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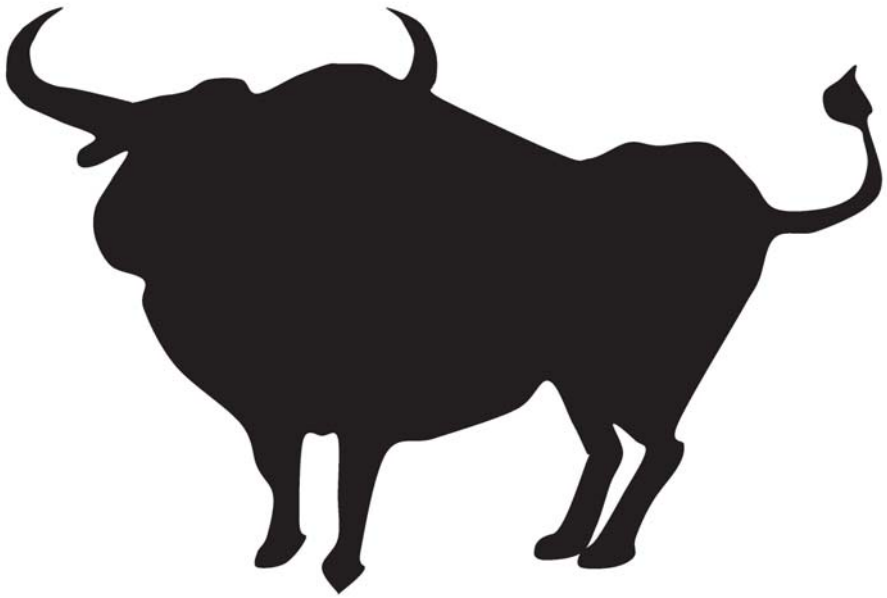

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In times of economic hardship, is it acceptable for a government to spend on weapons and its armed forces?

"What you cannot defend, you do not own", said Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of Singapore. While it may seem too nihilistic a view, it unfortunately reflects the painful truth of the Machiavellian realpolitik and world order today. This Catch-22 situation is further compounded by economic hardship in a country where states are often caught at the crossroads trying to strike a balance between rescuing themselves from economic hardship spending funds on weaponry and its armed forces, because given the limited funds and resources available, one of the two choices would have to be neglected in favour of the other. However, in the face of economic hardship, it is still acceptable, and in fact necessary, to spend on arms and armed forces in this cut throat volatile world today. This is in order to establish peace and security, only upon which economic hardship can be truly solved. Ultimately, a delicate balance needs to be struck between the two options to achieve long term progress and development.

Pacifists would claim that in times of economic hardship, it is unacceptable for governments to spend on arms and armed forces. This is quite a valid and logical stance since it is apparent that the finite resources available should be used to ameliorate economic hardship. After all, it is the government's fundamental duty to guarantee a quality standard of living for its people. Moreover, in the relatively peaceful world we live in today where conflicts are merely reduced to skirmishes, excessive expenditure on arms seems more irrelevant than ever. The government should therefore channel its funds and resources to invigorate the economy through a slew of financial reforms and market intervention. Ultimately, this would ensure that the state remains accountable to the electorate that had put them into power in the first place. Conversely, spending on arms and the armed forces in the advent of economic hardship would further compound the financial crisis, and several countries bear testimony to such an oversight. The Soviet Union experienced a series of famines and the depreciation of the ruble in the 1970s and 1980s. Then, Soviet citizens languished in the purgatory of economic hardship and struggled to

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obtain basic necessities, even more so when exorbitant price tags were placed on them in the black markets. Despite the glaring problems, the Soviet government continued to fund military programmes that developed the Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and nuclear stockpile, and mired itself in the cash-burning arms race, even in space, to combat the US threat in the Cold War climate. Ultimately, it trapped the Soviet government in a vicious cycle of endless expenditure on arms that it could not step down from. As a result, this decision cost millions of lives and led to resistance against the regime which ultimately collapsed in 1991. Today, North Korea treads on the same unfortunate footsteps by pouring funds into nuclear development while its citizens are reduced to eating grass and tree barks. Evidently, economic concerns far outweigh the need to spend on arms and armed forces because it compounds economic woes and blatantly disregards the livelihood of its citizens and even their sanctity of lives. This moral hazard therefore renders expenditure on arms and armed forces unacceptable during economic crisis.

