2015 Year 5 Common Test

2015 Year 5 Class Assignment

The media needs to exercise more responsibility. Do you agree?
Tan Jia Ying Brenda | 16S03P

The media serves many purposes in today's society, the most important of which is keeping the public informed of important and current issues and news. Due to its wide reach, the media serves as a bridge between the authorities and the people, and also between people. With this almost completely international reach that the media has, it has to exercise responsibility in providing the people with objective and accurate facts respectfully and with the public's best interests in mind. However, the media today still lacks responsibility in being a fair bridge between the world and the people, misusing its rights and ability to further biases and/or commercial interests, even showing disrespect and discrimination against certain social groups. Thus, the media needs to exercise more responsibility.

Many might say that the media has made full and good use of its wide reach responsibly to inform the people of pressing issues and to spur them into action. For example, the media called for the public to help in the recent Nepal earthquake by providing aid through donations. Through this, we can see the media fulfilling its role as a source of information, indirectly helping people in need. Recent reports of crimes such as scams will also heighten the public's vigilance. The media has thus exercised responsibility in the aspect of protecting and improving public well-being by reporting the facts, highlighting current dangers that people face and the needs of others to call for action to provide help.

However, it is also important to note that the media is controlled by innately biased humans, who may misuse the media to intentionally mislead and cause conflict. For instance, Fox News, being a pro-Republican news channel in the US, tends to shine a negative light on the Democrats when reporting about them. This was done to the extent of suggesting that US President Obama was "secretly Muslim" by asserting that the logo of the 2010 nuclear summit he hosted resembled the crescent symbol on the flags of Muslim countries, when in fact it was merely derived from the scientific drawing of an atom. From this, we see that the media, with its power to influence many people and change their perspectives, misuses this 'power' too. By reporting false facts or publishing poorly substantiated speculations, as seen from the Fox News' accusation of President Obama, the media abuses its wide outreach and influence. Since many people rely on the media for facts and news about their society and the world, such biased reports may cause misunderstandings, threatening to sow discord and conflict among people. This may in turn cause the harmony in society to be disrupted. Therefore, it is important that the media exercises more responsibility by trying to be as objective and unbiased as possible in the content it shares.

The media also needs to exercise more responsibility by showing respect to various groups in society. While it is true that the media does have the right to freedom of speech, this freedom should not be used at the expense of respect for others. Showing disrespect to a certain social group by mocking them may cause unhappiness in that group and send the message to others that it is acceptable to disrespect and discriminate against that social group. For example, the Charlie Hebdo attack stemmed from the satirical magazine's lack of respect for the Muslim community. By publishing content that encouraged prejudices against the Muslim community, it was misusing its freedom of speech. This angered the Muslims, and even caused a terrorist attack. It is clear that the media's irresponsible use of its abilities and rights can bring serious harm to society. It can thus be said that events such as the Charlie Hebdo attack could have been avoided if more responsibility had been exercised in considering the feelings and opinions of society and its various social groups.

Beneath its role as a respectful information and news provider, the media is still, ultimately, a profit-driven business. The media is guided by commercial interests, and has shown to be irresponsible due to such motivations. This is especially evident in advertisements. For example, advertisements targeted at men tend to portray women as "prizes" or the weaker sex - that if the men had achieved something, or bought a certain product, women would be instantly attracted to them. Other advertisements show women as shallow, only concerned about things like appearances and tangible luxuries. Such portrayals work against what society has been striving for in recent years - gender equality. To show men as the stronger sex, and women as superficial and as mere 'objects', contradicts the push for men and women to be seen as equal beings, with no one gender being better than the other. Being driven by commercial interests to make itself a lucrative business, the media has ignored or overlooked these goals of society, even potentially making

society's efforts of promoting and working towards said goals futile. The media has often not been able to strike a balance between its commercial concerns and the views and goals of society, and thus needs to exercise more responsibility in this area.

While it cannot be said that the media has not exercised responsibility in reporting the truths and calling for action from the public, it still has a long way to go in other aspects, such as keeping its information and views respectful, unbiased, and in line with the goals of society. The media has to prioritise the wellbeing of the society so as not to bring harm to it. And in order to do this, the media needs to be more responsible, and make better and wiser use of its rights and ability to reach out to people.

Comments:

Good essay on the whole, with credible attempt at relevance and evaluation. Clear structure. Keep it up!

Develop depth and completeness of evaluation fully for the Charlie Hebdo example – focus on "more" by showing either how the media's responsibility outweighs that of the agents (e.g. government, individual) or how its social duty outweighs profit motive.

'The media needs to exercise more responsibility.' Do you agree?
Ge Kuangning | 16A01A

Stefan Kanfer's famous TIME article satirising the ridiculous stereotypes perpetuated by advertising in the media from the point of view of a visiting alien declared that there was no intelligent life on earth. His article is important in allowing us to understand the media's impact on its viewers, not least because of its propensity for puerile and facile messages delivered as catchy sound bites, but because it raises the question: Should media therefore practise self-regulation to provide a more mature, well-articulated message to its audience? Given the harmful consumerist culture that the media perpetuates, we are inclined to believe that the media should practice a greater degree of agency to manage its powers more responsibly. On the other hand, the limits of self-regulation must also be questioned. Some will regard media censorship to be the instrument through which the tension between the political establishment and the media is managed. Asking the media to practise a greater degree of self-censorship is therefore asking of it to abrogate on its duties as a check on the government, tilting the balance of tension in favour of the political establishment, and opening the doors to the possibility of uninhibited abuse of power. Even as we decry the frivolity and dangers of the media, we cannot forget its purpose as the main information feed for the population, and therefore we cannot ask of it to exercise more responsibility.

Of the many worrying trends in the media, perhaps one that is most concerning is with regard to its pursuit of creating spectacle rather than providing useful information. To raise bottom lines and compete against other firms, the media has perpetuated a message of consumption that becomes harmful to society's most vulnerable. As a way of encouraging consumption, the media has crossed into a realm of sexualising even its youngest audiences. A 2011 report on the state of advertising in Britain by Reg Bailey for the Department of Education discovered that firms were hiring teen models to market their products. Over half of mothers surveyed by the report expressed that they have come across inappropriate advertising for children. Yet, even more troubling than this is that the report is unlikely to effect any change in the way advertising is done. While it recommends that the government take a more severe stance against advertising in the media, David Cameron has ruled out any possibility of concrete legislation to that end. Given the reluctance of pro-business governments like Cameron's Conservative Party in dealing with the situation, if follows that change in the media cannot come from external forces but from within itself. Because the media perpetuates harmful images and messages in advertising, and because

governments are reluctant intervene for fear of driving away much needed private investment, the media has to exercise private responsibility in the form of self-regulation.

