, there is a greater number of wildlife and plant species than there is in the entire North American continent<sup>5</sup>. This goes to show why Singapore is known for being one of the richest cities in the world in terms of its biodiversity, and this can only be attributed to the natural spaces and parks that serve as thriving ecosystems. These natural spaces might escape the minds of many, especially when it comes to talking about the future of the country and its development, and its value is often debated amongst various nature societies and the government. However, it is my firm belief that the parks and natural spaces in Singapore offer great value with regard to our country's growth and development.

In the past couple of decades alone, there have been multiple disputes regarding the conservation of our nature spaces. Such disputes can imply that we, as a society, do not value these spaces; and indeed, some of these debates have concluded in the destruction of precious bits of nature. This has caused many citizens to question the value of our nature spaces and many debates have hence taken place. One apt example is the whole controversy surrounding the development of Bukit Brown Cemetery into the expansion of a road in order to provide relief for traffic congestion. Bukit Brown was not only a cemetery, but it was also famous for its thriving biodiversity as many bird watching groups have gone there either to study the wildlife or just to enjoy the scenery. However, it was eventually decided that Bukit Brown had to make way for development. Currently, we also face the challenge of making the decision of whether the new Cross Island Line, a future train line, should be built through the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, cutting through part of the 0.3% of primary rainforest left in Singapore. These examples highlight how, in Singapore, our natural spaces and parks are seen to be of little value.

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<sup>5</sup> Editor's comments: This statistic has been both perpetuated and disputed, though researchers on both sides highlight that Bukit Timah, being in the tropics, certainly have more tree species than many temperate countries.

After all, our country is a small city facing issues like land scarcity, and we are in need of constant development for the future. Hence the value of our natural spaces is often questioned and pondered over, in lieu of new, urbanised areas.

However, there does seem to be hope in society's valuation of our natural spaces as Singapore continues its conservation and greening efforts due to new governmental policies and stronger advocacy from nature enthusiasts. We do, after all, dub ourselves the "City in a Garden". It is also one of the aims of our National Parks Board to transform Singapore into not just a city, but a garden with thriving nature as well. With these measures in place, there is hope for our untouched natural spaces as can be seen in the conservation of Chek Jawa Wetlands in Pulau Ubin. Just a decade ago, it was revealed that Chek Jawa was slated for development, which meant that Singapore was to lose one of her most valued and important natural spaces that also serves as a vital bird migration stopover. It was then when Ria Tan, one of our most active nature advocates, stepped up together with many others and managed to petition and convince the government to reconsider their plans. This was successful, resulting in the beautiful and thriving wetlands we have today. Another, also famed, natural space in Singapore has a different story to tell. This is the Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park. Unlike Chek Jawa, which was already a natural space to begin with, Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park was a canal, or a mere 'longkang', as the locals call it. It is a very apt example to show how the government places value on our natural spaces. In recent years, the government has decided to transform this huge canal into a beautiful park, with a stream running water right in the middle of it. This park can be said to be Singapore's most famous park, and moreover, it also serves as a flood control because the developers modelled it after the floodplains that occur naturally. It has been so successful that much wildlife has come to reside in it, with purple herons, hornbills, and not to mention regular visits from our beloved otters! The very fact that there is a strong voice in support of nature, coupled with the government's immense efforts in the park's development, that proves the high value and love Singaporeans have for nature.

Unbeknownst to many, Singapore's natural history has a huge part to play in our identity, showing that our natural spaces and parks do indeed offer value to our society. When it comes to national identity or concepts of a shared history, people often think of food, iconic playgrounds and perhaps the nostalgic five stones game our parents used to play. Little do our citizens think

of nature. However, nature does, arguably, have an important role to play in Singapore. Sir Stamford Raffles, whom many claim to have founded Singapore, was not just the person sent to colonise different places, but he was also a naturalist. He discovered many species in our region, including the elusive Raffles Banded Langur right here in Singapore. Alfred Wallace was another naturalist who described Singapore to be a place where most of his discoveries were made. During his short trip in Singapore back in the 1800s, he discovered hundreds of new species of beetles, marking Singapore's name in natural history. Our natural spaces such as our nature reserves and parks honour that part of our history. They remind us of our national identity as a "Wild City", as the legendary Sir David Attenborough puts it, and it is this special history that sets us apart from all other cities in the world; and just like how our heritage centres and spaces are valued for the reminders of our past, our natural spaces serve as good reminders, remnants and places of our living past. This makes natural spaces even more valuable and important in our society's steps toward the future.

Presenting a more futuristic perspective where society continuously makes leaps and bounds in technology, I argue that this can only further increase the value of our natural spaces and parks. Technological advancement and nature can co-exist and technology can be said to even raise the importance of nature. As residents of Singapore start to lead an increasingly sedentary life, where most of the work is done digitally, it is vital that they start to lead a more active lifestyle. That is where our parks come in. Parks and nature spaces are the ideal places for recreation, exercise, and bonding with family and friends. In fact, our Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong encouraged Singaporeans to adopt a more active lifestyle in his National Day Rally, in which he highlighted that one in three Singaporeans develop Type 2 Diabetes. He even posted pictures of himself in different parks on his social media to encourage people to go outdoors and have fun. These examples highlight the fact that we need these parks and green spaces now more than ever, given the kind of lifestyle that we lead. And as mentioned earlier, technology has also made us increasingly aware of our human impact on the environment. As climate change and global warming become serious issues on a global scale, Singapore is aiming to step up her game in promoting a more environmentally-friendly mindset and creating a culture of sustainability. With the Sustainable Singapore Blueprint being implemented a couple of years back, the government aims to educate its



citizens to start playing their part in creating a greener future. Our natural spaces and parks give people a reason to do so. As they feel a more personal connection when they visit these spaces, children are more inclined to grow up with an environment-centric mindset and adults are more willing to support efforts in sustainability. Many groups have started recently, such as the NUSToddycats and the Herpetological Society of Singapore, to start advocating for sustainability and conservation by using these spaces to take the public on walks to educate them of our precious biodiversity and nature. Without these spaces, the lifestyles and attributes of society would be negatively affected and it would be difficult to substitute the impact these spaces bring.

