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Note: The comments that follow each student response include both markers' and editors' comments.

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2024 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 1 **Sivamuthu Nihidha Varshini | 24S03O**

To what extent can popular music today be considered works of art?

Taylor Swift's Eras Tour has taken the world by storm, with fans flying across the globe and spending hundreds, if not thousands of dollars, on tickets to the Eras Tour and their outfits. Of course, it is not Taylor Swift alone who has been going on tours to perform. Other popular singers like Olivia Rodrigo, Laufey and various other musicians have been holding concerts worldwide. However, these fans are often met with criticism from non-fans on the superficial nature of popular music, and how it is a waste of time, energy and money to be travelling to the popular singers' concerts, and to listen to their songs. Now, this begs the question, can popular music be considered works of art, given the commercial nature of it? Well, I for one believe that popular music can be considered works of art given that it can be original, requires skill to produce, invokes deep responses in its audience, and has helped in the preservation and spreading of cultures.

Detractors might argue that popular music cannot be considered works of art as popular music lacks the refinement that one would expect from a work of fine art, such as a painting in the Louvre or Metropolitan, or even one of Shakespeare's famous plays. This might be supported by how some popular music is popular simply for having a catchy tune, while the lyrics themselves have no real meaning behind them. For example, sped-up versions of songs are often popularised by social media, where one can barely make out the lyrics of the song. Then, of course there is the use of curse words, sometimes to the point of being excessive in popular music. Jojo Siwa's 'Karma' is a good example of how a song with really not much meaning, one that was filled with unnecessary curses, was made popular simply due to the entertainment factor behind Jojo's publicity. This clearly exemplifies how popular music does not need refinement to become or remain popular, and sometimes might even be popularised due to this very lack of refinement. This is in stark contrast to many of the famous paintings around the world like the Mona Lisa, The Scream, or even Picasso's abstract art, which all had a certain level of finesse and refinement to become world-renowned.

However, while it may be true that some popular music lacks refinement, I think it would be too sweeping of a statement that all popular music lacks any qualifying characteristics that make them works of art. One way in which popular songs can be considered art works is how popular music often requires a specific set of skills that need to have been honed. If we were to look at one of Taylor Swift's songs, at first glance it might seem as though all she writes about are her ex-boyfriends or break-ups. However, upon deeper inspection, there is a staggering amount of skill and originality needed to produce each of her songs, accompanied by the music videos. Firstly, she needs to compose a tune that is catchy enough to become popular amongst her audience, and come up with lyrics that convey her messages, while still being memorable enough. This in itself requires the skills of being a good composer and writer. In fact, many singers write songs with rather poetic lyrics that ooze originality to

appeal to their audience. For example, in Taylor's most recent album 'The Tortured Poets Department', she had a song where she used world play of the term LOML, which she first introduced in the song as 'love of my life', just to flip the meaning at the end to the 'loss of my life'. Apart from writing good music, in order for the music to gain traction, the music needs to be accompanied by good publicity and a well-directed, and captivating music video on top of performances at concerts. This requires another set of skills like acting, directing, that further reinforces the fact that popular music does require a long list of skills from its creators, and it is the highly-skilled creators that have enabled their music to gain popularity.

Then of course, there is the point that popular music, like any good piece of artwork, elicits a strong response from its audience. Many popular songs have helped fans find joy, relief and peace. The fact is that popular music is the everyday man's art. Given the simpler nature of lyrics and tune, than say the lines of a play by Shakespeare or a piece composed by Mozart, the masses who have no prior artistic knowledge can relate to and enjoy the popular music. To exemplify this point, we can use songs like 'Lover' by Taylor Swift or 'Iris' by Goo Goo Dolls. 'Lover' seeks to embody exactly what the title suggests. It is often used by lovers from all over the globe to express their affection for one another. Another popular song by Taylor Swift called 'Love Story' has even gained enough traction that it is used by many to propose to their significant others, sometimes at Swift's concerts itself. The fact that people feel so deeply connected to popular songs, enough to propose to their lifelong partners with it, really says something about how impactful popular songs can be. On the other hand, songs like 'Iris' evoke emotions other than joy, and can even be tear-jerking. These songs have embedded experiences that everyone can relate to in their human lives, like the struggles of not fitting in with others, that tug at the heartstrings of many. In fact, some curse words can serve to add to the provocative nature of popular music that awards it the title of being a work of art. Some popular songs like Macklemore's Hind's Hall can call for awareness to certain social issues, like Hind's Hall does to the issue of suffering of Palestinian children due to the Israel-Hamas conflict. And of course, like any good artwork, popular songs also invoke deep feelings of hate from some. The above characteristics of popular songs have been observed in many celebrated artworks. For example, 'The Scream'(2017) by Kent Monkman served to shed light on the aggressive assimilation of Indigenous Canadians by the Catholic Church from the 1880s to 1990s, and, in its initial stages, even Picasso's abstract art drew criticisms from people who believed real art was realism. Given how popular songs invoke a plethora of emotions from their audience from joy to disgust, it is only right to recognise them as works of art.

Lastly, popular music can also be recognised as works of art given that they help in the preservation and spreading of cultures, like many good pieces of distinguished artworks. We are all well aware of the Korean Wave that was like a tsunami taking over the world. The trigger of this Korean Wave was the boom of the K-pop industry, whereby Korean music became popularised worldwide, especially amongst the youth. There is not a person I've met that does not know of the K-pop group BTS. K-pop becoming a worldwide sensation has not only made K-pop global, but also caused Korean dramas, fashion, skincare, cuisine, and even language, to reach a global audience. In fact, there was a 95% increase in the uptake of Korean classes in the US from 2006 to 2016, signifying just how much K-pop has popularised Korea

to the world. This has not only led to Korea's booming economy, due to the demand for Korean goods expanding to the global market, but there has also been an increase in Korea's soft power. The popularisation of K-pop has reduced racism towards Koreans compared to the other East-Asian countries like China, and even brought about perceptions like how skincare produced in Korea is of better quality than that produced in China for example. In fact, the K-pop group BTS even went to speak at the UN (United Nations), representing and bringing pride to Korea at the global stage. This was all achieved thanks to the popularisation of K-pop. Of course, this spread of culture and soft power can also be witnessed in the popularisation of American music, which led to the spread of Western cultural norms to all parts of the world, be it the way one dresses or the habits we cultivate; for example the tradition of eating birthday cake on one's birthday as compared to perhaps the lesser well-known Chinese tradition of eating longevity noodles on one's birthday. This ability of popular music to preserve and spread one's culture has been a lauded characteristic of other recognised forms of art, like the Indonesian Batik art with motifs unique to the Indonesian culture, or the popularisation of Indian arts and culture due to Bollywood.

In conclusion, popular music today can be considered works of art due to their original nature, and the skillful execution necessary, the provocative nature of popular music, and its ability to spread one's culture and garner soft power. In fact, popular music today is even being afforded the same treatment as the fine arts in some sense that there are universities offering degrees on Taylor Swift's music, like one would study Mozart's music. Not only that, there is also the fact that the music we study today without questioning whether it could be works of art were once popular pieces of music in the past. Who knows, perhaps the popular music we have now might be considered fine art in the future!

Comments

A very well-argued piece of response. Consistent treatment of the key words, with a good awareness of pop music as a genre and why it can be argued to be a work of art. Suitable examples were used to shed light on your arguments, showing a nice range as well. On the whole, essay was engaging and convincing. Good job!

The essay was largely fluent, clear and written with control. Good variety of expressions, with clear organisation of ideas.

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2024 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 2 **Pan Haotian | 24A01B**

Given the complexities of today's world, only the educated should be allowed to vote.'

When the first prototypes of democracy emerged thousands of years ago in ancient Greece, they assumed the unrecognisable form of a quasi-democracy, in which the ballot box was not a right, but a privilege. The ability to vote was restricted to the upper echelons of society: wealthy, educated, male senators, who were believed to be the only ones capable of grappling with the inevitable complexity of politics. Today, in an unprecedentedly volatile and complex world, marked by polarisation, tensions, and change, many clamour for a new model of democracy that harkens back to the past—a democracy where, once again, only the educated, who are informed about the facts behind political conundrums, are allowed to cast the vote that determines the fate of millions. I abhor this anachronistic stance, as an epistocracy, where solely the educated have a say, fails to account for the incommensurable values, not facts, undergirding society, and will ultimately neglect innumerable communities, hence causing irrevocable harm.

Detractors of my stance may posit that only the educated should be allowed to vote, since many important political decisions that bleed into the lives of all citizens require extensive knowledge. They hold that one's vote is more than just an unassuming decision affecting only the individual voter—given that the vote can decide policies that affect everyone else in society, we ought to be able to restrict this right when exercising it irresponsibly causes third party harm in the form of dangerous policies. Children, for instance, are not entitled to vote despite being intimately affected by policies, because we deem them uninformed and hence unable to make a rational choice. Seen in this light, an epistocracy simply extends existing principles of informed choice. The importance of education is further foregrounded by the highly complex world we live in today, rife with volatility and misinformation, hence necessitating education to truly uncover the truth and make rational weigh-ups. For instance, during Brexit, the reality of an already deeply convoluted matter, with many different viewpoints and conjectures, was further obfuscated by misinformation. Advocates of Brexit emphasised Britain's financial aid to the European Union, without revealing the crucial fact that despite these losses, Britain gains in exchange far more than it gives. While educated voters were deeply familiar with the situation, and able to rise above the din, a large swathe of the working class, who previously had little knowledge about Britain's long history with the European Union, were easily galvanised by such populist messaging. Driven by sentiment rather than information, and falsehoods rather than truth, the erstwhile uneducated led the drive of Brexit. The decisions of the uneducated, who did not possess the ability to parse complexities and discern fallacies, have fomented a bona fide crisis. Britain is now entrapped in a quagmire, with its medical system crumbling under manpower shortages stemming from immigration restrictions, and producers beleaguered by export tariffs that threaten their livelihoods. Unfortunately, given today's complexities, this is an all-too-familiar tale that is set to repeat across the world, as people struggle to weigh their decisions fairly without the information and faculties that education provides. As evinced by this example, allowing

uneducated individuals to vote often results in irrational decisions with no informed foundation, unleashing catastrophic outcomes upon innocent third parties and citizens. Hence, in order to ensure that our political decisions are well-thought-out and well-calibrated, only the educated, who are able to look through the metaphorical 'fog' of complexities that enshroud our world, should be allowed to vote.