On the other hand, self-regulation may not be ideal for that more potent force in the media – the press, whose reporting of news has the ability to effect and inspire real world action. It is precisely because of this ability of the press that we should not require it to exercise more responsibility– to maintain the veracity of it reports, and to ensure that action is taken to right wrongs. Yet, there have been examples where media outlets, even one as established as the BBC, have failed to carry out this duty. To protect its audiences from the graphic and gruesome nature of the Rwandan genocide, the BBC undertook to censor it and provide a more sanitised version of events that was more palatable to its audiences. It was this under-reporting of news that prevented action from being taken in Rwanda to put a stop to the ethnic cleansing. And history has shown that popular sentiment is instrumental to preserving the moral integrity of nations, as evident in the dramatic change in support for the Vietnam War after the revelations of the My Lai massacre of Vietnamese civilians at the hands of US soldiers. In the more recent case, the attempt to exercise more responsibility in reporting led to the contrary effect of irresponsibility in perpetuating moral catastrophe, effectively making the BBC complicit in the Rwandan genocide. To ask the media to exercise more responsibility on the basis of protecting its audiences is thus a dangerous proposal. It needs the freedom to report news and events as they are, to effectively carry out its duties.

Yet, some may still argue that with the emergence of social media, the expectation for the media to regulate itself will increase, because of the tendency for social media to deliver a one-sided, simplified view of world events. Social media has enabled activists to take to the world stage to promote their messages due to the accessibility of the Internet as well as the expedient propagation of information on social media sites. One example is the Kony 2012 campaign, which gathered significant traction. Yet, one might venture to question the efficacy of campaigns such as these, successful because of the huge audience made available to it on social media. While the campaign painted Joseph Kony as the rebel villain exploiting child soldiers, the message was wrought with irony, for the same could have been said of the Ugandan government led by Museveni, which the campaign is supporting. The campaign ignored nuance in the political situation in Uganda so that it was able to deliver a captivating "good-versus-evil" perspective. It is terrifying to think that donations made to the campaign would be used not just to bring justice to Kony, as it claims, but to support an oppressive and perhaps even more dangerous government led by Museveni. New media has to exercise more

responsibility because new forms of media are less regulated and have significantly lower barriers to entry. Without this self-regulation, media campaigns like Kony 2012 will continue to mislead and misinform.

However, before we can come to any far-reaching conclusion on whether media, in its totality, should exercise more responsibility, we should finally consider the important role it plays as an incarnation of the fourth estate. In order to carry out this duty effectively, the media has to be granted wide ranging freedoms to report whatever it deems fit, to, as John Stuart Mill explains in *On Liberty*, bring arguments to their logical limits. Even if campaigners like those from the Kony 2012 campaign were misleading, they should be allowed to exist, because regulation on such campaigns will deter genuine political activism from other activists from taking place. And in the case of Kony 2012, the campaign was taken to its logical limits, its disadvantages identified, and its audiences made aware of the more complex situation in Uganda than the campaign dared to reveal. If we were to expect the media to self-regulate, this will lead to a situation where political power is tilted towards the political establishment, and the establishment, seeing the leeway provided by a more compliant media, will be more aggressive in its implementation of censorship in a bid to wrestle power from the media. In Singapore for example, through the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, the Press is, as Cherian George described, a system "run by businessmen and published by journalists", journalists, ostensibly compliant, are placed under the proverbial Sword of Damocles. Should they step out of line, the government has wide-ranging powers, such as the above licencing act, to silence them. This situation renders the establishment immune from criticism, enabling enables abuse of power because self-regulation makes way for more aggressive censorship that prevents the media from keeping the government in check. The media, in its totality, therefore cannot and must not be expected to exercise more responsibility.

To conclude, although the frivolous and callous manner in which the media delivers information may make us inclined to advocate for more responsibility to be undertaken by the media, the importance of the media as an instrument of maintaining balance between popular sentiment and unilateral government action far outweighs the former concerns. The media is Caliban and Prospero, cretin and magician. We will have to be more interested in preserving its powers to contribute to society.

Comments:

Persuasive essay. Shows good understanding of the environment in which the media operates.

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Consider the importance of traditional festivals in today's society.
Heng Kheang Heather | 16S03B

Our world is not as it once was. The human civilisation of the past, distinctly divided into the various cultural groups that were immersed in their singular mythology and confined to only their own traditions, has given way to an immensely interconnected world now dubbed the "Global Village". In today's society, where cultures are intersecting in all ways and means, and where the significance of science and technology is fast overriding that of tradition and mythology, some doubt the importance of traditional festivals. Despite the above, however, the importance of traditional festivals in our modern world still remains.

Traditional festivals seem to have lost their importance in today's society because the bases for their existence - the mythology of their cultures of origin - have been undermined by knowledge gained from the discoveries and advancements in science and technology. That many traditional festivals are centred on myth is undeniable. Take the traditional Lunar New Year, for instance, where the lighting of firecrackers originated from the need to scare away the mythical "Nian", or the Mid-Autumn Festival, celebrated to commemorate Chang'e's flight to the moon. In the past, where these stories helped people to understand the world around them, such as in the passing of seasons and the arrival of a new year, or aided people in reconciling with strange and unfamiliar entities like the moon, myths were important for the people because they had explanatory power. Consequently, the festivals built around these stories also gained a great deal of significance. Now, scientific theories and technology have all but displaced the mythology that formed the bases for traditional festivals. With our modern, detailed taxonomic classification and our research and study of evolution and species, who can believe in the existence of the fantastic "Nian", unsupported by any evolutionary evidence or classification? Similarly, mankind's visits to the moon have made our previously distant satellite familiar, and who has need for the moon goddess Chang'e to bridge the gap between humans and the moon? As a result, the practice of such traditional festivals have become but a routine, for their bases of existence no longer hold such weight in the minds of those who practise them. With a loss of their bases, these festivals, previously extensions of mythology, the sole explanatory power of its time, have lost their importance by the displacement of mythology by science and technology.