In conclusion, natural spaces and parks in Singapore are at times seen as a hindrance to our growing society as we face major problems like land scarcity; however, there is no doubt in the value of these spaces as they have played a great role in society, both in the past and in the present. Looking to the future, our natural spaces and parks have an evolving purpose to remind us of the importance of nature and to allow us to relax and lead healthy lifestyles. It is in these places where many find peace and solace from the city's hectic lifestyle, and take time to step back and appreciate the true, pristine nature of our home. Ultimately, the value of these spaces is hence determined by the needs of our society and our views toward them.

**Comments:**

*Good range of examples employed. Interesting perspectives adopted to show how the natural spaces and parks of Singapore contributed to society. Students are reminded, however, not to get too carried away with the description of the example. Rather, explicit links to the question should always be provided.*

2017 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 2 | Passages

Passage I

*Johnny Oleksinski explains why society has a poor opinion of millennials.*

Millennials<sup>6</sup> are the worst. I should know – I am one.

Recently, a colleague's comment hit me like a stray selfie stick: "I love being a millennial because it's so much easier to be better than the rest of our generation. Because they suck." She's right. We're bad. We're really bad.

Nonetheless, I fight back against the traits that have come to define millennials: entitlement, dependency, non-stop complaining, laziness, Kardashians. People like me are called "old souls" or "26-going-on-76". We're chided by our peers for silly things such as enjoying adulthood and commuting to a physical office. Contentment has turned us into lepers. Or worse: functioning human beings. This is my number one rule: Do whatever millennials don't. Definite no-nos include quitting a job or relationship the moment my mood drops from ecstatic to merely content; expecting the world to kowtow to my every childish whim; and assuming that I am always the most fascinating person in the room.

Millennials are obsessed with their brand. They co-opted the term from Apple and Xerox to be – like so many other things – all about them. The trouble is that a young person's brand rarely extends beyond a screen: Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn<sup>7</sup>, YouTube. When you meet them, they're never quite as witty, attractive or entrepreneurial as they seem on Facebook.

The social awkwardness of 20-somethings is a problem caused by two enemies: egos and smartphones. But to be a good networker – still the best way to secure a job – you need to stop filtering mediocre selfies, look up from your device and string together a few words with strangers. Preferably, words about them.

The self-obsession doesn't go down well at the office, either. Employers are terrified of millennials. They're serial job hoppers: 21 percent of the commitment-phobes leave their job after less than a year; 60 percent are open to it. Think of it as binge-working. And once they do land their dream job? They want to work from their apartment. A US study said work-life balance drives the career choices of 75 percent of millennials. In my experience, however, the balance generally tilts toward wherever you can type in your T-shirt and shorts.

The situation looks bleak – but we can turn it around, millennials. Stop blaming everybody. Don't blame the economy, your employer, the media, your mom, the weatherman, George R. R. Martin<sup>8</sup>. By absolving ourselves of responsibility, we've become forever 8-year-olds, tattling on the world in hopes it will better our situation. It won't. It will only make it crummier.

<sup>6</sup> There are multiple definitions of the millennial (also known as "Gen Y") age bracket, but most tend to fall within the "born between 1980 to 2000" range.

<sup>7</sup> Professional networking site that helps individuals connect with other professionals in their industry.

<sup>8</sup> Author most well-known for the "Game of Thrones" series of books.

Stop being so insular. Stop curating your social media accounts – where most of your interaction takes place – to be in total agreement with your opinions. Most of the world doesn't think the way you do. Try empathy on for size. Befriend some dissenters, grab a beer with them. Listen to what they have to say.

Stop waiting around for something big to happen. Getting a job is hard. Primping your LinkedIn account and hoping your God-given greatness will finally be recognised by everybody else will get you zip, zilch, zero. You need to leave your apartment, meet people, be assertive, interested, open. I've gotten full-time jobs by sitting at bars and dancing at wedding receptions.

Fellow millennials, I want to like you. I really do. But you make it near impossible sometimes.



## **Passage 2**

### ***Sam Tanenhaus challenges the negative stereotypes about millennials.***

Suddenly, millennials are everywhere. Not that this group was ever invisible. What's changed is their status. Coddled and helicoptered, catered to by 24-hour TV cable networks, fussed over by marketers and college recruiters, dissected by psychologists, demographers and trend-spotters, the millennial generation has come fully into its own.

Why this microscopic attention? One answer is that millennials, the first people to come of age in the 21st century, with its dizzying rate of technological change, have been forced to invent new ways of navigating it. What else sets millennials apart? The usual answer seems to be "narcissism" – self-absorption indulged to comical extremes: the breathlessly updated Facebook profile, the cascade of selfies, the Kardashians.

But a very different picture emerges from the Pew Research Center's reports on millennials. What Pew found was not an entitled generation but a complex and introspective one. Its members have weathered large public traumas: the terrorist attacks of September 11, costly (and unresolved) wars, the Great Recession, the flood of images of Iraq and Katrina... For a generation reared on apocalyptic videos and computer-generated movie epics, these events showed the real world to be as easily disrupted as the virtual one, even as the grown-ups in charge seemed overwhelmed and overmatched, always a step behind.

It is no surprise that the millennial generation is sceptical of institutions – political and religious – and prefers to improvise solutions to the challenges of the moment. In a range of areas, millennials have not only caught up, but have jumped out in front. Consider their approach to the workplace. Thanks to the 2008 economic crash, millennials know how fleeting wealth can be. Their solution? Acquire not more, but less. A report by the Brookings Institution<sup>9</sup> noted that almost two-thirds of millennials said they would rather make \$40,000 a year at a job they love than \$100,000 a year at a job they think is boring.

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<sup>9</sup> ***Non-profit public policy organisation that conducts research leading to new ideas that aim to solve problems facing society at the local, national and global level.***

Even in the realm of fashion, many are indifferent to prestige brands and lavish advertising campaigns, preferring to get “disposable” clothing at H&M or Zara that is claimed to be “completely free of pesticides, chemicals and bleach”. The do-goodish pitch is aimed squarely at millennials, who collectively favour companies that embrace the values of good citizenship. And consider food. The new generation may have had health-consciousness drilled into them from young, but they have raised it to a new level. “For millennials, food isn’t just food. It’s community”, The Washington Post recently reported, highlighting the Silver Diner chain, which has developed a locavore<sup>10</sup> menu and started catering to those on vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free diets.