However, the above viewpoint rests on the false premise that the fundamental questions posed by democracy have objectively correct answers. The harsh truth is that democracy is replete with incommensurable values and laced with trade-offs that require value judgements, not education. Security or freedom? Peace or privacy? Rights or utility? These questions form arenas of heated discussion with no simple, empirical answer—frankly, no amount of education will tell us definitively if we ought to, say, sacrifice individual rights for the greater good. Issues are 'complex' precisely because they have no easy answer; it is precisely moral complexities that require the popular vote to decide the way forward. For instance, controversial debates over abortion that are unfolding everywhere in the world often feature a heavily moral undertone, informing individuals' decisions over whether a foetus constitutes a life. Similarly, while citizens in countries like Singapore support some restrictions on freedom of speech in favour of stability (as evidenced by the People Action Party's dominant majority), those in other countries like America repudiate any attempt to compromise their individual freedoms. These questions have gone unanswered for decades, because central to political discussions lies a moral dialectic that information cannot untangle. Though certainly there may be empirical facts—for instance, that lockdowns prevent the spread of COVID—they are boxed in by moral decisions that have no such empirical answer, like whether personal freedoms of speech and movement ought to be traded off to stop COVID. Hence, the sheer scale and prevalence of these value judgements suggests that the majority of political decisions require a specific kind of education, informed through lived experience instead of theoretical textbooks. We need everyone's vote to abide by principles of popular sovereignty: that we ought to make decisions that benefit the majority of people's interests. Public opinion, in this case, need not be educated. For value judgements, that will inevitably impact our lives, everyone should get a say. Since these complex value-based questions pervade all of politics, everyone should be allowed to vote.

Finally, it is crucial to consider the practical ramifications of an epistocracy. We ought to reject a world in which only the educated are allowed to vote, as it entrenches the systemic oppression of minorities and underprivileged communities. An epistocracy is a utopic vision that disguises a jarringly dystopian reality. In a complex society, in which education is inextricably intertwined with socio-economic hierarchies of race, gender, and class, the epithet "educated" is a loaded term synonymous with privilege and inequality. Everywhere in the world, from America to Angola, wealthy individuals graduate from university at disproportionately higher rates. Black voters in America, for instance, are highly unlikely to gain access to the vote, especially in communities where poor parents are unable to send their children for a tertiary education costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. In India, the largest democracy in the world, girls are often illiterate as parents bar them from going to school, confining them instead to housework. An epistocracy engenders a permanent underclass along the lines of race, gender, and class, in which rich, white, men are judge, jury, and executioner. We ought to give minority communities a say over crucial issues like police violence to avoid their interests being trudged over and ignored. To do so, they need to be

able to vote to rebuff attempts at oppression. Hence, they must not be locked out of the franchise.

In conclusion, it is precisely because of today's complexities—of moral clashes, or of societal oppression—that we must not restrict the vote to the educated. While governments ought to attempt to correct misinformation and enhance education, it is only with universal suffrage that the final decision may reflect the opinions of the majority while preserving the rights of the minority.

Comments

There were some gaps in the argument early in this essay, but built momentum – presenting robust, well-supported arguments against epistocracy, drawing on both epistemic and moral dimensions and a range of examples across continents/societies! Well done! Consistent engagement with the notion of a complex world.

Strong mastery of language is evident – vocabulary is rich and varied, lending clarify and impact to points made!

2024 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 3 **Chua Yu Jie | 24A01B**

Is it still wise to put our hopes in international organisations?

It is often said that today's world is the most peaceful, cooperative, and prosperous in human history, with many according praise for these developments to the enhanced and unprecedented system of international organisations that emerged in the modern day, and in particular over the last 75 years. Beyond the inherently limited and inward-looking nature of nation states, these international organisations appear to be the forum at which cooperation for the benefit of all mankind can be achieved, with a great hope hence being placed in them to craft a more just, equitable, and orderly present and future. Certainly, throughout the past 75 years, they appear to have a proven track record of doing so and continue to be powerful agents of positive change in the present day. It is nevertheless also true that these organisations have become increasingly bureaucratic and static in the current day, as their increasing complexity calcifies complex systems which by necessity are limited in their power. Moreover, these organisations are increasingly subject to pressure and influence towards self-interested ends from individual nations, limiting their ability to broadly affect positive change particularly when such change goes against the interests of member states. Under the circumstances, therefore, while international organisations continue to be occasionally effective, and are necessary tools of international diplomacy, we ought not put our hopes in them as fundamentally flawed and increasingly politicised institutions.

It must first be acknowledged that, in spite of all the criticisms levelled at them, international organisations continue to do good and be agents of positive change in a multitude of areas in today's world. By their very nature as organisations transcending national borders, they have the capacity to act in a manner that focuses on the common good for mankind, rather than the sectarian and tribal considerations of nation-states. For instance, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), a body formed to arbitrate disputes between states in an impartial manner in accordance with international law, has seen some success in mitigating transnational disputes such as the Pedra Branca dispute between Singapore and Malaysia, where the national interests of each nation collided over ownership of the island of Pedra Branca. Such disputes can be settled in a just and peaceful manner, that upholds and indeed enforces laws and rules governing otherwise unchecked national authorities, precluding international tensions, or worse, confrontation, over such disputes. Even on a more granular level, international organisations have been able to affect tangible positive change, with groups such as UNESCO preserving and protecting important cultural sites, and groups such as UNRWA aiding refugees. These groups have and will certainly continue to employ their transnational nature to better serve the needs of mankind in their respective fields. On the whole, the very nature of the world we live in, one which has not seen a major global conflict for 75 years (an unprecedented feat in human history), has been attributed in large part to the work of international organisations which fostered these ties between nations and provided forums for disagreements to be resolved, such as the United Nations General Assembly. Thus, it is only natural for us to look towards these international organisations as

mankind's hope for continued progress in the present and future.

Nevertheless, in the light of the increasing inefficiency of these organisations, their capacity to affect positive change has been called into question, with doubt also being cast on whether hope ought to continue to be placed in them. In the present day, the ability of these organisations to carry out their functions has been reduced, often by the designs of their constituent states. For instance, the United Nations, and its various bodies such as the Security Council, which were initially conceived as avenues for the peaceful resolution of international disputes, have proven categorically incapable of carrying out such a function; conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Palestine conflict have failed to be adequately addressed by the UN, as states become increasingly willing and able to bypass or even exploit its systems, such as the Security Council Veto, for their self-interested ends. Moreover, these organisations themselves have been far from blameless. By their very nature, the scope and powers must be acceptable to all member states and this need for consensus has often hampered their processes and ability to respond adequately to pressing and immediate needs. The European Union serves as the most extreme example for this point, where a complete consensus is needed among all member states for decisions on admitting and expelling members, resulting in gridlock in 2023 when, in response to widespread anti-LGBT rhetoric and actions from the Hungarian and Polish governments which were broadly incompatible with the values of the bloc as a whole, no recourse could be taken against these States which naturally shielded each other from punishment. That no recourse could be taken by the EU against such incompatible actions speaks to the inefficiencies and limits that are inherent within international organisations, where limits to their powers and increasing divisions between member states render them less capable of resolving disputes and effecting widespread positive change for all. Under the circumstances, where the very raison d'etre of these organisations is incapable of being fulfilled, it seems as though hope in them seems misplaced, particularly for the future where such gridlock and division only appears more likely. Given also that international organisations are almost uniquely built upon trust, with little recourse to physical power to enforce their collective decisions beyond that of individual states who look primarily for their own interests, the current failures of these organisations only seems likely to diminish such trust in future, further reducing the already limited capabilities of these organisations is moving forward, and further reducing the wisdom of putting hope in these increasingly ineffective organisations.

Compounding this issue of gridlock are fundamental concerns over the very nature and basis of these international organisations, which are irrevocably tied to the self-interest of individual nations and hence not to be looked at as fully capable of transcending these interests. Though the day-to-day operations of organisations are carried out independently, the basis and foundation of such operations cannot by any means be construed as independent. The scope of these organisations' responsibilities and powers are most often the result of international treaties which nations create and accede to. The self-interest of individual nations is hence always present in defining the very frameworks within which these organisations operate. The establishment of the United Nations after World War II is a prime example where the victorious powers by dint of their complete supremacy over the shaping of the post-war global order was able to enshrined their own dominance into the new United Nations, putting themselves down as the only permanent members of the

Security Council and according themselves veto power over that body. The most foundational basis by which the UN operates under, to say nothing of the aftermentioned gridlock in that body in the present day, is hence built upon such self-interest. Under such a system, which persists in the modern day, the self-interest of these permanent Security Council members is given unchecked precedence, damaging the most fundamental vision of the UN as an impartial and equal stage for all nations. Equally damning, the nature of these organisations as transnational entails that they do not have their own power bases or revenue streams, being reliant on individual nations for their cooperation in providing the necessary funds for their functions. This fundamental nature has been cynically exploited by national governments worldwide to further their political narratives and goals, such as Trump's withdrawal of funding from the World Health Organisation and the UK's withdrawal of funding from UNRWA, severely damaging the ability of both organisations to function effectively. The vulnerability of international organisations to such self-interested moves further curtails their ability to be positive agents of change, where their ability to do so must be 'acceptable' to individual nations, particularly the powerful, to be successful. Ultimately, therefore, the fundamental weaknesses and inherently compromised nature of these organisations' structures and functions render them inherently politicised and flawed. This limits them to acting in ways that are palatable to individual nations' interests and thereby being no more deserving of hope being placed in them than in compromised nation states themselves.

In conclusion, while it is certainly true that international organisations do bring about positive outcomes for mankind as a whole, their inherently flawed and unequal nature, compounded by the increasing trend of gridlock seen in the present day render hope in them a difficult prospect particularly in the present. That is not to say hope ought to be placed in any other body wielding power, most of all national governments which are the root cause of many of the issues with international organisations. If international organisations are truly to become unproblematically successful, it is incumbent on us to change the national systems we live under and, in so doing, indirectly effect change to these international organisations. Yet in so doing, hope is ultimately placed not in such organisations themselves, but in the capacity and ability of mankind as a whole. Perhaps then, it is wisest to put our hopes in ourselves to bring about positive outcomes rather than any inherently flawed international organisation.

Comments

Terms and scope of the qn were clearly understood - you draw largely on contemporary developments and illustrated these across a range of different international organisations (ICJ, UNSC, EU, UNRWA). There is a little slip in the penultimate paragraph where you seemed to forget that "still" is a key term for a while, but this did not affect the overall strength of the response.

There were some unnecessarily long sentences. On the overall however, strong mastery of language is evident, with wide ranging sentence structure and varied vocabulary used in a precise manner. Transition markers/linking devices were varied and avoided the formulaic.

4

2024 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 3 **Ernest Tan En-Rae | 24S03M**

Is it still wise to put our hopes in international organisations?

Ever since the establishment of the United Nations (UN) after World War II, several international organisations have sprouted up, from the European Union (EU) serving the Western bloc, to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the region and even non-governmental entities like the World Health Organisation (WHO). While early proponents of international bodies touted their ability to coordinate response across geographical boundaries and minimise conflict between countries, critics of such groups have also raised valid concerns regarding their potential inefficacy, lambasting their ineffectiveness at tackling global issues. Thus, they opine that we should no longer rely on these entities to protect and serve our interests. I posit that international organisations today are indeed unable to achieve the same aims of conflict resolution and tackling problems as they did in the past. Hence, it would be unwise to place too much of our hopes in international organisations.