It is also proposed that in the context of our current world, traditional festivals are unimportant because their status as primarily cultural entities is not congruent with this "global village", which must have a single, modern culture. Certainly, the world is increasingly interconnected. People no longer stay for their entire lives in their hometown, but have the means to migrate - to eat, work and play in a country other than their own. Since traditional festivals are so strongly tied to their places of origin, and so strongly bind a person to his cultural roots, they are a detriment to a world which increasingly emphasises cooperation and assimilation between various cultures and countries, because they can become an instrument of segregation. Celebrating the Lunar New Year permanently marks one as Chinese, as celebrating Loi Krathong distinguishes one as Thai. In our pursuit of a world without boundaries, the demarcation of various cultures has become unnecessary, and with it, the significance of traditional festivals has also dwindled.

However, while the above may seem true, traditional festivals still hold much importance because they help to give individuals renewed purpose in life. As each culture inadvertently imbues its priorities and values into its festivities, each celebration carries with it the hope and purposes of that group. For example, the festival Deepavali encompasses the Hindus' hope for the defeat of darkness by light, and thus is a celebration of overcoming the difficulties, trials and tribulations of this world by goodness and righteousness. Or take the Lunar New Year, a time of gathering and reunion, symbolising the Chinese ideal of a united family, with emphasis being placed on ties of kinship. In both cases, the celebration of each traditional festival renews the goals of the cultural group in the individual. Whether it is to live life righteously, or to work and devote oneself to the well-being of one's kin, traditional festivals serve to give the individual a sense of purpose in life. Since these purposes, engendered in the traditional festivals, are so often positive ones and constructive ones, they help one live a meaningful life by providing a compass and direction, minimising the risk of their living aimlessly, to no good end. Hence, the importance of traditional festivals has not diminished, owing to their provision of a purpose and goal for individuals, and helping them to live meaningfully in pursuit of a higher ideal.

Traditional festivals are also significant on a national scale. With globalisation, many countries have become pluralistic societies, with people of diverse races and creeds living together. However, the risk of conflict within pluralistic societies is high, due to the clashing of cultural ideologies and beliefs. In order to transition from a pluralistic country to a multicultural one, cultural assimilation and cohesion must be fostered between different ethnic and cultural groups. Traditional festivals are particularly effective catalysts of this transition because they are joyous celebrations, unintrusive and unlikely to offend other groups. People are diverse in many ways - through thought and reason they have formed various doctrines and ideologies - but in the expression of emotion, in the celebration of joy, they are

similar. Each culture celebrates the coming of spring in a different way, but it is at the end of the day an expression of joy at the gifts and blessings of a new year. In these shared emotions, different groups can find a common point, a basis on which to build better relationships. Methodological teaching may help different groups increase their knowledge of other groups, but only the perceptions of their similar points can truly aid in the assimilation of diverse cultures. Through the celebration of traditional festivals, each cultural group displays its beliefs and traditions, but in a way that can be shared by others from different backgrounds. Singapore is an apt success story, where all the different races celebrate and participate in the traditional festivals of every ethnic and cultural group, and it is a country in which multiculturalism has been largely fostered. Thus, the importance of traditional festivals still remains due to the fact that they allow for inclusive, unintrusive interactions between various cultures, allowing the pluralistic societies created by globalisation to become truly multicultural ones.

In conclusion, the importance of traditional festivals cannot be denied. While the rise of science and technology and the blurring of cultural distinctions have made such cultural festivals seem unimportant, they still retain a great deal of significance in helping individuals live meaningfully and towards a higher ideal, as well as in minimising fault lines in pluralistic societies, helping them become multicultural ones.

Comments:

Thoughtful work, though examples are at times repetitive (e.g. Lunar New Year) and lacking range.

"Personal privacy and national security cannot co-exist." Do you agree?
Joel Nee I-Loong | 16A01A

In the wake of the revelations about the United States National Security Agency's (NSA) sweeping mass surveillance programmes, there has been much discourse regarding the need for such intrusions into personal privacy to uphold national security. Some have argued that the protection of national security necessarily compromises personal privacy. However, their view fails to take into account information gathering methods, which are far more nuanced than blunt mass surveillance programmes and which can indeed successfully uphold both principles essential to any democratic state. Thus, personal privacy and national security are by no means mutually exclusive, but are both strengthened when one is upheld in conjunction with the other.

Some may say that the protection of national security must necessarily come at the expense of personal privacy because the nature of national security threats has changed. No longer is national security threatened by conventional militaries fighting on conventional battlefields, but by the far more insidious threat of terrorism. Critically, terrorism is unique in that there is no successful means of reacting to it after a bomb has been detonated and hundreds of people have been killed; any steps taken to combat terror must be necessarily preventive in nature, to avert the threat before it has happened. In this sense, the protection of national security must necessarily compromise personal privacy, as it is only by monitoring innocents that we can prevent a terror plot before it has even happened. This can be done by identifying warning signs through telecommunications data, for instance, to identify and defuse the threat of terror quickly and effectively. This is why, after the news of the NSA's PRISM mass surveillance programme was leaked by Edward Snowden, the Director of the NSA testified before the US Congress that such programmes had successfully averted "over 50 terrorist threats from the period after 9/11". He argued that such mass surveillance programmes were required to combat terrorism even if they compromised personal privacy by essentially spying on all innocent civilians because it allowed the NSA to identify threats before they happened. The same justification was used by US President George W. Bush after signing the 2011 PATRIOT Act into law after 9/11. Hence, because of the

importance of preventive national security measures, personal privacy must be compromised for national security.