Taken together, these habits and tastes look less like narcissism than communalism. And its highest value isn’t self-promotion, but its opposite, empathy – an open-minded and open-hearted connection to others. Indeed, millennials have made social media, with its many opportunities for “oversharing” self-display, a means of communication that pushes outward, instead of turning inward. Brandon Stanton, a 30-year-old former bond trader and self-taught camera portraitist, has created a famous example in “Humans of New York”. His popular photo blog, featuring ordinary people and interviews about their lives, gives dignity to what might otherwise be forgotten faces in the urban crowd.

Empathy was a theme sounded repeatedly by the millennials interviewed for this article. One said he hoped to succeed because “the better you’re doing, the more you can share with other people.” Another pointed out that while he was nursed on the traditional American dream – “if you worked hard, got good grades and did all the right stuff, you would succeed” – he has developed a more pragmatic version suited to 21st century economic realities: “I know that as hard as I work, I very well may fail. And it’s liberating to know that.” The key word is “liberating”. In the age of the start-up, of fortunes gained and lost overnight, of flawed ideas in need of continual debugging and re-tweaking, failure is the default outcome and, at times, the ground zero of eventual triumph.

No wonder, then, that “millennials are the nation’s most dogged optimists”, as Pew reported. “They believe their own best days are ahead.” They, and we, can expect some less-than-best days, too. Cultural transformations are seldom cost-free. And they’re not always permanent. Indeed, a new generation is growing up in the world the millennials have made and may already be working on its own revision of the nation’s moral life.

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<sup>10</sup> A person who makes an effort to eat food that is grown, raised, or produced locally.



Oleksinski and Tanenhaus have differing views about millennials in terms of their personal characteristics and their relationship with wider society. How applicable are these views to you and your society? Support your answer with reference to both passages.

Both authors have touched on pertinent points relating to how a millennial in a developed country might behave, given their preoccupation with personal devices and technologies that they can access. However, some perspectives ascribed to millennials in the American society may not necessarily hold true in a relatively more traditional and conservative society like Singapore.

In paragraph 6, Oleksinski argues that the inability for young millennials, fresh out of school, to communicate with others is caused by two main factors: “egos and smartphones”. This is highly applicable to Singapore, given that it is a Smart Nation<sup>11</sup>, and many of the younger generation are the ones who are permanently preoccupied with their phones. In fact, Singapore’s internet penetration rate is approximately 82%, and according to some studies, our social media use is around 77%, comparable to tech-savvy countries like South Korea. And with the prevalence of “phubbing” that we often see on trains with young 20-somethings completely absorbed in their virtual worlds, it is not hard to believe that even the most basic interactions one can have in the public sphere, such as giving up a seat on public transport for the elderly, have been foiled because all their attention is focused on their screens. Moreover, given the number of cases of derisive rants about races or social class that have gone viral locally, such as the one where a millennial had asked others to “get out of her elitist face”, it is clear that some young Singaporeans are spending much time on social media and merely airing their own views rather than engaging others in person. Such attitudes have warped their perspectives of the world, making them tone-deaf to the concerns of those around them and lost as to how to interact with others,

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<sup>11</sup> Editor’s comment: The notion of a ‘Smart Nation’ is not merely one of people owning smartphones; it is a government initiative to use infocomm technologies (including smartphones) to address global urban challenges.

especially those not from their age group. This, no doubt, contributes to their social awkwardness in real life.

On the other hand, in paragraph 7, Tanenhaus argues that the millennial perspective has changed from the traditional American drift, shifting from believing that hard work guarantees success to thinking that working hard might still cause them to fail, and that “it’s liberating to know that”. While this might hold true in America, where markers for success have diversified to influence sporting and artistic excellence, on top of a strong start-up culture like Silicon Valley that encourages youths to dream of alternatives, this does not meld with most of the Singaporean context that nurtures our millennials. In the time when millennials were born and growing, that is the 1980s to 2000s, the focus on academic excellence was not only heavy, it was also exclusive in many ways. With the advent of education policies like streaming and the Gifted Education Programme, the youths of that time would no doubt have been weaned on the idea that doing well at school and being diligent put them on the straight-and-narrow road to success. This ties in with the oft-championed narrative of meritocracy, where assuming that equality of opportunity existed, people are expected to remember that working hard was the only way up. Moreover, given that our society still often holds to traditional makers of success like being a lawyer or an engineer, the fact that we do not yet have as vibrant a start-up culture or as plentiful venture capitalists as they do now in America, only further reinforces old perspectives of success. Thus, the shift in the idea of the road to success, and what success itself entails, is not quite as applicable to the Singaporean society.

In conclusion, many of the behavioural traits mentioned by Oleksinski of millennials, especially those pertaining to technology use is applicable to this context too. However, Tanenhaus’ optimism rooted in a society that is still fundamentally different from the Singaporean one makes his arguments less applicable, at least in the present.

**Comments:**

*This is consistently cogent and convincing.*

*Ideas are not only well-developed, but showing sophistication and an assured grasp of underlying issues and conditions influencing millennials here.*



Oleksinski and Tanenhaus have differing views about millennials in terms of their personal characteristics and their relationship with wider society. How applicable are these views to you and your society? Support your answer with reference to both passages.

Firstly, Oleksinski and Tanenhaus clash over the focus of millennials. While Oleksinski argues that millennials are “insular” and “obsessed with their brand”, Tanenhaus counters by citing that millennials care very much about the larger communities and repercussions when making decisions. In response, I agree largely with Oleksinski’s view. While millennials do purport to care about the environment, or specific “less privileged communities”, many such claims and actions undertaken to assert these claims are mostly with the aim of improving social standing, and advancing individual status. For example, in Singapore, shops selling everything “cool” from acai bowls to freshly-pressed kale juice have been warmly embraced by millennials – not with the goal of health, or community development, but for that amazing Instagram photo with good mood lighting to “post on my main [Instagram account]”. Rather than being framed as environmentally-friendly alternatives, salad bowls and other cool getups are used to frame carefully curated social media feed. In fact, many of such fad foods are not actually environmentally-friendly or community-friendly – quinoa and acai sourced from South America requires transport via plane, and with it tonnes of carbon emissions, while cheap “pesticide-free clothing” tends to employ exploited, underpaid Bangladeshi workers. In fact, many local millennials still aspire to branded goods, such as Chanel and Bulgari, or their more contemporary iterations, popular streetwear brands such as Supreme and Vetements, to furnish their wardrobe and improve their self-image. As such, millennial focus is very much centred on self-promotion rather than communal improvement.