However, in the face of Machiavellian realpolitik today, the security of a nation must be guaranteed at all cost because it is the utmost priority to remain capable of defence so as to survive. Hence, economic hardship is merely a small problem that pales in comparison in the grand scheme of things. Ancient historian and war strategist Thucydides presciently warned centuries ago that "the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must". This quote epitomises the politics of survival in this cut-throat world. The ability to safeguard sovereignty is the basis of all progress in a country, hence to not spend on arms and armed forces at all times would be tantamount to removing the cornerstone of progress and prosperity. If the country does not even exist, what economic hardship will there be to speak of? This urgent need and justification for military expenditure is further augmented in small states like Singapore and Kuwait. In the nascent years of independence, Singapore mired in financial concerns as she lost her hinterland for exports. Yet even in the crisis ravaged era and region where all hopes of prosperity remained bleak, she set aside a significant amount of budget to develop a formidable armed force, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). For a country whose population was barely one percent of the US population, it seemed preposterous to splurge on the SAF. However, such dedication to financing a reliable armed force have paid off as the SAF delivered 50 years of stability and ensured that Singapore retained her sovereignty despite being surrounded by much larger and more hostile neighbours. Conversely, Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in 1990 due to her

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contrasting focus on eradicating economic problems. If not for the international coalition's support and commitment to world peace and rights to sovereignty, Kuwait would have disappeared off the world map today and only remain as a distant memory. Expenditure on arms and armed forces therefore greatly outweigh economic concerns because it is perhaps the only way to safely guarantee survival in a volatile world today.

It would also be parochial to assume that economic hardship and the need to spend on arms and armed forces diametrically oppose each other. In fact, such expenditure can invigorate the economy and resolve the issue of economic hardship, therefore effectively killing two birds with one stone. It could be argued that such expenditure is justified as it turns a crisis into an opportunity. Spending on arms and armed forces can create employment opportunities, developing arms can demonstrate the ability to secure peace and therefore earn the trust of military alliances for more funds. First, by developing the military, the workforce is mobilised for construction and conscription. In some cases, the development of arms can even invigorate downstream industries where a need for their basic materials fuels the supply and demand chain. A case in point would be Djibouti's construction of the naval base and naval force with the aid of Chinese military contractors. Hundreds and thousands of locals found themselves a source of stable income through the construction of the port and naval base, and country was actively mobilised in its energy and raw material sector to facilitate the construction, and as such, breathed life into the Djibouti economy that once mired in poverty. Second, military exports serve as a source of direct revenue. During the Second World War when the American economy was still recovering from the debilitating aftermath of the Great Depression, the United States invested extensively in its military sector and as a result, armoured vehicles, warships and light arms like M16 rifles were developed by the likes of Lockheed Martin and exported as revenue. This served as a cash cow to lift the U.S. out of the remnants of the Great Depression and prop the U.S. up as a world leader in economics after the war. Thirdly, by spending on arms and armed forces, it also demonstrates countries' commitment and capability to maintain peace in the region, which would earn the interest of superpowers. During the Cold War, Sukarno's Republican Army received generous funding from the US government to counter the perceived and growing communist threats, even when the country was still barely making ends meet after its independence war and 80% of Indonesians were still stuck at the bottom of the global value chain. However, the

expenditure on military proved to be a worthy investment when it proved to the US that Indonesia could serve as a bulwark of peace against expansionists communists in Southeast Asia, hence the US directly provided foreign aid to prop up the regime. Consequentially, Indonesia's problem of hyperinflation was solved and it even emerged as a regional economic powerhouse a few years later. Therefore, the reconciliatory nature between military expenditure and economic problems would justify such expenditure.