The second reason why national security measures definitely compromise personal privacy is not only because of its preventive nature but also because, in this day and age, terrorism no longer comes just from well-organised terror cells, but also from lone wolves. Hence, given that anyone could be a terrorist, it is important to monitor everyone, and not just suspicious individuals. The reason for this is that radicalisation has increased significantly with the rise of the Islamic State (IS), leading to increased lone wolf terrorism. Consequently, some have argued that now, more than ever, is the time to compromise on personal privacy and monitor each and every individual, because anyone could be a terrorist. This is why after Anders Behring Breivik murdered over 20 children in Norway, local media outlets questioned why the government had not noticed warning signs, such as his purchase of weapons and fertilisers. Similarly, after an IS-inspired radical killed seven in an Australian café in 2014, it was questioned why the state did not have his name on a terror watch list. Other cases of lone wolf terrorism, such as in the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, have led to calls for more invasive surveillance programmes that may indeed compromise personal privacy, but are nonetheless necessary given the specific and unique threat posed by lone wolf terrorism, where anyone can be a terrorist. Hence, it can be said that the upholding of national security must necessarily come at the cost of personal privacy.

However, it is often the mindless and frantic pursuit of national security at all costs that ends up compromising national security. Instead, a far more balanced approach that upholds both national security and personal privacy has been argued to protect both better. This is because the very mass surveillance programmes that compromise personal privacy compromise national security too, as the information gathered by these programmes are far too voluminous to be processed effectively. The sheer amount of information that is gathered instead ends up crippling national security agencies. For example, academics Binney and Drake have demonstrated that the US actually had information about 9/11, but that it was buried under mounds of information by the mass surveillance programme codenamed "Stellar Wind". Instead, they proposed an alternative to targeted surveillance, where court warrants would have to be obtained to monitor suspicious individuals, and argued that this better upholds both national security and personal privacy. In this vein,

measured and nuanced alternatives do exist that can reliably uphold both national security and personal privacy, as opposed to mass surveillance programmes that promise national security and fail to deliver. Targeted surveillance programmes have indeed been successfully used in Singapore, where the Yishun MRT bomb plot by a regional terrorist cell was averted not by spying on each and every citizen, but by following money trails and using investigation that did not compromise on the personal privacy of civilians. Hence, it is indeed possible to have nuanced policies that protect both national security and personal privacy, instead of mass surveillance programmes that do neither.

In addition, there are non-digital means of protecting national security without compromising personal privacy. These are intelligence gathering sources that rely on on-the-ground information through the form of human intelligence (HUMINT). This means that instead of compromising the personal privacy of civilians through mass surveillance programmes, intelligence agencies can use informants on the ground to track potential terror cells. This information is often far better in terms of national security, as it provides more up-to-date information that is not subjected to the same voluminous information issues that mass surveillance programmes face. The success of these programmes can be seen by how it was HUMINT that managed to nab one of the most notorious terrorists in the world. The information gathered by the US when seeking out Osama bin Laden was done not only through mass surveillance programmes, but also by couriers and double agents who provided the vast majority of invaluable information, allowing the US to hunt him down in 2011. Critically, the success of HUMINT programmes does not come at the cost of personal privacy, as innocents are not subjected to the Orwellian panopticon of a state-sanctioned mass surveillance programme. In this way, personal privacy and national security can indeed co-exist, so long as the appropriate national security measures are taken.

Finally, it is often the upholding of personal privacy that contributes to national security. This is because when the spectre of state spying is removed, it often incentivises civilians to step forward and contribute to community-based security efforts. This is the most effective form of national security, as having many pairs of eyes and ears on the ground actively preventing national security threats is the most efficient way of identifying one. For example, Muslim communities in New York have stated that they feel alienated by mass surveillance programmes, with

algorithms designed to identify Muslim names as they are suspected more heavily to be terrorists. This means a more insular community that is not as willing to speak up due to the marginalisation they experience with such programmes. In contrast, in Sweden, which does not adopt such intrusive national security measures, the Muslim community there is particularly vocal in expressing and alerting the authorities to any sign of radicalisation. Hence, the compromise of personal privacy and be seen to compromise national security, as it harms community-based efforts to seek out potential national security threats. In this way, personal privacy and national security cannot be said to be mutually exclusive, as the upholding of personal privacy often contributes to empowering community-based efforts that benefit national security.

In conclusion, while the rush to protect national security at all costs using the blunt tool of mass surveillance is understandable, personal privacy and national security can indeed co-exist using the more measured and nuanced tools of targeted surveillance, HUMINT and community-based efforts. Benjamin Franklin remarked that "those who sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither". Not only do national security and personal privacy co-exist, they are complementary and hence should be upheld in conjunction with one another.

Comments:

Strong, persuasive argument. Strong grasp of content knowledge and issues relevant to the topic.

How important are dreams?
Jason Rohan Cheong Zhi Jian | 16S03B

Dreams are the ethereal aspirations of humanity transcending our human limitations. They are intangible, common to the whole human race and unite us in our ability to envision a better future. As Victor Hugo once described, "Visionaries (Dreamers) are those who see beyond." This quality of seeing beyond our immediate circumstance draws both commendation and condemnation from society, which critically question its importance. Dreams are mostly important as they empower us to question the status quo and effect change, transcend our human limits and give us hope. However, dreams may appear unimportant in the case where they amount to nothing, or worse, are used to obliterate the dreams of others.

Dreams seem unimportant when they amount to nothing. This is apt given their intrinsically intangible nature. Because they are intangible, they alone are powerless to effect change and can warp reality and lull us into a state that is removed from reality. This is best captured in the idiom "building castles in the air". The grandeur of the castle is ultimately undermined by its non-existence. With dreams, we have the power to create anything, limited by the reaches of our imagination only, and yet unless translated to action, they remain, but a dream. Particularly because of the force of our dreams, the endless scale and rate at which we build our alternate realities, many are daunted by the act of translation. Dreaming comes at no cost to the dreamer, but the hard work involved to realise that dream involves painstaking sacrifice. For example, the book *10,000 Hours: You Become What You Practice* states that successful people require approximately ten thousand hours of practice at a particular skill before they becomes masters in that skill or field. Mozart spent the better part of his day devoted to the study of music. For those dreaming of success, Mozart's tale while seemingly uplifting and testament to the importance of dreams and achieving them, also belies the ethics of hard work necessary to make this true. Many who run headlong towards their dreams ultimately fail to do so when they encounter the wall that is effort and sacrifice. This is also the reason why 85% of the population who make New Year's resolutions give them up within the first three weeks — the inertia of change serves as a built-in foil to the lofty ambitions encoded in our human nature. Consequently those who have failed to achieve their own dreams may discourage others from doing so as well, and their past experiences form a credible and persuasive Pathos-filled argument. This is the reason why children from more pragmatic societies are discouraged from pursuing their dreams — statistics stack against the often unexplored and unpredictable

nature of their dreams, particularly job ambitions. Hence the saying "Ex Nihilo, Nihil Fit": out of nothing comes nothing. Because dreams end up achieving nothing, they appear to be a waste of time. As "time is money", in today's break-neck ultra-competitive world, dreaming is set up as an economic loss, not only of little value but of detrimental value since time spent dreaming is time spent wasted that could be used for more productive gains. Hence, dreams appear unimportant.