Additionally, Oleksinski describes millennials as serial pessimists who blame just about everybody, whereas Tanenhaus states that they are “the ... most dogged optimists” and “believe [that] their own best days are ahead”. Once again, I largely agree with Oleksinski’s view. While it may be a product of Singapore’s



already-established “complaining” culture, the need to complain seems to have expounded in the millennial generation, and manifested in various forms commonly perceived as trendy. “Low key wanna die” and “it’s tough” have formed popular, even ironic catch-phrases commonly tossed around the school population. The need to complain about insignificant injustices and portray one’s life as boring, depressing and without life (at least, privately) has arguably been necessary to fit in with the larger community beset with the copious demands of schoolwork, and bogged down by the rigid examination framework. With Trump as the leader of the “free” world, and perceived backward democratic systems in Singapore (which differ greatly from liberal democratic ones), many millennials have taken to social media networking sites to complain – such as in the wake of the recent presidential election, or lack thereof – but take no action to attempt effecting change in the political system, because we are ultimately powerless and excluded from the complex governmental machinery. With rampant disillusionment and a doggedly depressed mood, it can be said that millennials are generally pessimistic who prefer to blame their injustices on others.

Lastly, Oleksinski argues that millennials are poor interactors because they only communicate via social media, while Tanenhaus argues that millennials are adept at it, and harness social media to reach out to others. In this respect, I agree with Tanenhaus. While millennials do spend an (overly) long time on social media platforms, social media has also emerged as a new avenue and platform for social discourse. While Halimah Yaacob’s ascent to the presidency did spark many complaints and jabs, many millennials, including my friends, took their ruminations over national identity, meritocracy and race to Facebook and Instagram. While social media may not be perfect, it provides an open, accessible platform for millennials to espouse their views and engage with those with different viewpoints, at least in Singapore. I may even so far to argue that it sharpens the mind and encourages millennials to communicate their ideas, and to go on doing so in real life. As such, given millennials’ ability to make use of social media to exchange views and even carry on discussions in real life in Singapore, millennials can generally be viewed as good and willing conversationalists instead of poor ones.

**Comments:**

*An enjoyable read! Sardonic too! Lots of spark here with a good degree of consistency shown in monitoring and deliberating points raised with rich examples to boot as well.*



**‘City living is becoming undesirable’. Do you agree?**

“Gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, I must have you.” This epigraph from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel ‘The Great Gatsby’ exemplifies the ideal ‘American Dream’ depiction of city living – wealth, social mobility, as well as the fulfilment of fervent desires – the belief that the Western American cities in the 1920s presented vast opportunities for prosperity. Today, major cities in the world still remain the desired destinations for many, given that, just like in the past, ‘city living’ genuinely offers material fulfilment, such as job opportunities. On the other hand, city living is becoming undesirable in an unprecedented way – the city lifestyles of today can take a psychological, physical, and ironically, even a financial toll on its inhabitants. Thus, while city living continues to promise opportunities for its residents, its costs and harms may outweigh its benefits and thus, ‘city living’ may indeed be becoming less ideal in a way that far surpasses that of the past.

Just like in the past, major cities offer immense opportunities to its inhabitants, and for those seeking material prosperity, city living may seem ideal. The higher levels of education and employment opportunities, as well as access to symbols of wealth and the “high-bouncing” life – such as branded bags, sports cars, mansions and the like – show how city living remains ideal if one desires material fulfilment. In Singapore, high levels of education enable those living in the city access to higher-paying jobs, with “big money” jobs such as becoming lawyers or doctors amassing as much as over \$4000 in their starting pay. This is similar to the employment scene in China, where people from the rural areas flock to major cities like Shenzhen and Beijing, evidence of how city living is evidently seen to be the way to a more prosperous life. Citing a historical example, the positive perception of city living’s opportunities today is as in the past, during which we witnessed the mass migration of Poles, Serbs and other neighbouring peoples into Germany in the 1960s. Due to the rapid industrialisation of cities in Germany, industries became labour-intensive and for those seeking job opportunities in Germany, city living represented the

hope of a city income and the means to escape from the poverty of their war-stricken homelands. Therefore, just like in the past, city living is perceived to represent immense opportunities, and for those that desire prosperity, remains a desirable option.

In reality, however, city living is inseparable from the various physical costs of living in an increasingly polluted environment due to industrialisation and is thus undesirable. Ironically, the very advancement of technology that makes city living seem an attractive idea also contributes to massive amounts of pollution, which in turn becomes a huge health risk for city-dwellers. In today's world, powerful corporations own thousands of large-scale factories that emit harmful gases such as carbon monoxide into the atmosphere during production – the very same companies that offer all those job opportunities are ruining the lives of their workers at the same time. Since city living is quite inseparable from industrial areas, inhabitants of cities are often at risk of inhaling polluted air or drinking contaminated water. One good example would be the city of Shanghai, in China, where the Pollution Index<sup>12</sup> can reach up to 400 – way above the acceptable limit of 150. This means that 'city living' may also entail such health risks that could offset any semblance of prosperity or material gains. Another example would be the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster<sup>13</sup> in Japan in 2011. Even though the nuclear power plant was far away from the more densely populated city areas, its breakdown and emission of radiation following the 2011 earthquake still had an adverse effect on city-dwellers miles away, with hundreds being hospitalised due to over-exposure to radiation. It is not that all inhabitants necessarily face such pollution, but city living inextricably creates these health risks, in that it relies on pollutive technological and industrial processes necessary for rapid growth. Thus, the various potential health risks associated with city living may diminish its promise of a better life, making it undesirable.

Furthermore, city living, due to its fast pace of life and immense competition, has also become synonymous with high stress levels, fatigue and a psychological toll on its inhabitants. In the unrelenting race for economic prosperity, the obsession with material gains, and indeed the very jobs that epitomise economic opportunity themselves may create negative consequences that far

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<sup>12</sup> Strictly speaking, Shanghai uses the Air Quality Index (AQI).