Firstly. the power of international organisations lies in their extensive global reach. With members from multiple countries, spanning several continents, they are able to coordinate responses to global crises with unprecedented accuracy and decisiveness, thus enabling the world to address problems quickly and effectively and giving us hope in a world riddled with such issues today. Take the WHO for instance, with over 120 member states, the organization was able to disseminate up-to-date information in real time regarding the spread and morphology of the SARS-Cov2 virus during the COVID-19 pandemic to health ministries and governing agencies all over the globe, from Australia to Iceland. With the aid of modern communication technology, researchers and scientists could share their findings with their foreign counterparts through the WHO to quicken the development of vaccines and safety protocols. The WHO also published advisories and provided technical expertise to the healthcare services of almost every developing country, especially developing ones with less than ideal epidemiological response frameworks, thus helping to prevent severe illness and loss of life from the disease. Together with the UN and EU, they also worker with wealthier countries like the United States (US), Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) to distribute the newly-developed COVID-19 vaccines to less economically developed countries, particularly those in Africa and South Asia, who could not afford to secure millions of doses for their citizens, thus reducing the extent of healthcare inequality and giving these nations a fighting chance to recover from the socioeconomic effects engendered by the global pandemic. In this sense, international organisations should be lauded for their efforts in facilitating cooperation between states, allowing for pooling of resources and knowledge from countries all around the world to tackle problems on the international level. Hence, it can be argued that we can still rely on these groups to solve and mitigate today's challenges.

Besides fostering collaboration between nations, international organisations are also able to maintain global peace, giving us hope for a future without conflict between different countries. By providing a platform for countries to resolve their disputes civilly and diplomatically, while also enforcing legislation and punishment against countries that flout international law, international organisations offer mediation and resolution to nations in disagreement, eliminating the need for violence or armed conflict in today's globalised, interconnected world. An apt example of this is the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is the judicial organ of the UN, that helps states arbitrate and resolve disputes. In 2008, when Singapore and Malaysia both lay claim over the island of Pedra Branca off the coast of Singapore, instead of going to war, as we might have done a century prior without any governing bodies to resolve the issue, both countries took their case to the ICJ. The ICJ then heard the case and after considering the Law of the Sea, ruled that rightful ownership of the island was with Singapore. In spite of this result, both countries were still able to maintain bilateral ties with one another without any bad blood. By providing a neutral arbitration body for the mediation of disagreements between countries to allow them to talk it out without resorting to violence, international organisations like the ICJ are able to promote friendly diplomatic relations and preserve global order and peace. In a similar vein, the UN Peacekeeping Task Force also provides military support from its member countries in territories undergoing civil conflict, such as the disputed Kashmir region between India and Pakistan. The task force acts as an objective, unbiased third-party to maintain peace in previously conflicted regions, thus preventing further clashes between nations and promoting international peace. With this in mind, it is not hard to see why some individuals view international organisations as a promising agent for protecting international relations and thus have high hopes for their continued development.

However, one must also be cognisant of the limitations of international organisations, for they are not a panacea for all global issues. The effectiveness of such entities is limited by the enforceability of the rules and regulations they have enacted. After all, what use are the laws and policies set out if the nations that flout them bear little to no consequences. When pitted against belligerent state and non-state actors, international bodies have little sway over these entities, who do not abide by the rule of international law and face little to no punishment for doing so. Take Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has been ongoing since February 2022 and shown no signs of abating, as an example. Despite directives from the ICJ and UN calling for Russia to cease its advance on Ukraine, and also for the arrest of Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes, their pleas have fell on deaf ears, partly because Russia is too powerful to care about the little repercussions the invasion has had on itself. While international sanctions have been imposed on Russia, from barring of essential exports to freezing of Kremlin assets in foreign banks, Russia has remained undeterred by their actions and continues its invasive assault on Ukraine. It simply has too much firepower and enough resources to sustain itself. Coupled with the inadequacies of international law, little can be done to stop the tyrannical Russian state from mounting its hostile takeover of Ukraine, which was ironically triggered by Ukraine's desire to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). More recently, the Israel-Palestine War also reveals the failings of international organisations at resolving conflicts involving non-compliant actors. Despite pleas by over 150 of the member states of the UN for a ceasefire, Israeli prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu has continued the country's counter-offensive on Hamas-controlled Gaza in response to the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The conflict has claimed thousands of lives and has shown no signs of subsiding even though international organisations have condemned Israel, calling its response over the top and disproportionate, especially since there have been numerous civilian casualties on both sides. This evinces the ineffectiveness of such groups in dealing with unreasonable nations who do not respect international law. Compounded by the relatively inconsequential and softer punishments that they mete out, it has rendered international organisations unable to effectively maintain global peace. Thus, it would be unwise to place too much hope in them.

Furthermore, international organisations are also ineffective at tackling many types of problem on a global scale as doing so requires cooperation from most if not all of their member states. This can be difficult given that the vested interests of different countries often conflict, thus inhibiting the ability of these groups to enact any real, lasting change. From the earlier example of the Russo-Ukraine War, another contributing reason to Russia's continued attack on Ukraine is its position on the UN Security Council, a governing body of the UN that consists of five of the most powerful states, notably the US, China and Russia itself, and each member has the power to decide the actions of the UN. Attempts to call for a military intervention by the UN to stop the invasion have been vetoed by none other than Russia, demonstrating the inefficacy of the response by international organisations when countries themselves become obstructions. By comprising numerous members, the same extensive influence that enable collaboration and cooperation across geographical boundaries has become a hindrance in tackling global obstacles. Take the Paris Climate Agreement and Conference of the Parties (COP) for instance, two initiatives put forth by countries in a bleak attempt to address climate change. The lack of concrete action taken by the member states and abundance of idealistic, unfulfilled promises of net zero emissions are testament to the incompetence of international organisations at solving systemic, large-scale issues. This is especially true for a problem as pervasive of climate change, which does not discriminate in its ravaging effects on countries all over the globe. Donald Trump withdrew the US from the Paris Accord during his term while other economic powerhouses like India and China have made little headway to their emissions targets, sacrificing environmental preservation over economic interests and culminating in a lacklustre global response to the pressing issue of climate change. Out of the close to 200 countries that signed the agreement in 2015, less than half are on track to meet their carbon emissions targets. IN fact, Germany took a step back by reverting to natural gas as its main energy source due to public concerns over nuclear power. The inefficacy of global organisations at tackling problems stems from the requirement of a unanimous front; a global, collective effort is needed to address issues on such a large scale. However, due to each country having its own national agenda, and other countries thinking that since no one else is doing their part, that they should not be obliged to either, a vicious cycle of inertia and inaction is created, making it near impossible to coordinate a coherent international response to tackle problems plaguing today's world. Hence, we cannot over rely on international organisations to deliver on their promises as they have done in the past.

All in all, with the complexity of global challenges that exist in today's globalised, ever-

changing world, we can no longer place as much hope in international organisations in resolving these issues as we did in the past. While these entities undoubtedly play an important role in addressing and alleviating certain problems and have been helpful in promoting global peace, we must also be weary of its limitations. International organisations still fall short when it comes to dealing with uncooperative nations and leaders and for deep-rooted problems that require countries to make sacrifices and trade-offs. Until these states are willing to set aside their own self-centric interests and look at the bigger picture, we should not and cannot get our hopes up that global organisations can solve all of our problems. Hence, it would be unwise to put too much of our hopes in international organisations.

Comments

A very thoughtful and measured piece that engaged the question at a conceptual level by considering the features of Ios and the strengths/ limitations of Ios. It will be good to address the key term "still" throughout the essay. Very confident use of language with varied choice of vocabulary. Language is convincing.

5

2024 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 3 **Wong Kheng Hshin | 24S06O**

Is it still wise to put our hopes in international organisations?

"When down came a monstrous dove/whose force was purely moral/that turned the heroes' hearts to love/and made them stop their quarrel." Those lines were published in Punch[1] nearly a hundred years ago, describing the success of the League of Nations in stopping the Greco-Bulgarian War. While detractors would argue that international organisations cannot be trusted because they lack the ability to enforce their decisions, I instead opine that international organisations should enjoy our hopes. As long as our hopes are reasonable and feasible, putting them in international organisations offers unmatched influence.

Certainly, international organisations cannot compel member states to enforce their decisions, possibly making them nothing more than futile "talk shops". That assumption of Westphalian state sovereignty – the view that the state alone may decide how it is to be regulated, and that it alone holds the monopoly on violence necessary to enforce the decisions – is after all the fundamental one underpinning the international order. Consider the most prominent international organisation today, the United Nations. Decisions by its General Assembly, notably, are non-binding, while those of its Security Council (which have the force of law) may be vetoed by the whims of its Permanent Five members, the USA, UK, France, China and Russia. Especially in our multipolar world, characterised by great-power competition and conflict (especially since the rise of a China determined to avenge its "century of humiliation"), it is hard enough to get mutually antagonistic states to agree. What is more, securing the votes of rotating temporary members (which are generally small states whose interests diverge from those of the global superpowers), or even enough to pass a resolution, complicates this. The upshot of all of this is that we cannot trust global organisations. Neither, for that matter, can we trust regional ones like ASEAN. ASEAN's reliance on "confidence-building measures" – by which it means talk, debate, and discourse instead of action – is the product of a system that recognises state sovereignty and national interest as the foundation upon which international organisations are built. Buttressing it further is a culture of consensus and compromise – *mushiwara* – that precludes any action that fails to receive unanimous support. Whether this has meant that ASEAN cannot stand united against Chinese claims in the South China Sea (which the ICJ has rejected in favour of the Philippines) because one of the thirteen member states (Cambodia) disagreed, or that it cannot interfere in ongoing genocides in Myanmar, it has reduced it to being a mere talk-shop where nothing gets done. Insofar as our deepest hopes lie in the solution of global problems, we should not put our hopes in international organisations nowadays. Compare this with the political climate just after 1991, the "unipolar moment" when Western liberal values had emerged victorious from the Cold War and appeared hegemonic in the world. Not

[1] *Punch* was a British satirical magazine popular in many parts of the British Empire.

only were countries speaking the same language of freedom, democracy, and self-determination, they were acting upon those values, interfering against the ruthless and unjustified Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The change is startling: whereas in the past we could hope, now we cannot.

However, accepting this simplistic narrative obscures the wider trend of closer integration that the world has seen, however. While we may not have reached the apex state of international organisations, we should continue to hope because of their potential developments. Indeed, it is useful remembering that before Wilson and World War I, there was not even such a thing as an "international organisation". It was restricted to the books and imaginations of philosophers trying to form projects for "perpetual peace". After World War I, while an international organisation was born, it was plagued by difficulties including the necessity of unanimity for every single decision. That deficiency was cured with the current iteration of the United Nations: evidence that the development of international organisation trends towards effectiveness. That is not all, however, as the proliferation of ideas like the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) are increasingly making it plausible that such organisations can usefully and productively intervene in atrocities like genocide and mass murder. If we have hoped to build a world without war and such inhumane crimes, we may not see that dream in the international organisations of yesterday or today – but we can trust that we will see it in those of tomorrow. We have borne that hope for so long because that trend was evident, and we should continue bearing it because that trend gets more and more plausible. It is not just political states that are growing closer together as they interact in the same forums and trade ideas, after all. That is merely one sign of a multidimensional push for globalisation, with global trade (driven by containerisation and aviation), telecommunications, and the internet increasingly linking humans, societies, economies and inevitably nations. International organisations are likely to benefit from the next step: the transfer of political sovereignty from fractured nation-states to cohesive humanity – and with this so likely, why should we not continue to hope?