However, dreams are very important, especially when translated to action, as they empower us to question the status quo and change the world. The history of revolution (of any sort) is a history of dreamers. This is none more obvious than Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I had a dream" speech and the subsequent March on Washington rally. The discontent Martin Luther felt [toward] the discriminatory treatment black American's faced touched him powerfully and awakened in him the dream of a "Free America" here "one day all peoples of every colour may stand together". Where his other countrymen passively accepted their fate with a weary drawn-out sigh, Martin Luther refused to let [his dream] be resigned to the same destiny and from there he trailblazer a new path amidst the murky waters of racial politics, in part birthing the Civil Rights movement. On the more sinister flipside, dreams can be used to effect ennobling, dignifying change or cataclysmic and degrading change. This is clearly seen with Hitler and his vision for an all-Aryan supreme race that earmarked Jews for extermination. Hitler's dream was borne out of a desire to rebel against the defeated attitude of post-World War I Germany and inspire the country to seize the reigns of its superpower status and exert its dominance. Such was his dream, borne of the same stock as that of Martin Luther's, that refused to accept the world as it was and was determined to mould it in a way to suit his own perverse desires, that caused the Holocaust. Hence, the context of dreams reveals a wide spectrum of morality. Morally just ones such as Martin Luther's catalyse or inspire action to challenge norms and expected ways of behaviour in order to construct a better world, and thus are important to nurture and fulfil; morally evil ones such as Hitler's deserve attention to ensure they never see the light of day. Hence, dreams are of utmost importance, regardless if they are enacted or not, as we have the obligation to encourage beneficial dreams while nipping inherently malicious ones in the bud.

Dreams are also of profound importance in transcending human limitations. While many dreamers seemingly stop short of fulfilling their dreams, the realised potential of fulfilled dreams unleashes powerful repercussions on the whole of humanity. Indeed, the chronicles of human history bear witness to the importance of dreams as inventors and leaders alike dared the impossible, advancing civilisation beyond the mental prisons of human limitation and weakness. Indeed, one standout dream lifting humanity from lowly earthly confines up to the celestial skies was that of the dream of flight. Many thought that as Man was born on earth, he was to stay with two feet firmly planted on *terra firma*. And yet with the Wright Brothers, a new frontier in transport, defence and recreation was unlocked. Recalling the idea of inertia of change, Newton's first law described how objects at rest will stay at rest whereas an object in motion will stay in motion. This accurately captures one of our greatest human shortcomings – our resistance to change. For what are dreams than colour that fills the black and white spaces of society, or the genesis of something inconceivable in human experience? Because of dreams' fundamental nature as potential change, humanity by our weakness is averse to it. Without dreams, we, the crowning glory of life, would continue in envy of birds and other lowly flying creatures. By pushing human boundaries and overcoming human obstacles, dreams capitulate us towards something greater – a better humanity – and, for this reason, in making us "keep moving forward" (as Walt Disney's maxim was), dreams serve a most important purpose.

Finally, dreams are important in giving us hope. Even if unrealistic, dreams give us the strength to pick ourselves up from our failings. It is the dream of glory that makes athletes "fall down seven times, stand up eight". It is the dream of a better life that fuels the American Dream of social mobility, attracting large numbers of immigrants who seek American shores over the bleak and deadening shores of their past. Dreams give us hope to continue and press on in spite of all the signs heralding rejection and defeat. It is why soldiers "lose a battle to win the war" as they live with the hope of "fighting another day". It is why losing teams come back, underdogs surge up in our highly competitive sporting arenas. Hope from dreams enables us to look past our failings and work actively and passionately towards a better tomorrow. It is intrinsic to the human condition as it enables us to fight for our survival. Hence, dreams are important.

In conclusion, dreams while appearing of little utility and purpose actually serve to challenge societal conventions and effect change, enable us to transcend human boundaries and give us hope. For these reasons, dreams are important.

Comments:

Thoughtful discussion with wide-ranging examples.

A strong personal voice. However, avoid the tendency to get carried away, lapsing into exaggeration.

Should society pay more attention to the needs of criminals?
Lee Yuan | 16S03E

Recently, in the United States, many executions have gone wrong. With suppliers of sedatives and paralytics unwilling to supply state prisons, alternative chemicals have been used in the executions by lethal injection of many on death row. However, many of these botched executions have resulted in the intense pain and suffering of these convicts, some of whom are serial killers, rapists and sociopaths. An argument about the needs of criminals currently serving time in prisons worldwide has thus arisen, particularly those of the convicts to be executed. Despite this heightened awareness of issues surrounding criminals, many have remained apathetic to their welfare and their needs. Instead, many members of the public find that these criminals deserve the pain and suffering they are going through, as a form of retribution and natural justice for their heinous crimes. However, this view is greatly mistaken. Instead of seeing these convicts as evil and worthy of punishment, these criminals are, like ourselves, humans too, and they deserve to be accorded the dignity and respect that we accord to every human being. The physical and emotional needs of criminals are in fact a reflection of our own needs, and for that reason, it is important for society to be more aware and to do something about the welfare of convicts.