<sup>13</sup> Nuclear plant accidents are a fairly rare occurrence for cities; consider a more commonplace example of pollution to make your evidence more representative.



outweigh their promise of material success. In our increasingly globalised world today, the stifling competition makes it harder and harder to find jobs – perhaps invalidating the appeal of city living – further adding on to the high stress levels. For instance, in Japan, the exponential rise in the number of “ka-rou-shi” cases – fatigue-related deaths – is a worrying phenomenon that can be traced back to the very nature of ‘city living’. In cities like Tokyo, staff often work overtime almost every day of the week, and a tragic but unsurprising number eventually collapse due to stress, fatigue, or other psychological or physiological factors. This is also reflected in the high suicide rates in Japan – one of the highest in the entire world<sup>14</sup>. In this case, ‘city living’ and the immensely demanding lifestyle it entails may seem like a poor deal as it leads one to pursue economic achievement at the expense of health and welfare. The lifestyle associated with ‘city living’ has become clearly undesirable in how it sacrifices the emotional and psychological welfare of its inhabitants for the now increasingly limited economic opportunities it promises.

Finally, the perceived charm of better pay, more goods and services and a higher standard of living is offset by the skyrocketing costs of ‘city living’ in recent years, effectively rendering city living ‘undesirable’ as the initial promise of making dreams of material attainment come true is now becoming increasingly diluted by the financial costs of living in major cities. Due to the rapid development of cities, vital resources such as land grow less day by day, driving up prices for the likes of housing, increasing the costs of living. For example, in Hong Kong, housing prices are exorbitantly high and it is not uncommon for couples to stay with their in-laws or parents even after marriage simply to save housing costs. In Singapore, the huge outcry in response to Minister Josephine Teo’s comments that “not much space is needed to have sex” when urging Singaporeans to increase the birth rate also reflects how those living in Singapore evidently do not feel that they have the necessary space and resources required in starting a family. This possibly shows how ‘city living’ is in fact becoming less and less livable in recent years due to the high costs of housing resulting from depleting resources, such as land, especially for small, land-scarce cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

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<sup>14</sup> Japan is a country rather than a city. Thus, this sentence is unnecessary as it does not advance the argument about cities being stressful.

In conclusion, city living continues to be perceived as an ideal, especially in terms of the opportunities that it provides and the possibilities of material success. In reality, though, the various prices that its inhabitants pay – in many ways – may make it undesirable, especially in the long term, when resources grow scarcer gradually. Therefore, city living is indeed becoming, and will continue to grow more ‘undesirable’.

### **Comments:**

*Reasonably thoughtful response that recognises the “dual” nature of cities though such weighing was more successful in the first third of the essay. Nonetheless, still a very good response, well-balanced and containing generally strong illustration.*

*Excellent language overall, with good variation in sentence structure. Vocabulary is decent. Structure of essay is quite good, though stronger, more strategic use of inter/ intra-paragraph connectors and transitions would add just that extra quality.*

**‘The best way to combat climate change is through education.’ Discuss.**

In 2006, politician Al Gore released the documentary ‘An Inconvenient Truth’, detailing the irreversible effects of climate change on global ice caps and on future generations. The intent was to bring forward the pertinence of climate change to the forefront of our consciousness, and to establish consensus amongst the masses. Still, even as our knowledge of climate change has increased through various forms of education, individuals, firms and nations have hardly been aroused to establish an effective counter to climate change. Indeed, while education allows us to form a consensus on the issue, it is hardly the best way to combat climate change.

It is true that educating the masses on climate change is important, for it achieves the first step of helping the public bridge consensus and identify the issue. In tackling any global problem, it is crucial to define the causes and substance at hand. Such is the case with climate change, where society remains divided on the topic due to the propagation of conspiracy theories and conflicting data. In reality, the scientific community has already established universal consensus on the issue – that climate change is real and is fuelled by anthropogenic factors. Through raising awareness on the causes and consequences by means of public talks and campaigns, along with formal education, basic facts and figures can be made known to the public. Furthermore, the fact that governments and schools emphasise climate change stresses the importance of the issue, such that the public does not treat the issue lightly. For instance, the United State’s National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) regularly publishes satellite images of the changing density of ice caps along with atmospheric data. By being publicly accessible, the statistics reveal to us the actual extent of the problem. For concerned citizens, these statistics would act as the motivating factor to minimise their carbon footprint. For the indifferent, such education at least serves to stem misinformation. Only when the public all agrees on the urgency of climate change can collective action be provoked and be targeted. Hence,

education is at least an effective way to raise awareness on the issue for future actions to be undertaken.

However, education is ineffectual in combatting climate change because it is difficult to effect change in people's habits. The Pew Research Centre published a survey on millennial attitudes to climate change – while many are knowledgeable on the subject and are even concerned about it, very few actually change their lifestyles in response. Today's capitalist architecture means we often prioritise the individual over the whole, and self-interest over interdependence. We primarily see ourselves as consumers who seek to maximise our own benefit through excessive consumption. This feeds into the actions of firms, who base their production activity on consumer trends resulting in an ecosystem which promotes wasteful spending and production. For instance, in India, even with the introduction of energy labelling of technology products to educate consumers on the products' eco-friendliness, there is no visible change in purchasing trends. Given that we abide by self-interest, we take no regard in how our current behaviour may adversely affect the future state of the environment. Furthermore, our individual lifestyle changes often result in ambiguous and intangible changes in the moment, resulting in a lack of motivation to short-change oneself for the sake of the environment. In Singapore, most families still perceive cars as the more convenient mode of transport. Despite repeated governmental urging and press reporting on how public transport reduces our aggregate carbon footprint, the sentiment that it is necessary to own a car has remain unchanged. Hence, education certainly cannot be the best way to counter climate change given its impotence in influencing behavioural changes.