Even if that does not convince us – and it should – we can continue by noting that the functions an international organisation currently plays are vastly expanded compared to those of the past, justifying our hopes in even the current iteration of such organisations. In the past, international organisations were capable only of stopping minor clashes – those between "Balkandum" and "Balkandee", as that British cartoon so condescendingly put it. More specifically, it only stopped those clashes when both parties were willing to stop – Greece, after all, chose to obey the League of Nations' demands because its goals were limited. It sought only compensation for the soldier accidentally shot during the Incident at Petrich. Compared with the League of Nations' dismal performance in the Corfu Crisis or the Abyssinian Crisis (where its leading members, Britain and France, treacherously plotted to protect their national interests by selling out Ethiopia to Mussolini under the Hoare-Laval Pact), the hopes of the past seem blown way out of proportion. Nowadays, by contrast, we have states consciously choosing to trust to international organisations, and crucially, international tribunals, instead of resulting to the ultima ratio regnum – war. We see Singapore and Malaysia fighting with words, not bullets, over the Pedro Branca issue; we see

transitional authorities and transitional justice enforced through UN-sponsored bodies – most famously those in Cambodia (UNTAC and the ECCC) or Rwanda. We see, in short, states consciously choosing, and international organisations willingly and ably facilitating the solution of problems in a non-violent way. From bodies with a miniscule chance of stopping bloodshed, to recognised and trusted institutions that either avert bloodshed entirely, or which preclude it from happening again through peacebuilding efforts, international organisations seem to have earned our trust.

Even if both compelling arguments do not convince, and it is judged that international organisations do not deserve such hopes, there is the possibility that it is not their fault but ours – for having too great a hope as to be unreasonable. Perhaps it has been and always will be the case that big powers eschew collective negotiation for bilateral ones where they can make their influence felt – or failing that, either set the rules of the game to secure outcomes favourable to themselves alone, or simply ignore any decisions taken. Yet that does not preclude the effectiveness of such organisations as spaces for mooting ideas. In particular, it does not preclude our hoping that international organisations secure social, economic and environmental change, as many have done. Whether we think of the WHO and the ILO, which were established in the wake of WWI but remain vibrant and effective today – the latter's achievements once included ending slavery in many African nations, but now looks like developing charters for an 8h working week, combatting child labour, and promoting worker's rights and welfare – the IMF and World Bank (which even today, as in the wake of the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, still provide essential help in reform, recovery and relief), or RFMOs and international agreements to conserve biodiversity (like UNCLOS and the BBNJ treaty), the list goes on and on and on. These have not just secured a better life for millions, emancipating them from wage-slavery and exploitation, but have also ensured a safer one for all, free from the threat of environmental degradation and declining fish stocks which threaten food security and livelihoods. That so many have sprung up to continue and expand the work of their predecessors is surely cause for hope, when combined with the continuing value which previous organisations bring to the table. Even if we cannot hope that peace be guaranteed through these organisations, we can hope for realistic achievements to continue. Achievements, coincidentally, which do not constitute the absence of war – negative peace – but which secure to all a liveable and happy life – the positive peace that is perhaps a more significant hope!

To this, detractors might object that we have no guarantee that this lies in the interests of each nation, and in such a case, our hopes would quickly diminish. True, these organisations depend on individual states to accomplish. They depend, for example, on countries accurately reporting fishing counts, or accepting logging and emission quotas. If one country chooses to flout them, as Trump did when he pulled out of the Paris Agreement, other countries are incentivised not to accept constraints in the cutthroat realpolitik of the global international order, possibly leading organisations to collapse like falling dominoes. I further concede that with the rise of populism as a path to power, as politicians play upon dissatisfaction and promote nationalist rhetoric – think "America First", "Brexit", and more very recent phenomenon attributable to economic stagnation and the crisis-ridden 2000s –

it is becoming increasingly likely that international organisations are becoming futile. Yet, despite all these factors, we should still have hope in them because what constitutes the national interest is not fixed, unmoveable, set in stone. It is defined, and the rise of an increasingly interconnected digital generation (accustomed to acting on the global stage, thinking like a global citizen, and networking with people thousands of miles away) is likely to mean that the national interest is increasingly defined in international terms. We live in an increasingly post-Westphalian world, and youth recognise this fact, overwhelmingly voting for parties like the Liberals or Democrats. These parties are the ones which can interpret the national interest in terms approaching the global interest – and, by doing so, provide international organisations with the support they need to succeed. We should have hope in these international organisations because, in a few years, the generation of Thunberg, of the school strikes and youth activism, will soon be voting citizens, capable of putting in power leaders who will ensure that commitments are met and organisations empowered. At the very least, the rise of this new interest group will make it politically necessary to act in an internationalist way.

In conclusion, we willingly acknowledge the deficiencies of international organisations. Theya re non-binding, or at least are spaces with rules rigged against the passage of binding resolutions. They are guided by national interest. Both do not mean, however, that their only solution to a problem is "a joint memorandum suggesting a mild disapproval of you", as Puncg mocked. Instead, if we see the larger trend, we notice one justifying our hope and beliefs – we see a body that is capable of promoting multidimensional prosperity and liveable lives, which is (and will be) a tool to safeguard peace and avert the disaster of war, and which above all meets these criteria more than the dis-organisations of the past did or ever could. Above all, it falls to us to continue this trend, mixing belief and hope with pragmatism and realism, to earn the trust that the people of the world must continue to vest in these bodies. Cynicism is not wise – it is merely the jeering or arrogance, the mocking of a vacuous herd that adopts its hackneyed slogans. Realistic hopes, by contrast, are wise – and necessary.

Comments:
A strong response, showing a wide range of examples. Several occasions of good evaluation both of the nature of IOs and of the current sociopolitical climate. Could expand on the former, nonetheless. Some conceptual understanding glimpsed when making past/present references. Clear personal voice. Great command of language. Could work on some brevity to avoid laborious use of language. Do improve readability of essay by including more spaces in between words.

6

2024 | Y5 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 3 **Amanda Lim De Ying | 25A01B**

To what extent does social media promote undesirable behaviour?

With the ever-growing influence of social media today, screens are constantly being flooded with an array of content ranging from online activism to hashtag movements, to challenges on platforms like TikTok. Some may argue that with the transmissibility and reach granted by social media, that power and potential can be abused to spread and promote behaviours that are undesirable and might cause egregious repercussions. However, the rise of new-age content in the form of interactive online platforms does not necessarily lead to exclusively undesirable consequences.

In the argument or whether social media promotes undesirable behaviour, it is undeniable that one must consider the potential of social media to reach out to a significantly larger audience and to mobilise them to take greater action to enact meaningful change. Strikingly, this is exemplified by activist movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter and more, each lending a voice to underrepresented sectors of our society, drastically shifting the power dynamic and allowing these communities to leverage on the virality and reach granted by social media to encourage and enable society as a whole to fight for racial and gender equality. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement which went viral in 2020 sparked by the murder of George Floyd gained traction when a video clip of the act of police brutality was shared on social media. This shed light on an issue that albeit prevalent, had been previously overlooked by the majority of society, ultimately inspiring hundreds of millions of people, beyond the United States, to sign protests to demand change on their own platforms and to actively take action to demand change rather than passively participating. Furthermore, the impact of the #MeToo movement in changing our culture to becoming more accepting and willing to listen to the stories of survivors of sexual assault have undoubtedly brought incredible changes in how the issue is dealt with. Beyond legislative reforms and the crackdown on the protection of victims, the #MeToo movement was able to challenge the previously taboo topic of sexual assault and the culture of victim blaming prevalent and entrenched in all corners of the globe. The widespread reach and transmissibility of messages like such on social media fuelled the movement and resulted in significant impacts. In the local context, Monica Boey, a student of National University of Singapore (NUS) filed a complaint on Instagram against Nicholas Lim for sexual assault, resulting in his suspension. Not only did social media allow and encourage her to speak up through the shift in mindsets, governments and institutions were also inclined to mete out more than just a slap on the wrist and hold her abuser accountable. This highlights the potential for social media to shape mindsets to be more progressive and equal for all members of society.

However, the same reach and transmissibility that social media has can be tapped on to promote and spread hateful and discriminatory ideologies by granting a universal platform which can be abused by anyone due to the lack of barriers to entry. This issue further exacerbated by the algorithm behind social media platforms which is designed to create and

tailor feeds and "For You" pages of users according to their existing beliefs, creating an echo chamber. As a result, users are trapped in fixed mindsets as their beliefs will continue to be validated by what they see online, resulting in confirmation bias and painting an incomplete picture of reality, For instance, the Capitol Hill riots in 2020 were fuelled by social media as right-wing users had their opinions echoed on social media and believed that the election was "stolen" from Trump due to his own posts and other extremist views that mirrored their prevailing sentiments, ultimately creating political strife and extremely dangerous and violent protests causing instability. Furthermore, Donald Trump also used his platform on X, previously Twitter, to call the COVID-19 virus the "Kung Flu", perpetuating and fuelling anti-Chinese sentiments already prevalent in the country. To add on, social media allows every user to have a platform, which has given rise to creators who share and promote extremist views or even misogynistic ones to young, impressionable audiences, conditioning them to think in a certain way or act in a certain way that harms the progress of society. For example, the teenage boy responsible for bombing the mosque in Christchurch was found to be a part of multiple online communities and platforms promoting extremist and violent ideologies. Furthermore, creators like Andrew Tate, who very firmly and determinedly push out extreme misogynistic ideas that objectify women, have garnered large followings on the internet. Such examples of users who abuse their platforms have detrimental impacts, particularly in socialising and conditioning the beliefs of their large, impressionable youth audience. By shaping public perception and societal attitudes, social media guides the way each of us live and act in daily life, whether or not we are cognisant of it.

Furthermore, the virality of social media has the capacity to influence and encourage reckless and dangerous behaviours irrationally through the spread of misinformation and even seemingly harmless "challenges" on platforms like TikTok. For example, the "Benadryl Challenge" which is responsible for at least one death, or the "Blackout Challenge", or the "Tide Pod" challenge in which users were encouraged to eat a packet of laundry detergent. Such reckless and risky behaviour under the guise of fun and light-hearted challenged have had hundreds of thousands of participants worldwide, including a large majority of youth and children, who caught up in the excitement of these challenges, often do not consider the greater potential repercussions on their safety, health or even their lives. This showcases how social media has the power to influence how people act on such a significant scale due to the nature of its reach, and how many online trends can potentially encourage users to partake in risky behaviour. Furthermore, the potential of social media to accelerate the spread of fake news may paint an inaccurate picture of reality to users, breeding unnecessary fear that pushes users to act irrationally in a way that could impact both themselves and society. For example, during COVID-19, a user on HardwareZone falsely shared that Singapore had experienced its first death from the virus, causing extreme, widespread fear that led many Singaporeans to panic buy, causing shortages in essentials all over the country. Hence, the virality of such trends and misinformation can result in irrational, unsafe behaviour for users.