The doctrine of law and justice states that those who have done wrong should be accorded the appropriate punishment, be in monetary, in the form of fines, or physical, in the form of incarceration and capital punishment. Thus, it would seem justified to disregard criminals' needs as, having committed a crime, they need to suffer commensurate punishment even if it is at the expense of their welfare. A case in point would be the Kobe child murder in the previous century, where a minor had murdered one of his schoolmates and hung the deceased's head on the gates of the school. When arrested and charged, he was still a minor, but the Japanese legislature lowered the legal age of responsibility in response to this case so the offender could be tried as an adult. This serves as a precedent for us, that regardless of age and status, a heinous crime should still be punished severely. The needs of a child are clearly very different from that of an adult criminal, but having carried out the murder in cold blood, it would appear that he has lost his right to look out for his own welfare. Similarly, when a convict has committed a crime, he would have to atone for his sins in an appropriate manner, even at the expense of his physical or emotional welfare. This is the basis behind Sharia law, for example, where retribution is the motive for punishment and the means for justice. Put succinctly, a criminal who has deprived another of his rights, either his right to property or his right to life, for example, does not deserve his own right to humane treatment. Thus, criminals' needs do not deserve greater attention from society, as it would seem that they are merely receiving their just deserts.

It can also be argued that society should also not place greater emphasis on criminals' needs as society should focus its attention on other more important needs. We live in an age where there are numerous social problems that have yet been addressed, and instead of wasting its resources and time on criminals, it appears to be more logical to invest more of society's efforts in tackling issues such as poverty and juvenile delinquency. For example, in the United States, a country that has the highest prison population in the world, spends up to a quarter of its budget on maintaining its prisons and taking care of the prison population. Is this a worthwhile place to spend a country's money, when there are problems such as education and social mobility to tackle? Imagine the benefits to society if half of the prison system's budget was used on improving the standard of state schools and helping the unemployed and the financially needy keep their heads above the water. On the other hand, spending too much time and resources fretting over the welfare of criminals would entail overspending on the prison system. All these welfare programs for prison inmates come at a significant opportunity cost to society, particularly when they are not contributing to society. Society should thus turn its emphasis and focus away from the needs of criminals, as it appears that there are other more important needs that can be addressed instead.

However, the views expressed above are myopic. From a pragmatic standpoint, criminals' needs should be looked after for the safety and security of society, as the majority of these criminals will return to their communities one day. By neglecting the welfare of criminals, other social issues may result. On the other hand, by caring for criminals, taking care of their physical and emotional needs and helping them to reintegrate into society, these ex-convicts can in fact help to contribute to the country's growth, both as an economy, and as a community. A suitable example would be the Scandinavian countries, where the prison system emphasises rehabilitation and education instead of retribution and physical suffering. With welfare systems in place for inmates, classes on wide-ranging issues and a minimum-security system, it is no wonder that Norway and Sweden have the lowest criminal recidivism rates in the world. In South Africa, for example, where maximum-security prisons abound and criminals are incarcerated for extended periods in inhumane conditions, convicts come out hardened and desensitised to crime, violence and vice in general, making them even more likely than before to pose a threat to society's safety. As illustrated, the needs of criminals in prisons are indeed a pertinent issue for society to discuss and think about, as their physical

well-being and welfare in prison is likely to affect their emotional well-being and worldview upon their re-entry into society. While it is one thing to recognise the need to punish criminals, retribution does not always mean all is well. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "an eye for an eye, and the whole world goes blind". We cannot simply stand by cold-heartedly and watch criminals be deprived of their basic needs, as it could result in long-term social ills. It is thus imperative that we pay more attention to their needs.

Our resolve to look into the welfare of criminals as a society is also a reflection of the society's morals and ideals. By ignoring the needs of criminals and simply hanging them out to dry, it shows the world that society is cold-hearted and unforgiving, unwilling to give those who have offended a second chance. By giving greater emphasis to the welfare of criminals, however, society will be portrayed as a benevolent and understanding community, one which is inclusive and forgiving. This is particularly true when criminals return to their communities after serving their sentences. Some countries have few welfare programs for ex-convicts who have regained their freedom and are working towards contributing to society again. In China, for example, ex-convicts are shunned and labelled as an utter disgrace to the family, the community and the country. How do we expect these ex-convicts to feel that they belong, to feel motivated to be a better person when everyone is just demeaning them? They are likely to feel left out, distraught and possibly even hopeless as their prospects for re-employment and re-integration are weak. In Singapore and the United Kingdom, on the other hand, reformed criminals are welcomed back into society with open hands, with initiatives such as the Yellow Ribbon Project that help ex-convicts find their footing in society. Whether a society is inclusive and open-minded can really be seen from their treatment of convicts, regardless of their backgrounds. A society that discriminates against ex-convicts is also likely to put down other minorities as well, whereas a society that is forgiving is also likely to be willing to help the disadvantaged, the minorities and the foreigners. In our globalised society, the world's perception of a society's morals is paramount in deciding its standing in the world, and for that reason, society, to be seen as a liveable and forgiving one, should pay more attention to the needs of criminals.

Ultimately, criminals are human beings, just like any one of us who have t yet to run afoul of the law. "To err is human", and it is precisely because criminals have physical and emotional needs that they committed crimes in the first place. As humans, ex-convicts, inmates and death row convicts should all be deserving of human rights as well. Their needs are the same as ours, and we should be forgiving of their mistakes, just like how we would want to be forgiven when we err as well. For example, in the trial of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the Boston Marathon

bombers, families of the victims urged the jury to be humane, to consider him a human so that their own pain would not be worsened. Oscar Pistorius, whom some claimed to have killed his girlfriend in cold blood after an argument, was accorded the dignity he deserved and the protection he needed in spite of his status in South African society, not because of it. Just as we need to be cared for, criminals also need to feel the warmth of society and those around them as well. They should not be cast aside as non-humans, as a degraded form of life, because simply put, they are not. One's mistakes does not make a person, and criminals should not be remembered and noticed only as offenders, but also as parents, children, friends, as humans. We should thus pay as much attention to the needs of criminals as we do to the welfare and rights of others around us. Society, as part of a humane community, should hence accord more emphasis to criminals' welfare.

In conclusion, society should pay more attention to the needs of criminals. As much as they deserve punishment, their needs are very much like ours, and how we treat them will eventually come back to affect us in a myriad of unpredictable ways. Today, most of us are still unaware of the plight of criminals, of people who have made mistakes. As the discussion on human rights continues with fervour, we must not forget this group of people who are physically and emotionally separated from the rest of wider society. We should pay more attention to criminals' welfare, not simply because of the pragmatic reasons and social issues that could come back to haunt us in ways any criminal would never be able to dream of, but because all of us, together, are humans as well.