Furthermore, educating the masses cannot be the best way to combat climate change because firms are the main culprits of climate change. A whopping 70% of global emissions can be attributed to 100 companies. Manufacturing, deforestation and logging are production activities undertaken by firms, not individuals, who are only interested in fulfilling their corporate agenda and not the green agenda. Educating the public to adopt green practises like recycling amounts to nothing should the large-scale activities of firms continue. Even then, governments do try to educate business owners on sustainable practises through guidelines instituted by national agencies. However, this form of education remains ineffectual because firms can decide to do nothing with the information



as they fundamentally do not have the incentive to switch to expensive but sustainable production methods amidst rivalry between businesses. For example, while more sustainable oil rigging methods have existed in the market for a long time, the Royal Dutch Shell Company remains oblivious to their presence, instead choosing low-cost production methods in Ogoniland in Nigeria. Their aggressive exploitation of oil in Ogoniland was of serious environmental damage to the air conditions, so much so that the natives protested against the local government. Interestingly, it was only with concrete measures like lawsuits and public backlash that Shell decided to step back and pledge to using more sustainable practises in its production. Clearly, education is a soft measure that does not legally bind firms to action, who remain devoted to the profit motive. Hence, given the resistance of firms to education, and the fact that they are the main perpetrators of climate change, education is hardly the best way to combat climate change.

Lastly, education for the masses and even firms on climate change is ineffective as governments often do not take the lead in spearheading the fight against climate change. While education is effective in ensuring general awareness among the population, the hard and concrete actions against climate change are at the level of policy. It is fundamentally up to the politicians to regulate the production activity of firms, to impose carbon taxes and further promote individual habits. An environmentally conscious population amounts to nothing when politicians' inaction dominates. For instance, when President Obama tried to roll out a set of climate change bills, the Republican-controlled senate blocked it through filibustering, resulting in a diluted and ineffective set of environmental regulations today. Furthermore, when politicians refuse to take the lead, it reverses the work of education for the public will not see the importance of tackling climate change. The anti-climate change rhetoric of President Trump has allowed for anti-climate change arguments to gain traction in the USA. When governments remain stubborn in prioritising other government agenda, the educated individual cannot effect change alone. It is the collective action of government, firms and individuals that constitutes an effective frontier against climate change. Therefore, the inaction of governments renders the effects of education futile in tackling climate change given the key responsibility and role that governments are conferred in leading the war against climate change.

In conclusion, while education allows the populace to identify and define climate change, education cannot do much beyond that. Education alone is not the optimal answer to addressing the global problem especially when education fails to effect behavioural change in a consumerist age. The indifference of firms and the inaction of politicians prove that education does not result in a concerted fight against climate change. Fundamentally, there is no best way to combat these perennial issues, as such an effort requires soft measures like education, coupled with hard measures like carbon taxes, legislation and international cooperation.

### **Comments:**

*There is a consistent focus on the question, keeping education firmly in your evaluation, even as you discuss other methods. A good range of illustration is evident, although there are some areas where depth could have been better.*

*Excellent language and control throughout, with evident economy of expression without loss of effectiveness.*

**Discuss the claim that the digital age has made it more challenging for political leaders to govern today.**

The onset of the digital revolution has allowed most parts of the world to reap the benefits of greater convenience, a wider range of entertainment and a greater sense of interconnectedness with the world. Businesses and individuals have both embraced the emergence of a digital age which have contributed to the improvement of both material and non-material standard of living. However, the digital age may not be equally welcomed in the political realm. Some have argued that it has added to the complexity of politics, making it harder to govern in today's day and age because of the uncontrolled flow of information and the power of anonymity. Optimists, on the other hand, think that the digital age still contributes some benefits to politicians. I believe that the digital age has ultimately benefitted the realm of politics, but has made it more challenging because of its benefits.

The digital age has undoubtedly enabled greater accessibility. Politicians have increased interaction with the general public and the public are more frequently in contact with their leaders. This has made it easier for politicians to govern because they are positioned to be better able to understand the needs and concerns of the citizens. The creation of social media accounts of prominent politicians on Facebook and Twitter has allowed citizens to directly contact them by dropping them a direct message, or the simple act of sending a message to their corporate e-mail can get the job done as well. Politicians are no longer seen as distant authoritative figures, but leaders who are willing to listen to the people and meet their needs. Online feedback platforms such as The Straits Times forum have also allowed leaders greater awareness of issues on ground level, instead of governing from their 'ivory tower'. Policies can thus better suit their needs. Vice versa, citizens can also gain better awareness of political activities. The Instagram account of our President, Halimah Yacob, frequently uploads posts to announce important ground events or meetings with world leaders. In fact, the government can use technology as a tool for propaganda, as

seen through the state control of the national newspaper The Straits Times, making it easier to sell their politically unpopular but economically beneficial policies, and thus making their job easier, as well as encouraging active participation in politics.

Furthermore, the digital age has allowed, free, unregulated flow of information, with the creation of the internet and convenient gadgets to access it. This has the benefit of educating the general public as information is readily available at the tap of a finger. It is also beneficial to countries with a democratic form of government, where the majority decides the outcome. The majority thus needs to be equipped with all the necessary information in order to decide what would be the best outcome for their country. A common example would be elections. Citizens are able to gain information about the goals of politicians and determine if the latter would be a right fit for them, and gain a deeper understanding of what they stand for. In contrast, having uninformed voters would result in disastrous outcomes like Brexit, where British politicians are struggling to execute the decision the public has arrived at while economists have criticised it as detrimental to the economy. Thus, it has become much easier for political leaders to govern as the public is more educated, especially on politically contentious topics, and easing the implementation of politically unpopular decisions, such as the Goods and service Tax (GST) hike.

However, there are two sides to a coin. The digital age has also made it more challenging to govern as it has enabled the spread of ideas and ideologies that may be counter to the official narrative or mandate. For example, lack of traditional gatekeeping in digital platforms has allowed the liberalism in the US to catch on in Singapore, with more people becoming aware of issues never thought of in such a conservative society, like the LGBT community and same-sex marriages. This has led to the organisation of Pink Dot, greater protests to laws such as Section 377A, and calls to make applications of same-sex marriages (and family building) possible. The digital age has also made it easier to rally and unite people, allowing the formation of various communities that stand for a common interest. Politicians now have to take into account a broader spectrum of views, making the enacting of policies tougher. This has made it more challenging as lawmakers and politicians now have to debate on such issues and possibly change the constitution. The digital age also threatens the kingdoms of the Middle East which are largely conservative, or communist states like China



and North Korea, which have enacted harsher clampdowns in light of the freer flow and exchange of information characteristic of the digital age.