Lastly, social media has popularised a culture of "virtue signalling" and encouraged users to partake in so-called activism that can serve as an opposite effect or only last for short-term, transient period, which encourages user to undeservingly give themselves a pat on the back and falsely allowing them to believe that they are making a change. Firstly, as social media serves as a platform for users to represent themselves, it has unintentionally bred a culture

of "virtue signalling" encouraging users to advocate for certain causes to "prove" their values without actually taking the time to understand the issues they claim to advocate for as they can simply do so with the click of a few buttons. For example, Justin Bieber shared a post that read "Justice for Israel", superimposed on the background of the Gaza Strip highlighting how he reposted the image solely for projecting an image of himself on social media rather than to truly advocate. Besides that, the #BlackoutTuesday movement encouraged users to post pictures of black squares to amplify the voices of the Black community, but it ultimately drowned out the resources, campaigns and petitions under #BLM, showing the misguided and ineffective forms of activism encouraged on social media. Due to the performative and public nature of social media, users often focus more on performative, symbolic gestures rather than meaningful change, which only lasts for as long as the conversation is trending. Thus, social media encourages transient, performative acts of advocacy, rather than promoting and encouraging users to work towards sustainable, lasting change.

In a nutshell, social media itself is merely a tool that can grant its user with a platform to voice their opinions and condition others by lending users greater transmissibility, reach and virality. The determining factor of what this tool can be used for depends on its users. In the right hands, it can be used to spark collective action by giving a voice to all users. However, in the wrong hands it could be used to amplify and solidify extremist views, perpetuating a cycle of discriminatory, violent behaviour. The virality of posts can also potentially allow the wrong things to gain traction, such as reckless challenges and misinformation, pushing users to partake in undesirable behaviours such as a result of peer pressure or fear. Social media even creates a culture of performative and meaningless activism, spurring users to present themselves a certain way solely on how they want to be perceived and shifting the focus away from the original intentions of making a difference in our society.

Comments:
A very good attempt, with relevant points which are developed with sufficient details and wide-ranging examples. Perhaps as a next step focus on how social media shapes the beliefs of people and influences them to behave a certain way (e.g. why do people want to call people out on social media? or why are they motivated to resort to "virtue signalling"?). Language-wise, very clear and fluent. Well-structured with wide-ranging vocab.

7

2024 | Y5 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 4 **Chen-June Kee Fay | 25A01B**

'There is no point in fighting for gender equality today.' Do you agree?

Before feminism vaulted into the mainstream where it has since thrived, grossing over a billion dollars at last year's global box office in the guise of a proudly and gaudily pink manifesto-cum-toy-commercial [2] which competed in—and out-competed—the formerly testosterone-driven summer blockbuster market, it was incubated in the womb of academia: Simone de Beauvoir in place of Greta Gerwig. Yet, despite the mainstream's current embrace, a certain strand of left-leaning academia has since abandoned it. Drawing on the naming conventions of 'post-structuralism' and 'post-colonialism', 'post-feminism', as its title suggests, holds that the ideal of gender equality has been clinched: the fight for gender equality is now obsolete. However, even post-feminists concede that their claims are limited to Western developed democracies; and that which they consign to the past—feminism—employs a central metaphor which attests to its continued relevance.

Only cavillers would contest that significant strides have not been made towards gender equality. The victories gained by yesterday's fights are evident today. In developed democracies, gender discrimination at the legislative and structural level has been, for the most part, eradicated, at least in a de jure sense. Answering the call of the suffragettes (oft-labelled as 'first wave feminists'), the vote has long been extended to women in the UK and beyond and, as a result of second-wave feminists' demands for equal employment opportunities, so too are women now protected by legislation from workplace discrimination. Within the domestic sphere, women have reclaimed their autonomy as humans and not merely husbands' property. AWARE's community-level campaign in Singapore, a country far more conservative than most Western democracies, led to the eventual total repeal of marital rape immunity. Additionally, the revolution within the marbled chambers of the legislature has been accompanied by a wider sociocultural reckoning with the impacts of patriarchal control and the need for gender equality. The zeitgeist, which had derided Jane Eyre as a dangerous and subversive novel partially culpable for 1848, now embraces feminist ideals; and even corporations, which typically jump onto social movements only once they have proven to be so accepted as to be profitably anodyne, churn out long press releases on their female employment figures and their unwavering support for women. No company will now claim that gender equality is not a corporate goal, and most will claim that it has been achieved (although statistics beg to differ). #MeToo brought to the fore the sexual abuse perpetrated by powerful men which had previously been tacitly condoned. When Trump's Access Hollywood tape was released, the backlash came not only from the left: even prominent conservatives such as the Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell begrudgingly condemned his comments. Weinstein, who had treated Hollywood as his oyster, saw his impunity rescinded and himself put behind bars. Ire for the 2004 Super Bowl's wardrobe malfunction was justly redirected from Janet Jackson (who suffered the initial brunt) to Justin Timberlake as the public rallied behind #MeToo. This solidarity crossed geographical and cultural borders: even in heavily patriarchal Japan did

[2] Barbie, a Greta Gerwig-directed movie, was one of the highest grossing films of 2023.

journalist Shiori Ito, who saw her accusation of sexual abuse ignored by the courts, find support online which grew so large as to dominate national headlines, fuelling a growing movement for legislative reform which culminated in the recent re-definition of rape from being force-based to consent-based. In the theatres of the law and public discourse, it appears that the fight for gender equality is largely won and over.

Here, the central metaphor of feminism as occurring in 'waves' is particularly prescient: though the general movement of the tide may be towards the shore of gender equality, every forward ebb is still succeeded by a backwards wane: with every significant stride towards gender equality is a concomitant backlash; and given the major progress made in the past decade, the current backlash is also especially strong. The US, long ahead of the curve with regards to women's rights, saw the overturning of Roe v. Wade in mid-2022. Without federal protections, male-dominated Republican state legislatures quickly enacted sweeping bans on abortions with some, such as Louisiana, not even allowing exceptions for rape and threatening to imprison doctors who assist with abortion procedures. As gender equality finally gained a foothold in the cultural sphere, it lost its foothold in the domestic. The victory secured in the fight for gender equality is not permanent; and to cease fighting because of a perceived victory is equivalent to surrender: a case in point is how the right to abortion enshrined by Roe v. Wade has since been retracted. This rollback in women's reproductive rights is echoed in other developed countries: though Italy has yet—and does not intend—to criminalise abortion, its far-right government led by Brothers-of-Italy's Giorgia Meloni has curtailed access while granting pro-life groups ingress to abortion clinics. Furthermore, the tide of misogyny is rising in political potency with far-right Republicans making significant inroads in US state legislatures and online personalities such as Andrew Tate (now charged with rape) capturing significant online communities of aggrieved men. When inequality is taken for granted, equality is perceived as oppression. The reactionary men's rights movement, resurgent throughout the developed world, is perhaps most powerful in South Korea where clashes with feminist demonstrators have broken out into violence. Idaenam are now seen as a core voting bloc and political condemnation has shifted towards conciliation with them actively courted by the current ruling People Power Party. Given the extent of contemporary backsliding, it perhaps reasons that the fight to secure gender equality is as pressing as ever.

To the developing world, post-feminism is a pipe dream. Whatever strides that have been made in the developed world have at most been matched with shuffles in the developing; and while conversations on gender equality have become omnipresent in the developed world, they have been unequivocally shut down in the developing. Even at the edge between developing and developed, China (which boasts the world's second-largest economy) remains actively hostile to calls for gender equality. When videos of women being assaulted by men at restaurants, of another being beaten unconscious and fatally run over by her husband's car, of another being chained up as a sex slave (and mother of eight) in rural Jiangsu province went viral on Douyin and Xiaohongshu, the response from the authorities was not strict opprobrium and immediate prosecution but swift censorship and canny redirection of the social media outrage towards gang violence instead. This was despite the enshrining of equal rights between men and women within the Constitution since the CCP came to power. In countries where gender inequality is tacitly endorsed by the state and where calls for change are silenced with celerity, the fight has yet to even reach its apogee,

let alone be concluded. In Afghanistan, the Taliban enforces not only mandatory hijab but also denies girls the central human right to a secondary education. Earlier this year, the Gambian parliament voted to advance a bill re-legalising female genital mutilation as a hallowed cultural practice. Even in India, child marriages remain commonplace and tribal tensions oft explode into gender-based violence with women paraded naked through the streets of states like Manipur. Yet change is possible and fighting far from hopeless. After Mahsa Amini died in police custody for refusing to comply with the mandatory hijab law, protests—which the authorities found hard to contain—erupted across Iran. The protesters were not just women as had been the case in the past: men, shaken out of quiescence by the morality police's brutality, joined the demonstrations. The cause of gender equality, formerly advanced by women only, received newfound support from men. The Iranian government, overwhelmed by circumstances, temporarily disbanded the morality police as a faux olive branch. Though its repression has since returned, so too has the possibility of change been demonstrated: public support for the theocratic regime is at a record low according to even the government's official results for the 2024 legislative elections. The torch of gender equality has proven to be a politically powerful ideal: the fight for gender equality in developing countries is only beginning.

In the developed world, gender equality may be present in outline yet inequality still exists in the details with the persistence of the gender pay gap, pink tax, glass ceiling, and employment discrimination against pregnant women, especially in South Korea and Japan. In the developing world, women have yet to find a room in the public sphere let alone gain (to borrow the title of Virginia Woolf's manifesto) a room of their own. In both, gender equality is only secured once it is secure, and given the propensity for even the developed world to backslide, the forever fight for gender equality is as pointed now as ever. #MeToo was feminism's fourth wave: a fifth will have to follow.

Comments:
Very good knowledge and awareness of issues was shown, with very apt examples which demonstrated insight, though examples are of uneven quality due to some lacking specific details. It would have been better if you account for the shift.

Language-wise, strong personal voice with wide-ranging vocabulary. Very good control of language.

2024 | Y5 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 2 **Matteo Jude Wee Sze Yu | 25S06D**

Schools fail to adequately prepare students for adult life. How far is this true?