Comments:

A delightful read and it shows a good grasp of the issue. Illustrations used were effectively linked to the points made and a consistent thesis was reinforced throughout the essay. Keep it up.

To what extent is religion a force for good?
Nah Sze Perng | 16A13A

Karl Marx once remarked: "Religion is the opiate of the masses." While the world has changed since Marx's time, religion remains a highly contentious and controversial sphere of discussion in today's society, given its evolving roles. Religion usually involves a set of beliefs or dogma that followers and practitioners are required to subscribe to. These beliefs and values include commandments such as to value human life and to "love thy neighbour", which are a common theme amongst the three largest religions – Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Religion can provide a nurturing and sound moral compass for individuals seeking guidance in their lives and also allow individuals access to religious communities that form support networks as a means of providing for those who fall through social safety nets. Religion also aids in the formation of a cohesive identity, to bolster nation building efforts which is paramount to countries which lack unity. In these ways, religion can clearly be considered a force for good.

First of all, religion provides a moral compass for individuals seeking guidance in life. A key tenet in many religions is the adherence to a set of moral principles, which commonly include not hurting oneself or others and espousing the values of kindness and compassion. In the current world, where materialism seems to be the tenor of the age in which the larger community may be caught up in the pursuit of material wealth, individuals feel increasingly lost and alienated as they question the purpose of their lives, whether its sole purpose is to attain material comfort or whether there is a higher purpose to be accomplished. Here, religion plays an important role in shifting the values of individuals away from hedonism, towards kindness and compassion for others through the values they espouse and the relevant actions enshrined in their doctrines. For example, former United States presidential candidate Mitt Romney revealed that his Mormon faith gave him the grounding and the guidance to commit to philanthropic work by donating money he earned from his company, Bain Capital, back to the community. In this case, religion demonstrates that it can provide the moral compass to redirect the energies and efforts of individuals towards socially constructive actions, away from the pursuit of material benefit. Religion's insistence of adherence to moral principles also enables individuals to avoid committing crime. Several states in the United States have offered religious counselling and the option to subscribe to religious services in state prisons after pilot programmes conducted found that former convicts who adopted religion in prison were less likely to recommit due to their adherence to moral principles. Thus, religion can be a constructive force in providing individuals seeking guidance with a sound moral compass.

Moving beyond the individual, the positive benefits of religion extend to the larger community as well. Religions tend to have support networks for their adherents to rely on and via which to do social work for the benefit of the larger community, often providing social services that governments may not be able to. For many religions, community forms a large aspect of religious life. Participation in religious activities are not limited to the private, individual sphere, but extend to the community as well, where religion provides a common ground for people not only to interact but also to help each other in times of need. Take Islam in Egypt, for example. Before its politicisation in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood was a charitable religious organisation actively involved in social work. The Brotherhood provided social services such as education, financing counselling and even basic healthcare that the ineffectual bureaucracies of Hosni Mubarak could not, essentially providing support networks which supplanted the government's. Other cases where religious organisations helped catch the destitute who fell through the cracks of the social safety net include Catholic organisations in Brazil that provided basic shelter for poor families and orphans when corrupt governments increasingly ignored the growing problem of the favelas, or Brazilian slums, that were becoming more crowded and violent. Given that religion involves the community and the work religious organisations do to benefit the less fortunate and the destitute, it is unquestionable in light of the benefits society accrues from religion that religion is a force for good.

Furthermore, religion aids in the consolidation of a common identity and the building of a national consciousness, which is paramount in situations where externalities and disunity threaten to tear communities apart. Religion provides a common rallying point for communities to unite, to fight off external events or internal disunity by tying all their interests into a shared religious interest. For example, in the foundation of the modern state of Israel, the Jewish faith was used as a rallying point for the Jews to unite and fight off the Muslim nations that opposed their existence. Enshrined in the Jewish constitution and the psyche of the Israeli people is the idea that Judaism is the official religion of the state, and the impact it has was that it forced communities to put aside their differences to defend the common religious interests from hostile forces. This consolidation of national identity in Israel's case was primarily due to religion as a unifying force for its peoples. Some 60 years on, though the situation remains far from perfect, Israel is in a stronger position from when it first started due to the positive impact religion has had on is nation building process. In fact, religion has such a paramount role in nation building that prominent political scientist Samuel Huntington recognises, in his book *Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, that religion functions as an important rallying point for the people, providing a semblance of legitimacy to the construction of a common identity. This successfully led to the foundation of modern nation states such as Indonesia and Turkey. Certainly, if

religion is able to unite formerly splintered communities it has to be a beneficial force.

However, not all action taken by religious organisations or by individuals under the self-proclaimed banner of religion are entirely beneficial. One religion is ultimately mutually exclusive to another as the imposition of one religion over society means that other religions are unable to peacefully co-exist in the same space and time. Taken to the extreme, this breeds intolerance and, subsequently, fundamentalist ideologies that call for militant actions to be taken against non-believers of the religion. Such militant ideologies and intolerance generally manifest themselves in the form of terrorist organisations which dominate headlines, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Such groups carry out indiscriminate acts of terror and violence under the banner of religion on the innocent civilian population to pressure governments to accede to their demands. In the case of ISIS, this translates to the elimination of non-Muslims and the establishment of a worldwide Islamic caliphate, which is impossible due to the diverse range of religions. These groups tarnish religion and threaten the essential fabric of society, whose principles include tolerance of other groups and upholding the rule of law. What is more worrying is their perversion of religion not only as justification to wage holy war, but as a rallying point to exhort members of their faith to follow in their footsteps and plan copycat attacks. This is seen in the messages posted on social media by ISIS for Muslims to plan attacks in their home countries and the influence it had on the Sydney gunman who held patrons of a Sydney café hostage last year. Clearly, if religion is used as the basis for mass murder and a banner to exhort others to do the same, it is a destructive force that needs to be removed and is not a beneficial force.