There is also the new, looming threat of terrorism. The spread of liberal ideas may be beneficial in bringing about better change and freedom, but the spread of extremist ideas will inevitably lead to radicalisation. The digital age has made it harder to regulate the kind of context exposure the citizens are getting, and too much regulation would be an infringement of personal privacy, which would incense the citizens. It has also led to greater government surveillance of the people ever since the 9/11 attacks, which led to the establishment of the US Patriot Act. However, the Snowden revelations had caused outcry at how much privacy is being invaded, seeing the amount of information the National Security Agency was holding on to. The tensions between individual freedom and the amount of power vested in the state is thus becoming harder to navigate, with the compromise between privacy and security always proving to be a contentious issue.

Lastly, the digital age has brought about a new problem – fake news. The difficulty of verifying information from anonymous accounts, and the inability of some to differentiate truths from untruths have contributed to the frustrations of political leaders. The digital age has enabled the fabrication of information such as videos and pictures, further fuelling the fire. The biases and prejudices tilts information to their favour and withholds certain aspects of truth so voters are not as informed as they would like to be. This can be seen in the recent US presidential elections, with news outlets like the BBC and the CNN being accused of favouring the democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and thus producing articles and videos that are detrimental to the popularity over Trump. The concept of anonymity in the digital age has also led to the difficulty of verifying first-hand accounts, allowing fake news to very quickly spiral out of control. This has made it difficult for politicians to govern because information online can be false or one-dimensional, polarising communities. With the echo chamber effect on social media, citizens are dangerously caught in their own filter bubble and become increasingly unable to discern the news. This will eventually culminate in social tensions either in various communities or targeted at the leaders in question, upsetting the political stability as citizens demand for action to be taken although they do not demand the full picture. Being a government that is ostensibly “for the people”, decisions become politically difficult to make, like

the eradication of the Second Amendment in the wake of the Florida School Shooting.

In conclusion, the digital age has brought about greater access to information, which can lead to the betterment of society, and greater improved relations between the leaders and the public, easing tensions through dialogue and better assessment of ground tensions or concerns. The spread of liberal ideas may be detrimental to certain forms of governments, including that of Singapore. However, it has also enabled greater understanding of human rights, and has allowed people to fight for their rights through the organisation of themselves into communities or rallies. Although it has become more politically challenging to govern, it is the duty of the leaders to navigate these grey areas well, with sufficient foresight to make the right decisions such as changing constitutional laws, as well as take into consideration all the various views of the people, since it is their obligation to look after and maximise the welfare of the people. Indeed, it is not easy to be a politician; it is a difficult and often thankless job. However, change can be for the better, and leaders should embrace this.

### **Comments:**

*Fluently written, though a little wordy at times.*

*Relevant arguments and examples. Still, in paragraph 5 there is some confusion about what exactly the focus is: restricting radical content or surveillance of citizens? The student makes a link between the two that needs to be more clearly explained and explored.*

**To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the arts, such as music or photography?**

Technology is often criticised for “ruining everything”. Can this be said of the arts as well? To sufficiently answer this question, one should look at the various impacts that technology has had on the arts – on its quality, its accessibility, and public interest in it. Technology such as the Internet or other inventions may be seen as products of scientific innovation, while the arts may be seen as the literary, visual or performing arts. To a small extent, technology has indeed compromised the quality of art in some cases. Ultimately, however, technology has had many positive impacts on the accessibility of the arts, interest in the arts and the advancement of the arts. It can thus be said that technology has had an overall positive impact on the arts, rather than a negative one.

As mentioned previously, technology can decrease the quality of art. Technology has brought about the rise of social media platforms, on which many artists publish their work, be they bands like Boyce Avenue or rising poets. Often, the intentions of these artists is to get noticed as fast as possible by as many people as possible, especially on platforms like YouTube on which views are monetised, increasing the incentive of artists to get as many “likes”, views and subscribers as they can. This can lower the quality of art in two ways: firstly, any art produced will likely pander to the masses in order to attract attention. The less-than-sincere intent of the artist may result in art not following one of its purposes, which is to express an artist’s genuine intentions, thus compromising the quality of art. Secondly, since there are no checks for quality on the Internet (unlike art exhibitions or performances which have curators or other forms of quality control), poorly-executed art may be proliferated. “Insta-poet” (“Instagram poet”) Rupi Kaur is often accused of being “Instagram famous” despite her poetry not being up to standard. Indeed, many of her works are one or two lines long, and are not particularly insightful or original. She even has faced accusations of plagiarism before. Yet fans are drawn to her Instagram page and fork out money for her poetry anthologies. In this way we can see how technology has

compromised the quality of art by enabling social media, which tends to incentivise artists not to create their best works. This decreases the quality of art, constituting a negative impact on the arts.

However, the rise of social media due to technology does not only result in negative impacts on the arts. It may well be true that poor quality art has become more prevalent due to social media and the Internet, but the Internet also enables good artists to practice their art, even for a living. This can work in various ways. Firstly, the internet and social media allow artists to be “discovered” online, by art galleries or record labels. This helps the artist in question to access work opportunities and thus earn income from making their art, enabling them to practice their art more often. For example, Tumblr artist Viktoria Ridzel posted “fanart” of her favourite book series (Percy Jackson and the Olympians) online. The author of the series, Rick Riordan, ended up employing her to do official character illustrations. Secondly, other than being “discovered”, artists can also utilise crowdfunding platforms to earn income from their art. Nebula Awards-nominated Singaporean author JY Yang has a Patreon to raise money for the writing process. Similarly, skilled a cappella group Pentatonix often does fundraising online for their music videos. Ultimately, technology allows artists to make money from their art more easily than before, especially in the case of crowdfunding where “middlemen” are largely eliminated. This enables more people to dedicate themselves to their art forms and promote their work, thus constituting a positive impact on the arts.

We can also examine the impact of Internet technology from the point of view of the audience and viewers of art. Before recent advances in technology, the viewing of art was largely confined to physical arts spaces. Should a person have no money to watch “The Nutcracker” at the Royal Ballet House, or lack the time to travel to see a musician in action, then that person was simply out of luck. He would not be able to access the arts; he may not even be aware of the arts events around him too. Technology has greatly changed these circumstances. Though of course some art remains behind paywalls, it is now possible to view and experience the arts online. The Vaganova Ballet YouTube channel has many videos and snippets of their performances. Similarly, while libraries have almost always existed to allow people to view literature at no cost, the Internet now eliminates the time needed to reach the books we want to find. The Gutenberg Project is a free online archive of works with expired copyrights, such as *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Iliad*. Other than increasing the accessibility of art, the



Internet can also be said to increase interest in the arts. Yayoi Kusama's art exhibition in the National Gallery, Singapore, attracted much attention on Instagram, causing people to flock to see her works. Thus, technology allows the easy viewing of art and even ignites interest in the arts, having a positive impact (increased accessibility) on the arts and the arts scene in general.