The concept of a "school" first originated from the ancient civilisations of Egypt and China. Meant to serve as a sacred site for the learning of highly gatekept knowledge, only a select few individuals – usually the sons of kings and ministers – were given the privilege to study in these cloistered institutions. In 1989, the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by 140 countries resulted in the right to universal education being formally proclaimed as something every youth should enjoy. Under this equality paradigm, primary and even secondary education has been made compulsory in most countries. With global literacy rates and the socioeconomic prosperity that follows from it steadily rising, it is increasingly evident that schools play a vital role in society as places of learning where all of our youth, not just the select few, can develop the qualities, competencies and skills to survive and thrive when they eventually become adults. Such qualities include independence, time management and emotional maturity, which ensures success in all areas of adult life from work to managing relationships and responsibilities. I believe that while some schools may overemphasise on rote learning in their curriculum, for the most part schools still recognise the responsibility they play in each child's growth and hence develop our youth beyond just scoring well on academic tests, thus allowing them to transition to adult life more smoothly

Some claim that in many schools around the world, there is an inordinate focus on getting students to ace their written tests, resulting in the creation of a generation of robotic test-takers offering limited soft skills and eventually proving to be of little ability in the workplace. Schools certainly do have the incentive to focus on student grades; after all, they are the most tangible indicator of student "success". Grades are what education ministries review when deciding which schools to increase or cut funding for and what anxious parents scrutinise when choosing the "best" school for their child to study in. Thus, for the sake of the school's self-interest, students are more often than not pressured to a horrifying extent to perform well: for example, the proliferation of the "cram school" is endemic in Kota, where hundreds and thousands of Indian students study upwards of 14 hours a day preparing for the brutally competitive JEE examinations, India's equivalent of the A-levels. In China, it is a common sight for schools to force students to stay on campus six days a week, with absurdly long school hours especially in prestigious institutions like the Chengdu Seventh Middle School where students study from 7am to 9pm. These examples are emblematic of a larger worrying trend, where students have no other option but to burrow their heads and study, doing nothing much else for the remainder of their student life. To this end, students have no time to develop skills that are essential to adult life, like team communication or creative thinking. These skills which are required for team leadership and personal effectiveness, for example, cannot be reasonably tested via pen-and-paper examinations and are thus omitted from the curriculum, barring students from the opportunity to develop them. Furthermore, the content that is studied during lessons also has very little bearing on

the jobs that students will do in the future – unless one is a mathematician, for example, an adult would never have to use integration in his daily life. It hence seems that the academic work students do at school is of limited utility when he grows up, proving that such schools with a disproportionate focus on academic excellence fail to prepare students for adult life.

However, many schools throughout the world are focusing on developing inter- and intra-personal soft skills, which all adults will require to navigate the complexities of adult life, through a variety of developmental courses. Almost every school has some form of leadership programme where students can take up leadership positions and play a pivotal role in planning events, managing student discipline. They take up responsibilities that highly resemble what adults are required to do in their day-to-day jobs. For example, the renowned boarding school Korean Minjok Leadership Academy features a comprehensive leadership development programme, where its own student government is empowered to take charge of the discipline of the student body as well as brainstorm ideas to improve the school and student life. It is through these experiences, commonplace in most schools today, that students develop crucial competencies like time management, critical thinking and teamwork. Even if a student is not in a leadership role, he will most likely experience being led by his peer or a teacher for various projects and would have to learn to meet deadlines, how to convey his ideas properly during discussions and other skills that cannot be taught in the books, as they require real life experiences and genuine interactions with others to learn and master. It is these skills that not only make adults good employees, but at a deeper level, enable adults to manage the responsibilities they have to shoulder in a mature and effective manner. By developing these crucial competencies through leadership and other programmes, schools give students a head start in their adulting journey.

Moreover, there are many vocational schools that comprehensively prepare students for crucial jobs in the workforce. Compared to academic know-how that tends to be unnecessary for the jobs students take up in their later years, vocational schools directly teach students the hard skills that are required to excel in the blue-collar jobs that keep society running. For example, in Singapore, the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) offers both NITEC and Higher NITEC diplomas in a variety of trades, like hairdressing and nursing. In the United States, a network of trade schools that offer courses in carpentry and tailoring, among other skills, presents itself as an attractive alternative to traditional colleges. Classes in these schools often entail real-world application of the knowledge that is acquired during lessons via hands-on work and authentic industry experiences. As a case in point, ITE's 3-year Higher NITEC course provides each student with two internship opportunities throughout their study, ensuring students are directly equipped with the hard skills needed in their respective vocations, thus increasing employability and making sure they are prepared for this field of work. Thus, schools adequately prepare students for the working world, especially in the blue-collar trades.

Finally, even in schools with a more academic focus, there has been a much greater emphasis in developing critical thinking and analytical skills that adults need to thrive in all aspects of their life. An epochal change in pedagogy has taken place over the past few decades, where schools around the world are prioritising metacognition over the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. The most direct implication of this pedagogical shift is that the era of memorising information and regurgitating it during examinations, as exemplified by the cram

schools of India and China, is over. Instead, schools now teach their students to be self-reflexive: to think about how they think, as well as how their thinking process affects the decisions they make. There is a newfound emphasis on developing deeper levels of cognition: this paradigm shift is reflected in changes in curricula worldwide. Science lessons in Singapore have evolved to include more experimentation compared to theory. Students are encouraged to witness and investigate physical phenomena, then unpack why they happen using scientific concepts, which requires the higher-order skills of careful observation, reasoning and application of knowledge compared to pure regurgitation and rote learning. Students sitting for the General Paper at the A-level examinations learn how to unpack societal trends and identify underlying causes, finally gathering and distilling their thoughts to structure a sound argument. In today's curriculum, cognitive skills of a higher level are being developed. Adults need these skills throughout their whole life: to unpack causes and do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis during a workplace presentation, to navigate their social and romantic relationships with greater maturity and to make wise choices while voting at elections or serving on a jury. Schools provide rich opportunities for these skills to be developed by students, thus preparing them for a smoother and more successful adult life.

The best schools are microcosms of society: they model how the working world is like while providing a safe environment for students to learn and grow. With the evolution of educational pedagogy from narrow to broad-based and from prioritising knowledge to developing cognition, I believe most schools are more than equipped to prepare students for adult life. It is imperative that schools serve this purpose to the best of their ability. After all, they are educating the next generation of thinkers, leaders and pioneers who mould society for the better. Hopefully, schools throughout the world will continue developing these young minds, forging capable adults who create tangible change.

Comments:

You've provided sound reasons for your stand and included wide-ranging examples drawn from different contexts and even different types of schools. More importantly, you've also astutely recognised the shift in the pedagogical approaches many education systems have taken.

Occasionally, examples raised could be more representative, with less of a reliance on Singapore. Even so, this did not detract from the strength of the response. Language: Strong personal voice, effective paragraphing.

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2024 | Y6 | KI TP | Paper 2 | Question 1

PASSAGE

Philosophers have constructed a vast industry devoted to the elaboration of subtle theories designed to justify what morality is – the sort of rules the transgression of which common sense decries as 'wrong' or 'evil'. They claim that such rules are generally regarded as obliging us without qualification; they bind us merely in virtue of our status as human beings. But why should we believe in such totalising morality?

A system of morality claims total authority over every action and even every thought. The moral ought claims overriding authority for general rules such as 'You ought to keep your promises' or 'You must not hurt innocent people.' This is obvious. But adherence to these totalising principles is consistently impossible, forcing moral systems into incoherence by setting arbitrary limits to its own scope. Take Utilitarianism for example. Nothing in the logic of the principle of utility can exempt any act or thought from being fed into the calculation of overall utility. But exceptions are made all the time; surely whether to play hockey or chess is not a moral question. Although it is: since my happiness is a component of the total, if hockey can harm me, my choosing to play it should be, strictly speaking, immoral. As Peter Singer has stressed, for the price of another pair of shoes, you might have saved some child from starvation. For a consistent utilitarian, you are guilty whenever you contribute much less to charity than what would entail your own destitution. Since most people find this to be more than they can accept, we have devised ways to calculate how much to set aside to save others from poverty. But this sets an arbitrary limit to the principle of utility. How, then, can we say that moral systems – and moral commands – are totalizing in every sense of the word?

Moralists claim that moral commands deserve to prevail over all other reasons to act – always, everywhere, and for all time, but that claim is bogus. The quest for the foundations of moral theory gives rise to irreconcilable disagreements that, in turn, inevitably undermine the credibility of the lower-level reasons or principles that are brought in to justify moral theory. Consider the following: in a debate about ultimate values, we might get to ask when a reason is a good reason. We might be led better to appreciate the difficulty of weighing one reason against another. But each morality wants it all: only one ultimate value can be supreme. So, the debate is on. No participant can avoid appealing to 'intuitions', a fancy word that just refers to what you believe in the first place without needing a reason. But intuitions conflict. In defence of their different 'foundational' intuitions, each advocate can only resort to question-begging assertion. For these foundations are, by definition, the rock-bottom first principles. When they compete, there is nothing deeper to which they can appeal to settle

the disagreement – except everything else. But that everything else is what we have without moral theory: competing reasons of all kinds, without any privileged class of reasons to which all others must yield. The systems that sort reasons into moral and non-moral aim at identifying right and wrong. But those systems can themselves be bad.

Why do we even believe in a totalising morality in the first place? Perhaps, as Nietzsche argued, emotions, rooted in fear and resentment, are what above all motivates us to believe in morality. For morality licenses a right to blame that we are reluctant to forfeit. When feeling bound by a moral rule, the rule's transgression, by oneself or others, is liable to trigger 'moral' emotions such as guilt or indignation. A Nazi might feel indignant at his colleague's lack of zeal in persecuting Jews. A fundamentalist jihadist might feel guilty for secretly teaching his daughter to read.

Furthermore, it invites us to wallow in a certain kind of regret we dignify as morally superior by calling it 'guilt'. Guilt is the primary moral emotion. The benefit claimed for it is that it motivates you to behave better in the future. But why should we live our lives with guilt hanging over our heads? Morality licenses ugly emotions by encouraging us to feel contemptuous of others who fail to share our principles or superior to those who fail to live up to them. Yet, it is this very licensing of ugly emotions that is off-putting, and a dangerous implication of the belief in a totalising moral system.