All in all, the justification for military expenditure can be argued to be necessary even in times of economic hardship because in the grand scheme of things, some sacrifices have to be made for long term peace and prosperity. This conflict, however, must be carefully balanced in order to progress smoothly into the future.

Teacher's Comments:
A well-considered response that shows effective arrangement of ideas to present a convincing stance. Good job choosing examples that immediately address the question demands and the main point in each paragraph. Overall, a thoughtful and well-executed essay!

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Do you agree that fashion serves no real value?

The image conjured upon hearing the term 'fashion' is most likely one of glitz and glamour—stick-thin models clad in flowing, diaphanous gowns, adorned by shimmering jewellery and strutting down the runway while eclectic house music plays in the background. As such, many hold the assumption that fashion is superficial and holds no real significance. It is capricious, ever changing with the times and has no true purpose other than to cater to the fickle palate of elite fashionistas, who constantly crave and hunt after the latest '*avant-grade*' outfits from their favourite designers of *haute couture*. Yet to condemn fashion as having no real value simply based on what it appears to be on the surface is superficial. While certain types of fashion really do hold no significance, the macrocosm of fashion does in fact provide several benefits in different aspects that reflect how purposeful it truly is.

It must first be conceded that the most typical idea of fashion—*haute couture*—does not have much real significance other than aesthetic beauty at times because of its high cost and lack of functionality. How many can afford the exorbitantly-priced floor-length dresses with plunging necklines or the dégradé pleated tulle gowns hot off the runway from the House of Dior's latest Spring/Summer collection? Better yet, how many would want (or dare) to clad themselves in quirkily–cut tops and uncomfortably tight wrap skirts even if they were produced by Italy's top designers? These types of fashion are highly impractical and unaffordable, especially for the middle-class and lower-income class of the population, who would rather go to work in comfortable, practical clothing rather than stand out like a sore thumb while suffocating from the discomfort simultaneously. Paired with uncomfortable climate conditions such as the intense humidity and heat in Singapore, such garments are all the more out of the question. In this sense, this '*haute couture*' type of fashion serves no real value as it is both impractical and expensive, and therefore not applicable to a majority of society.

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On deeper analysis, it should also be acknowledged as a fact that fashion fosters a culture of consumerism, resulting in a waste of resources. Fashionistas, both the elite and mainstream alike, are constantly hopping from trend to trend and dressing according to the latest fads in order to seem 'cool' and 'trendy', a form of flaunting of their supposed social status. These ephemeral, fleeting trends often result in a massive wastage of clothing and resources. Studies have revealed that several million tonnes of relatively new, functional clothing are discarded or donated (more of the former than the latter) every year. It does not help that popular fashion labels are feeding this fashion frenzy in an attempt to keep their clothes lines fresh and entice people to purchase more—H&M introduces hundreds of new outfits every week, promptly disposing of older designs. This throw-away culture perpetuated by society and firms not only erodes the valued principles of prudency and thriftiness, but also promotes materialism and places a strain on resources like cotton which could have been devoted to other industries which directly improve society's welfare. Hence, seeing as how fashion encourages consumerism and wastes resources, both detrimental for society, fashion may once again appear to lack real purpose.

However, to simply write off fashion as useless based on the above arguments would be a benighted oversight of the benefits fashion brings to society, in both tangible and intangible aspects.

To begin with, fashion is a powerful instrument in making statements that express certain causes or beliefs, especially when the appropriate attire is selected. People, first and foremost, perceive others to be of a certain personality or the like based on their clothes, as supported by countless research. Fashion is expression on the individual level and collective level. In the social arena, large groups of people often garb themselves in the same collective attire to make a stand for particular social causes they believe in. Take for instance the Pink Dot Movement in Singapore, where thousands gather *en masse* in pink-coloured clothing to show their support for the LGBT community and ensure that these individuals do not feel left out or socially ostracised in a relatively more conservative society. This social statement is one of such great impact that even tourist participate in it to express their support as a collective body. With meaningful social statements like these

made possible through fashion, how could one possibly argue that it serves no real value?