Taking previous perspectives into account, the impact of religion is largely dependent on the people who wield it and their specific intentions and purposes. Though we hear of sporadic terror attacks such as the one on Charlie Hebdo and the kidnapping of Nigerian school girls by Boko Haram, these groups ultimately represent a minority who pervert religion to suit their own twisted purposes. Indeed in the wake of such violence, many religious groups have condemned such attacks, saying they are not representative of the larger community. With the vast majority of individuals and communities harnessing religion for beneficial purposes, such as providing a moral compass, social services and a common identity, religion is largely a force for good despite the taints caused by the extreme minority.

Comments:
Very clear, coherent response that is generally well organised and persuasively argued. There is an attempt to use a range of examples.

To what extent is social media a useful platform for change?
Lian Xuan Rui Brendan | 16A13A

Social media is a powerful force in today's increasingly plugged-in society. Some of its key characteristics include the speed at which it spreads information, its interactivity, its wide reach, and its lack of gatekeeping apart from outright censorship. It is in many regards, therefore, a useful platform for change in the sense that it can efficiently and quickly positively influence peoples' behaviour to help others or to act as an agent of change.

The speed and wide reach of social media enables it to be a useful platform for raising awareness for causes and encouraging volunteerism or donations. Social media today has a very wide reach, with Facebook boasting a membership that exceeds one billion. It also disseminates information quickly: its use of the Internet means that messages can be transmitted very quickly – almost instantly, in fact – to large numbers of people. This makes social media an effective platform for campaigns to reach out to a large number of people. Furthermore, because social media is interactive in nature, it has a self-spreading or self-promoting mechanism that allows campaigners to reach out to a larger number of people. This can be used to effect positive change on society, through the raising of awareness for social issues and the encouraging of donations. For example, in 2014, the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge utilised Facebook to raise awareness of the neurodegenerative condition known as "Lou Gehrig's disease", by having participants dunk themselves with a bucket of ice water to simulate the effects of the disease. It also called for participants to donate to research for a cure and/or 'tag' other friends to do it as well, creating a self-promoting mechanism. This was effective in raising significant funds for ALS cure research. Another example would be how, in light of the recent 2015 Nepal earthquake which struck the capital of Kathmandu, the plight of victims was publicised on Facebook with the company encouraging donations via a banner on top of the newsfeed. Social media, as can be seen, is an effective platform for raising awareness and funds, and thus is a useful platform for change.

In addition, the lack of gatekeeping on social media, as well as its speed and reach, allows it to serve as a useful tool to engender political change. The lack of gatekeeping means that any sort of information can be spread and disseminated to a large number of people. This enables users to circumvent restrictions on speech or civil liberties that are present in mainstream media such as television, radio or newspapers as a result of gatekeeping. In the context of political change, this means that users can quickly spread messages to encourage protests for political

reforms, generating an impetus for change which would not have been possible with mainstream media. Furthermore, social media also serves as a tool for organisation, disseminating information on where to meet and at what time. This has been observed in two case studies. It was first seen in the Middle East and North Africa uprisings of 2011, dubbed the Arab Spring. The self-immolation of a Tunisian man in protest of police and governmental corruption was captured on video and put on Twitter, and the outrage sparked by this video triggered a series of protests that overthrew the Tunisian dictatorship and created a democratic government. Social media also spread the revolution across borders, as images of protests in Tunisia sparked similar protests in Egypt, Syria and Bahrain, with the Egyptian dictator Mubarak being overthrown. The second case study would be Hong Kong in 2014, where pro-democracy protests sparked by Beijing's decision to vet the lists of candidates who could run for the 2017 Hong Kong elections were organised via social media. These sites were used to rally protestors to areas such as Mong Kok and Admiralty, as social media's ability to quickly reach large numbers of people proved critical. Clearly, social media is an effective platform for creating political interest and organising rallies, and hence is a useful platform for creating political change.

However, a counter argument against the efficacy and utility of social media to create meaningful change is that the lack of gatekeeping means that false of deliberately harmful information can be easily and quickly disseminated, thereby opening up the possibility of hoaxes and the spreading of hate messages. An example would be how after the arson of a mosque in 2015 in Houston, the Facebook page of the mosque was littered with hateful and racist messages such as "I cannot feel sorry". This, detractors claim, reinforces negative values in society, and is not the sort of change that is desirable. In this light, social media may not be considered a useful platform for change. The rebuttal to this is two-fold. First, the fact that these messages are disseminated so quickly is evidence enough to show that social media is effective in engendering change, be it positive or negative. Second, even if we concede that social media can bring about harmful changes, it can also reverse them by spreading and reinforcing positive values. For example, after the Sydney Siege in 2014, a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #I'llridewithyou became popular in Australia to counter the hate the Muslim community received. This shows that social media is a useful platform for reinforcing positive values, thereby effecting change in terms of societal attitudes and mindsets.

Nevertheless, detractors argue, mainstream media also has a very wide reach and quickness of disseminating information. This makes it effective in creating change. Also, people trust mainstream media to be reliable sources of information as a result of their gatekeeping, viewing sources on social media to be less credible,

which undermines the efficacy and utility of the latter as a platform for change as less people are likely to buy into information on social media. This argument, however, is simplistic because it fails to consider this nuance: there is not so great of a divide between mainstream news sources and social media because many credible news companies such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) have social media pages and online articles which can be 'shared' or 'retweeted' on social media. Thus, the union between mainstream media and social media enables credible information to be disseminated quickly. Thus, social media's utility as a platform for social change is in fact enhanced and supplemented by mainstream media, rather than being undermined. For example, the self-immolation of a Tunisian man was not popular news until it was published by Al-Jazeera, after which it was promptly disseminated, sparking the aforementioned revolutions. It has been demonstrated, therefore, that the lack of gatekeeping does not undermine the utility of social media as a platform for change. Social media and mainstream media in fact complement each other.

It is undeniable that social media will continue to exist as a powerful force in today's world as access to the Internet proliferates, not just in terms of users but also in terms of the number of ways to access the Internet, with the launch of the Apple watch this year being an example of new innovation. Indeed, the power of today's social media as a platform for change is only set to grow, and it would be wise to engage in discourse over the role social media should play, especially what sort of change should it be allowed to promote.

Comments:

Clearly written, with economy of expression yet a very strong, distinct voice. Examples are good, as is your organisation. Your ability to anticipate/posit counter-arguments and then address them helps maintain your analysis at a high standard.