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2024 | Y6 | KI TP | Paper 1 | Question 1 Lau Ken Ern | 24A01A

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of ethical knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

The author's main conclusion is that we should not believe in a system of totalising morality. He supports this with the following three main premises: (1), that the adherence to morally totalising principles is consistently impossible, which forces moral systems into incoherence by setting arbitrary limits to their own scopes, (2), that no moral command deserves to prevail over all other reasons to act in all cases, and (3), that a totalising moral system can have dangerous real-world implications. The author follows a modus ponens structure in which all three of his premises, denoted by P1, P2 and P3 respectively. These premises lead separately to the conclusion, denoted by Q, i.e. If P1 or P2 or P3, then Q, representing a valid argument. Generally, I accept the argument

Firstly, the author largely fails to provide robust argumentative reasoning but relies on a utilitarian example to drive his argument to establish MP1. Here, I will attempt to provide reasoning. The author's main point relies on proving absolutely that adherence to totalising principles is consistently impossible. Fundamentally, there is one reason for this. It requires the individual to first "know" what the totalising principle entails in each action. For instance, between pulling the lever to kill a doctor or killing a mother by letting the train be, one must know with absolute certainty what action or choice follows from their moral principle. This is rather difficult if the principle is simply "maximise utility". It is not only the case that one has nearly no information or ability to calculate utility, but that there exists a fundamental case of incommensurability between the calculus of people's utility, i.e. how can one know that the doctor's life has more utility than the mother's or vice versa? Even in rational theories of morality such as deontology, if two rules e.g. "do not lie" and "do not kill" conflict, one has no means of knowing what to do in a dilemma where telling the truth would entail killing someone. While Kant attempts to argue that we simply have yet to discover truly universalizable rules that can govern our actions, this itself is the fundamental problem. In the absence of all-encompassing theories and rules to guide each action, humans will encounter moral situations with no knowledge of what to do in accordance with incomplete theories, i.e. there is no specific deontological rule or divine command to tell me how much I should, as the author suggests "set aside" to "save others from poverty". Even with the correct action prescribed, no moral theory can tell one the extent or nuance to which they should act. Hence, adherence to morally totalising principles, while possible in certain situations, is truly impossible to be adhered to due to imperfect information and the human's inability to even have knowledge of the best way of how to "adhere" to principles in the first place. In essence, the move from incomplete, abstract principles to real life actions is largely uncertain and is, at the very least, insufficiently informed in most instances. Hence, totalising principles cannot be totalising if you cannot even know – with certainty – the course of action they entail. Hence, I accept MP1.

Let us now analyse MP2, that no moral command deserves to prevail over all other reasons to act in all instances. Here, the author seems to draw a line between moral reasoning and non-moral reasoning, and attempts to demonstrate the inevitable reliance on non-moral reasoning due to the incommensurability of moral reasonings and intuitions. This observation is apt although rather unclear at times. While the author convincingly shows that there exists a fundamental inability to break the deadlock between the "ultimate values" of moral theories using incommensurable intuitions, I would like to go a step further in strengthening this premise. To do this, I will argue against the warrant of the argument - that moral facts exist and are real. That is to say, if I can show that moral foundations do not even exist, it follows that moral reasonings simply have no objectively higher standing in our own judgement than "other reasons". Essentially, the construction of moral knowledge seems to be one of societal invention, if not a personal subjective feeling at best. Firstly, there exists not any physical nor certain correspondence to which we can derive a real, objective set of morality. This is unlike that of science, which can point to physical objects. Morality seems to be a rationalist endeavour led to by some sort of a priori reasoning. Yet, if this truly is the case, it should not be the case that humans even have moral disagreements as their a priori judgements should be necessary and unaffected by their empirical experiences. Furthermore, the most fundamental source of moral knowledge – intuition as the author suggests, seems to be problematic. I may intuit that killing is immoral, but a psychopath intuits nothing wrong with it. Faced with this, the fundamental conflict here truly is "irreconcilable" as it seems more likely that we are simply stating our own subjective preferences despite seemingly talking about them as though they are objective. By the tripartite definition of knowledge, moral knowledge, and hence moral commands, would be impossible. Firstly, there is no way of ascertaining the truth of a moral claim due to incommensurable intuitions. Secondly, we are unable to justify them with nothing more than subjective moral theories. Essentially, morality becomes a product of some subjective preference or emotion. The significance of this, then, is that "moral reasons" are no different from "other reasons", and so we should not value or place moral reasoning on a higher pedestal. Hence, with the warrant of moral knowledge even being real or possible cast in huge doubt, MP2 is further strengthened as morality fails to trump over other reasons. Morality's internal irreconcilable disagreements, coupled with the potential impossibility of moral knowledge, renders it such that moral reasons would at best be equivalent to subjective, societal reasons.

Lastly, a quick comment on MP3. The author essentially points out that morality seems to be a psychological necessity rather than a metaphysical one, in that society believes in it for its motivating power. This again points to the moral skepticism I mentioned earlier and is an apt reason to not place moral reasoning on a pedestal. The author however goes a step further into the pragmatic realm and argues that totalising morality can have dangerous implications by licensing ugly emotions that are off-putting. However, this point lacks elaboration. Given the point about psychological necessity, the author must demonstrate why licensing ugly emotions is worse than the motivating force it produces for us to better ourselves in return, but this weighing is missing. I argue that the motivating force stated is unexclusive to morality and is in fact more effectively binding through laws, legislation and pragmatic education. After all, laws ensuring decency in human beings in general makes society better

off without any need to appeal to moral guilt. Secondly, the right to blame, and the "ugly feelings" associated is precisely what is harmful as it causes mass-scale conflicts, e.g. religious wars due to incommensurable moral views. Rather, a world operating solely off pragmatic, real-world reasons could ultimately be better.

In conclusion, I accept the author's argument as his premises are true and his argument is valid.

Comments:
Excellent piece that thoroughly and systematically engages the main arguments by questioning the assumptions held and supporting the author's MP with your own argument. Points are well supported by relevant considerations in the nature and construction of knowledge in ethics. Well done.

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of ethical knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

The author's main conclusion in this passage is that we should not believe in a totalising moral system. He develops this argument in two independent threads – first, that moral systems are not actually totalising and can be bad, and second, that there are dangerous implications for believing in a totalising moral system. While the broad manners in which the author argues for his position is acceptable, I disagree that they ultimately lead to the conclusion that we should not believe in a totalising moral system.

The author first argues that moral commands do not deserve to prevail over all other reasons to act. He posits that each moral value holds "one ultimate value" supreme, and given that there is no foundation with which to weigh between these values except for our intuition, they cannot prevail over all other reasons to act. In general, this main premise is true. Many different moral principles hold different, often incommensurate, moral values and weigh them differently. A utilitarian, for example, might prioritise utility to judge between right and wrong, while a deontologist might prioritise prima facie duties that inform one not to use others as a means to an end as the ultimate value to weigh between duties. These different moral systems, as indeed claimed by the author, are incommensurate insofar as they rely on different standards of what is right or wrong. However, this does not mean that moral reasons exist independently of other reasons. In fact, it is precisely these other competing reasons the author raises which are factored into the consideration of measuring whether an action has a net higher or lower utility, for instance, and the moral system itself serves as a metric to weigh these different competing reasons against each other. Hence, while moral values and systems do not "prevail over all other reasons", they work closely with other reasons to inform us of which actions to prioritise.

On the other hand, I do not think that the premise that there are dangerous implications for believing in a totalising moral system is true. The author asserts that since emotions are what motivates us to believe in morality, morality licenses ugly emotions and a right to blame. While it might be true that it is our initial sense of disgust and indignation that is triggered when we see someone committing an immoral action, it is unintuitive to say that the emotion is what justifies our moral claim that their action is wrong. This is because we often turn to objective standards against which we compare and repudiate the actions of others – we do not condemn someone for lying simply because it makes us angry, but because there is an underlying principle that we believe should be applied universally to others in this scenario which justifies our indignation. It is not true, therefore, that it is solely for the license to a right to blame that we choose to believe in morality, but for a universal standard that applies to everyone.

Implicit in the author's argument is the assumption that there can be no universal, objective

standard for morality. This is why he points to exceptions which lie even within moral systems like utilitarianism, and conflicting intuitions between individuals. Ultimately, it is this lack of standard which allows the author to argue for the dangerous implications of weaponizing totalising moral systems. Certainly, while there might not be consensus on what moral systems to adopt or how to resolve disagreements, it is important to note that widespread, almost universal agreement does exist on many moral issues. The actions of murder and torture seem to be good examples of where the vast majority believe and agree to be immoral. This points to an underlying question in morality: If there is widespread agreement in the central issues of morality, thereby pointing to the universalisability of morality as a whole, why do disagreements and differing moral systems still exist? A possible response here which the author fails to consider is that of the value pluralist. Ultimately, these moral values might have to be weighed amongst each other, but even if they are incommensurable and incomparable, this does not imply an abandonment of moral systems, but an acknowledgement and consideration of other moral values and systems as important too. Being unable to attain a universal standard for morality or to weigh between different moral systems does not mean that our project of understanding morality better and attempting to reach this standard is fruitless.

Furthermore, the author fails to consider in his warrant what a system of morality that is non-totalising must entail. This is a moral system which, according to the author, can no longer "bind" us or oblige us without qualification. Crucially, we choose to believe in a totalising moral system because it can give our moral persuasions moral weight; a non-totalising, almost completely subjective system cannot have the compelling and prescriptive force that we ascribe to morality. Moreover, it is unclear that this non-totalising moral system evades the problems that the author mentions himself. The morality of actions can be constantly changing depending on arbitrary intentions of the user as well, and 'moral' emotions can still be licensed within such a system.

In conclusion, while it is true that there is no absolute agreement on the standard of morality that should prevail over others, it is not true that it is the belief in one that propagates dangerous implications. I do not accept his conclusion.

Comments

Good awareness of the author's argument and solid engagement with majority of the passage. Evaluation is fully relevant, engaging with key ideas in a systematic and thorough manner. Points are insightfully linked to relevant sources in the nature and construction of knowledge in ethics. Go further to examine assumptions and/or expand coverage of points.

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of ethical knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

The author's main conclusion is that we should not believe in a totalising moral system, using three separate arguments to support his stand. First, he points out the impossibility of adhering to totalising moral principles, forcing the inevitable limiting of the scope of such principles by arbitrary limits. Second, the author raises the irreconcilable disagreements that plague discourse about the foundations of moral theory due to competing intuitions, implying that there is no totalising moral system that accounts for all these conflicting ideas on morality, showing the loopholes in believing in a totalising moral system. Lastly, the author argues that believing in a totalizing moral system licenses the primary moral emotion of 'guilt', an "ugly emotion" that the author claims we should not let "hang over our heads". While the author makes certain accurate observations about moral discourse and the application of morality in his three arguments, he ultimately fails to weigh his arguments and show why we should not believe in a totalising moral system.

Firstly, the author's observation that competing intuitions plague moral discourse is an astute one. Indeed, the prevalence of differing perspectives on many moral issues – abortion, gene-editing, the use of AI et cetera – seem to posit that morality is subjective and to believe in a totalising moral system is a flawed mischaracterisation of morality. However, the author, in making this argument for the subjectivity of morality, does not account for the inherent totalising nature and goal of moral discourse. In moral discourse, people aim to find out what is 'right' and 'wrong', so as to inform future decision-making and prevent the repetition of mistakes. This reveals that moral discourse, in pursuing an ultimate aim of identifying what we should or should not do, is intrinsically totalising, aiming to come to conclusions on morality which can be applied universally. Hence, despite the prevalence of differing intuitions as correctly pointed out by the author, to then extend this argument to the claim that morality should not be believed to be totalising would be plainly ignoring the inherent totalising nature of moral discourse, where human beings aim to come to consensus on moral claims that can be applied universally. Thus, the author's second argument fails to support his main conclusion.