In addition, on a more global scale, statements made through appropriate dressing further diplomatic ties between countries. When diplomats or persons of power visit other countries, there exists an inherent cultural barrier between the visiting country and the host country. This is all the more pertinent in today's increasingly plural societies, where culture-related issues are becoming trickier and can easily spark conflict. This is where the donning of appropriate clothing comes in— dressing in a certain fashion that pays tribute to the host country reflects the visiting country's appreciation and respects for the host country's culture, easing tensions and allowing for the smoother progression of amicable discussions, even if intangibly so. A case in point would be Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, who wore a dress featuring the emblematic silver fern when visiting New Zealand, aiding in the bridging of cultural gaps intangibly. Therefore, one cannot dismiss fashion as serving no real valve when it is capable of fostering closer ties between countries through the use of appropriate attire.

In a more tangible aspect, the fashion industry provides employment to millions across the globe, lifting many out of poverty. It is no head-turning fact that the fashion industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry, what with countless designer brands and labels as well as multi-national retail chains around the world today. Italy, home to renowned brands like Dolce & Gabbana, has a fashion industry worth 83.6 billion Euros. Many of these major fashion labels often require massive amount of manpower due to the sheer amount of clothing churned out by mass production every year. Less developed countries also benefit as some of the work is outsourced to them, allowing numerous individuals to be lifted out of unemployment as these jobs typically only require low skill levels. This directly impacts large numbers of people globally who have benefitted from the employment opportunities provided by the fashion industry and now have higher standards of living. Moreover, fashion has also taken up the mantle in protecting the dying breed of artisans by providing them with jobs. Designers travel to places like South Africa to employ the locals there to create intricate handmade crafts and to South Asia to tap on the centuries-old techniques in hand–dyed fabric. The employment provided not only allows these minority artisans to put food on table, but also brings the beauty of their technique and craft to an international stage, where many more will be able to

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value and appreciate their culture and skills, giving new meaning to their craft. As such, fashion most definitely has real significance in this aspect.

Finally, fashion is highly capable of pushing the boundaries of today, especially in terms of creativity and inclusivity. Fashion is an outlet for expression, and the kind of expression is entirely up to one's imagination—there are no rules, no right or wrong when it comes to fashion. As such, many are coming up with the most interesting of ideas and concepts, manifested in their unique and funky outfits. Rihanna's overflowing 'Flower Dress' at the Met Gala this year is one such example. It was created not simply as an aesthetic piece, but rather as an interpretation of renowned Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo's past collection of artworks. In addition, while fashion only used to be dominated by the West, it is now accessible and celebrated by those of different countries as well, as reflected by Turkey's International Modest Fashion Week, which featured headscarves and conservative dressing. This goes to show how fashion has grown to encompass and embrace more cultures and societies despite differences in dressing. Hence, fashion serves real value in this sense.

In the final analysis, fashion may seem to be superficial and wasteful on the surface, but it in fact has much more purpose to it such as in terms of providing employment and making meaningful statements. Ultimately, fashion does serve real value as its benefits are far-ranging and impact both tangibly and intangibly, but whether this true purpose it holds can be appreciated by the world or not depends on how we choose to portray it.

Comments:

A very comprehensive analysis that has taken advantage of a wide range of examples to highlight insight and deep evaluation and use of a good range of expressions that lacks pretension.

Teacher's comments:

A very comprehensive analysis that has taken advantage of a wide range of examples to highlight insight and deep evaluation. Use of a good range of expressions that lack pretension.

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To what extent can we rely on the media to be truthful in today's world?