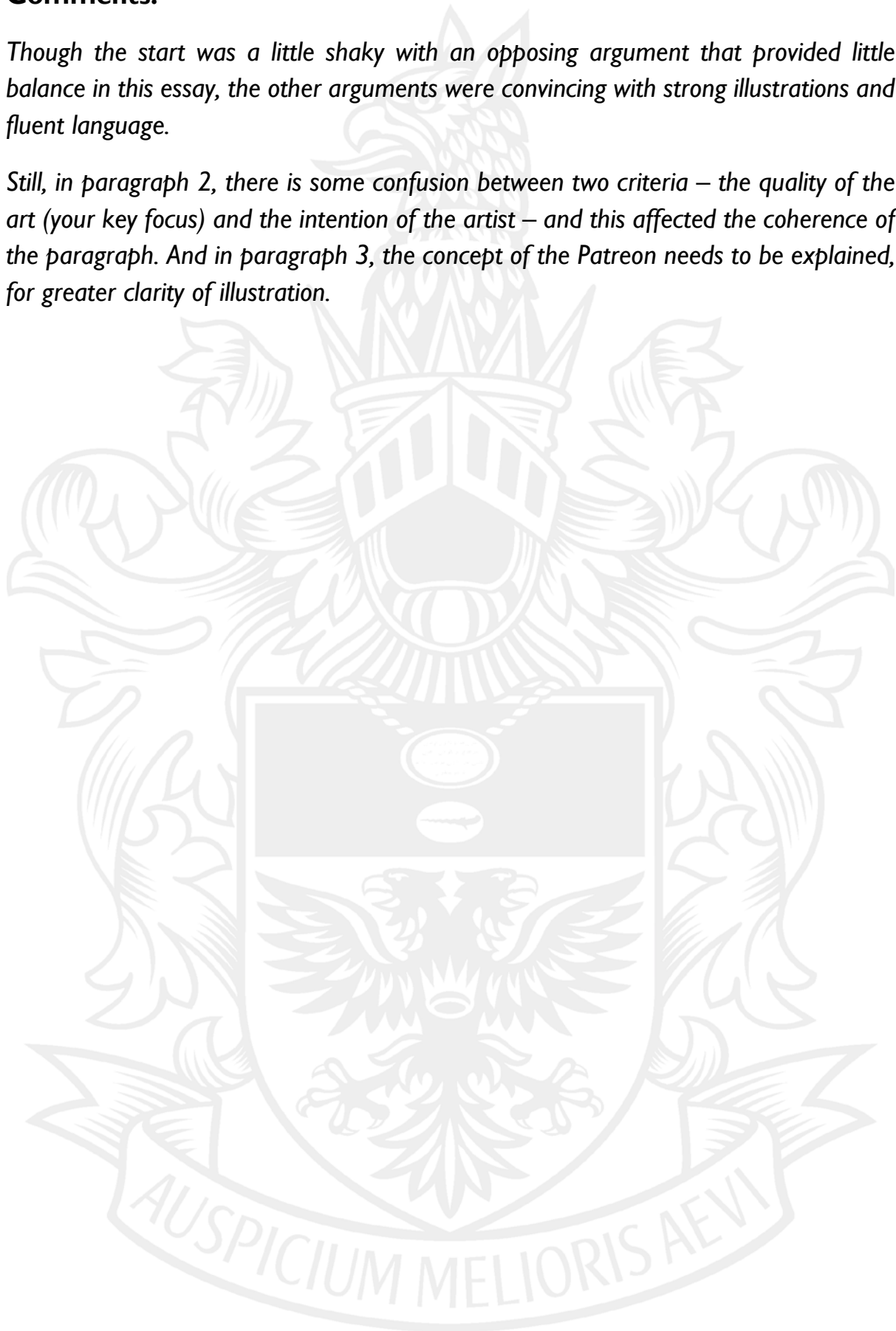
Other than the Internet, technology has also given the arts new or improved tools and media by which art can be created. Cameras with better precision and light settings can be used by photographers to increase the detail and intricacy of their photographs, such as by capturing athletes in motion with less blur and greater accuracy. In the visual arts, new colours made of various combinations of pigments are constantly being made, such as "Vantablack", thus increasing the feats and techniques artists can use to colour their works. New media brought about by technology include interactive, text-based video games, considered a form of literary art by some major literary awards. One such game is "Fallen London", which has the player exploring a London that has collapsed underneath the earth, and delves into various literary themes like love, choice and death. Improvements in technology have also enabled mediums like animated film to develop better animating techniques, increasing the quality of animation – just compare the current Mickey Mouse to the original Steamboat Willie! In short, technology has changed or improved the quality of the tools that artists use. This has allowed an expansion in the possibilities of the arts and increases its potential to create new, better works that resonate with audiences or communicate artistic intent in a fresher, more effective way. This certainly constitutes a positive impact on the arts.

In conclusion, technology has certainly caused a drop in the quality of the arts to a slight extent. However, that is merely one unfortunate consequence of the democratisation of the arts that technology has catalysed. Technology has brought art to the public and has drawn the public to artists, breaking down the elitist barriers that once plagued the fine arts. Artists today tap on technology to increase the ways in which they practice art as well. All in all, technology has had a mostly positive impact on the arts, not a negative one. We can look forward to new advances that will expand the variety of art forms we can view, appreciate, or even practice.

### Comments:

*Though the start was a little shaky with an opposing argument that provided little balance in this essay, the other arguments were convincing with strong illustrations and fluent language.*

*Still, in paragraph 2, there is some confusion between two criteria – the quality of the art (your key focus) and the intention of the artist – and this affected the coherence of the paragraph. And in paragraph 3, the concept of the Patreon needs to be explained, for greater clarity of illustration.*



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