Furthermore, the author argues in his third argument that totalising moral systems would license feelings of guilt, which, according to the author, is undesirable, and hence the notion of totalising moral systems should be abandoned. While the author is right in pointing out that guilt is a key deterrent from committing immoral acts, he overstates the negative implications of such "ugly emotions" – feeling superior to those who fail to live up our principles and feeling contemptuous of those who fail to share them – and does not argue for why these negative consequences would outweigh the benefits of totalising morality in eliciting such emotions to support his main conclusion. Perhaps the benefits of what the author labels as "ugly emotions" do outweigh the negative implications that the author

highlights: after all, the guilt that one feels after stealing, for instance, would deter him from being a repeat offender, producing positive outcomes not only for the shops that are subject to stealing, but also for the rehabilitation of the offender. Hence, while feeling guilt itself may not be a desirable state to be in, the author does not show why such undesirability should deter us from believing in a totalising moral system, especially when he does not weigh such implications with the benefits of these emotions.

Lastly, the author, in showing how Utilitarianism is unable to be applied in all cases completely in his first argument, fails to consider other viable approaches in viewing the totality of morality. For example, the virtue ethicist claims that we should never treat someone only as a means to an end, yet this is a viewpoint that can be applied to all cases. For instance, when we hire a taxi to go home, we are not being immoral by 'using' the taxi driver as a means to go home, for we serve as a means for the taxi driver to earn a living. Hence, given the mutual benefits of such an interaction, we would not be using the driver as a means to an end only, making the hiring of a taxi not an immoral action. Evidently, from a Utilitarian's point of view on morality, it seems impossible to adhere to 'totalising' moral principles, and it is upon this that the author argues for why we should not believe in totalising moral systems in the first place. However, the author fails to consider other normative ethical theories that show how morality can be applied in its totality – virtue ethics, for one. Overall, the author fails to consider how morality can be totalising in application, weakening his first argument in supporting his main conclusion.

In conclusion, while the author presented three separate arguments that individually support his main conclusion that we should not believe in a totalising moral system, these arguments fail to convincingly establish his conclusion. His first argument does not account for other normative ethical theories that in fact disprove his claim that morality's inability to be applied universally shows that a totalising moral system is impossible. His second argument does not consider that the disagreements in moral discourse about what is 'right' and 'wrong' show that moral discourse aims to establish totalising moral principles. His third argument does not weigh the consequences and benefits of guilt and overstates the former to establish the undesirability of believing in a totalising moral system.

Comments

Excellent piece that systematically dealt with (and challenged) the three main arguments that the author raised. Evaluation is nuanced, balanced, and shows good understanding of the nature of morality and how moral discourse proceeds in the world. Good use of examples to illustrate main points. Good work!

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2024 | Y6 | KI TP | Paper 2 | Question 2

PASSAGE

Success is a multifaceted concept that requires a deeper digging into; misunderstanding it often leads to disastrous consequences. One common definition of success revolves around the accumulation of material wealth and possessions that afford the wealthy individual security, comfort, and access to resources that provide a higher quality of life. The problem with this definition is that an exclusive focus on material wealth leads to shallow values, inequality, and a lack of fulfilment. Who would agree that a wealthy individual who is sad and lacks purpose other than accumulating wealth is a successful individual? Thinking of success as achievement and recognition can avoid this problem since it prioritises personal fulfilment. Setting out to achieve specific goals can also boost self-esteem and provide a sense of accomplishment.

So, success seems to be about the attainment of personal fulfilment. But what about happiness and overall well-being? This perspective emphasises subjective experiences, inner peace, and alignment with one's values and passions, which can lead to a more balanced and meaningful life. But the feasibility of defining success solely based on subjective feelings is questionable, as happiness can be fleeting and influenced by external circumstances. And, what happens when religion is thrown into the mix? Pursuing happiness at all costs may also overlook the importance of resilience, growth, and contribution to others. We seem to be at an impasse. If we cannot define success properly, how would we know how to live successful lives?

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2024 | Y6 | KI TP | Paper 2 | Question 2 **Lau Ken Ern | 24A01A**

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author's main conclusion is that success is a multifaceted concept that requires a deeper digging into, which is supported by two main premises, (1) that misunderstanding success can often lead to disastrous consequences, (2) that we cannot know how to live successful lives without defining success properly. The two main premises lead to the conclusion separately. The argument is valid, following a modus ponens structure form [If (1) or (2), then MC]. However, I reject the author's argument.

The author seems to prove MP1 through various examples of misunderstood definitions of success. For instance, misunderstanding success as the accumulation of wealth leads to shallow values, inequity and a lack of fulfilment. I disagree with this premise as the author fails to really show why any definition of success is necessarily "misunderstood". The author seems to believe that there is a correct, objective metric of success, to which all other definitions presented in the passage (wealth, achievement, fulfilment, et cetera) are all misunderstood and hence disastrous when believed. The first problem with this is that success is a necessarily subjective concept, meaning that individuals uniquely define success in their own way. To this end, no "misunderstanding" occurs as they are well aware of their own values, goals and wants in life. As such, it is simply untrue and unobjective for the author to claim that wealth is a "shallow value" to financially poorer children who simply want to live comfortably with their family. The disastrous consequences the author speaks of are a mere reflection of his own unique value judgement of other's lives. In reality, the true arbiter of the scale and degree of consequences are the individuals themselves who choose to believe in their own specific definitions of success. The idea of fleeting happiness is mentioned by the author may well be a beautiful fact of life embraced by the hedonist and thus certainly not any kind of disastrous consequence. Hence, MP1 is false as the author false assumes that success must be understood objectively. Rather, success exists as a subjective concept dependent on the non-universal calculus of each individual. Even if we grant that there indeed is an objective standard or definition of success, and that there is a genuine misunderstanding, the consequences themselves are still subjective to the individual and their unique utilitarian calculus. Hence, I reject the argument as MP1 is false.

Secondly, let us analyse MP2, that we cannot know how to live successful lives without defining success properly. Once again, the author's warrant here seems to be one of an objective standard of success that can be defined and attained as knowledge. However, beyond that, I find it questionable that one has to truly grasp success to live a successful life. After all, Diogenes the cynic, who barely cared about much seemed to believe that he was living a successful life. It is not only possible but more likely that one lives a successful life prior to grasping success properly due to the inherent limits and arbitrary barriers the definition of success places on one. For instance, the definition of success as happiness may mislead one into short-term hedonism. Instead, a life spent without fully understanding success may open up more opportunities for them, instead of causing them to tunnel vision

on a singular goal. In essence, one who does not live life knowing what success entails may themselves live the most successful lives, that a life well lives isn't contingent on knowledge of how to do so, perhaps as the journey and process of figuring things out is itself rewarding and subjectively "successful". Hence, I reject MP2.

All in all, I reject the author's argument as firstly, it is untrue that misunderstanding success leads to disastrous consequences. Secondly, it is also untrue that one cannot live a successful life without defining success properly.

Comments

All in all, I reject the author's argument as firstly, it is untrue that misunderstanding success leads to disastrous consequences. Secondly, it is also untrue that one cannot live a successful life without defining success properly.

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2024 | Y6 | KI TP | Paper 2 | Question 3

PASSAGE

Education stands as the cornerstone of societal progress, serving as the bedrock upon which the edifice of civilization is erected. Its paramount importance cannot be overstated, for it serves as the conduit through which knowledge, innovation, and enlightenment flow, nurturing the minds of individuals and fostering the advancement of communities. Primarily, education empowers individuals by endowing them with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of modern existence, through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, for example. Education serves as a vehicle for social mobility, offering avenues for individuals to transcend socioeconomic barriers and pursue their aspirations. By empowering individuals, education engenders a society characterized by opportunity, equality, and progress.

The problem today is that many ancient institutions are still fixated on teaching certain knowledge and practical skills that were once necessary for societies of the past, not necessarily as relevant for today's digital, automated society. In a rapidly changing world, education must prepare for the future. Workers are already being retrained at least twice in their lifetime due to emerging technologies, and older workers are alienated from the beliefs and ideas of the younger generation, and dismayed and confused by what they see as degeneracy and decadence in changing values and ways of living. The growing gap between new and specialised knowledge and the ability of the mass of society to understand its significance and implications, between decision makers and the masses, will become critical unless the institutions of society actively promote and apply the idea of education being the continuing process which it should be. Just as the man who is not well-informed has severe limitations on his freedom so does the man who is incapable of grasping new situations because his education has not taught him how to learn.

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Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author's argument concludes that the institutions of society should actively promote and apply the idea of education being the continuing process it should be to prepare workers for the future. He argues this on two fronts. First, he establishes the vital importance of education in society. Secondly, he shows how current educational methods fail in adequately preparing students for the evolving working world. This, he states, leads to a nullification of the basic purpose of education in providing opportunity and freedom. While some parts of the author's argument are slightly suspect, it is acceptable overall.

Firstly, the author shows the importance of education in society, deeming it the "bedrock" of civilisation, and provided the example of education as a way for one to transcend one's socioeconomic status, empowering one to progress in society. Here, it is possible that the author somewhat overstates the influence of education, as it seems unlikely that education alone could shape the entirety of society to be characterised by "opportunity, equality, and progress". However, the sentiment of his argument largely rings true. Education may act as a powerful tool to those who have access to it such as in Singapore's case, where mandatory education and education grants help create social mobility among the less privileged.

The author then goes on to explain why current educational institutions fail to meet their goal of empowerment, due to a lack of preparation for the changing world of the future. He states that the skills taught are less relevant in a digital automated society, using the example of older workers' confusion at current trends as well as the need for their retraining to show how the current education system has failed them. This allows him to conclude that institutions in society should promote education as continuous to allow older workers to stay empowered in a changing society. While some of the author's points seem one-sided, I accept his argument. Firstly, painting current educational institutions as "ancient" and stuck in their old ways of teaching discounts the value they add. While learning algebra seems redundant with the easy availability of Google, students take away skills such as problem analysis and perseverance which remain relevant today. However, I concede that certain aspects such as the rote memorization of facts may be less applicable in the digital age. The phasing out of such content in the face of increased emphasis on critical thinking in schools is a positive change. Secondly, the author seems to see the retraining of workers as a negative process, yet it seems counterintuitive to believe that life-long learning would not involve a certain degree of skills updating. Additionally, the learning of new information can be carried out by the individual themself without a need for institutional intervention. Perhaps, the attitudes of the older generation cannot be totally attributed to a lack of education, but at least partially to an unwillingness to learn. However, I concede that the teaching of continuous learning may help mitigate this by influencing people's attitudes to become more open and willing to learn.

Despite these criticisms, I accept the spirit of the author's argument. It is indeed essential for education to prepare individuals for the future, which means the systems themselves must stay updated. Thus, I accept his argument overall.

Comments

Systematic treatment of the author's premises, with a clear line of reasoning to support the conclusion that the author's argument can still be granted in spite of some problematic premises and reasoning. More detail in the form of explanation and examples could be provided to lend more support to your points, some of which are not that well substantiated.

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