It would have been an unassuming day for the staff and patrons at a Washington D.C. pizzeria during election season, if it were not for the sudden intrusion of an armed gunman and the subsequent shot he fired. He was quickly taken into custody (willingly, even), where the reasons cited for his actions were revealed upon questioning. They were 'noble' – he had garnered much disturbing information about this pizzeria, from some far right new sources and programs, and was convinced that Clinton and her aides were operating a paedophilic sex ring within its doors.The above incident, dubbed as "Pizzagate", left many people shocked, and questions about tackling fake news came to prominence as it became clear that as fake as some news were, they could exact very real consequences. So, the question that many now ask is: is the media of today trustworthy? On my part, I am inclined to think that while the larger part of information provided by modern media outlets can still be relied upon as true, some caution is necessary as not all media sources deserve the same amount of trust.

Due to the apparent rise in frequency and incidents of fake news, as brought to light during the 2016 US presidential election, many media outlets have placed an increased emphasis on the factual accuracy of what they report. This is true of some of the established media outlets worldwide, including countries such as Germany, where concerns about the honesty of the media was questioned after some news outlets reported the occurrence of a violent incident happening on New Year's Eve when there was none. In response to readers' heightened awareness of the questionable veracity of whatever the media presents due to events such as the above, however, established news outlets have taken the initiative to become more reliable sources. For example, in the context of Germany, even news outlets with rather dubious reputations – such as that of a local tabloid known for its salacious reporting and penchant for sensationalising – have publicly vouched to maintain journalistic integrity in its subsequent issues. To that end, some of these outlets are working with home-grown organisations such as *Correctiv* (based in Germany) to confirm the factual accuracy of the stories they publish. This is thus reflective of a concerted effort

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to present truthful media coverage despite mistakes previous made, and suggests that they will maintain a sufficient level of truth to be relied upon in times to come.

However, the truth is that in today's world of journalism, due to political, social or economic incentives or problems, there are many occasions in which the information presented might not be wholly true. To this end, news from the media should thus be taken with a pinch of salt, with the level of trust in the media being accorded to it by the reader in terms of the context whereby the journalist wrote a particular article, or even the country from which the news outlet in question has its headquarters.

Political context is of key relevance in ascertaining if a media outlet presents truthful news and can hence be relied upon, in terms of the amount of a state control present in the society. In authoritarian regimes, or even democracies less liberal in nature, the media can end up being a mere mouthpiece of the government that fails to act as an effective fourth estate by omitting reports on any, for instance, results from a failed policy that might reflect poorly on the government. This is the concern that many human rights watch officials have about the situation in countries as Russia, China, and increasingly, Turkey. In Turkey, the shuttering of popular newspapers such as *Zaman*, and the replacement of its original office of editors with one of Erdogan's office's own choosing led to the newspaper's complete reversal in stance from critical to very supportive of the current government, with articles that gloss over any views perceived to be dissident in nature. Of course, this can be taken to new extremes when it comes to countries such as North Korea, where any media coverage may be completely false, and presented simply to further the interests of the government. Fortunately, even if the trend is worrying, many countries today still have relatively better levels of freedom of the press. However, it is nonetheless a factor to be considered as a reason why some media should not be taken at face-value.

The same can also be said for objectives of alternative news media outlets aside from journalistic purposes of presenting and reporting on the truths of today's world. Especially pertinent in today's age is the financial incentive that comes with higher ratings. Due to the saturation of the news and media industry, rival firms have taken to increasingly sensationalised, exaggerated or even utterly fake news with zero factual accuracy in order to generate revenue. A rather infamous, yet recent example would be the decision of Fox

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News to post an article on the death of a Democratic politician who belonged to the Democratic National Committee (DNC), who the article accused of having leaked inside information about Clinton and other DNC members during the election season to WikiLeaks, rather than attributing it to Russian hackers. Not one to be one-upped, other far right news sources soon put up articles boldly headlined with titles along the lines of "*Information leak an inside job, not by Russians!",* which generated much readership due to their controversial nature. The crux of the issue is that all of this was done with any fact-checking on the truth of the matter, in which these turned out to be baseless accusations. It can thus be seen that sometimes, the tendency of larger-than-life stories to be popular and the wishes of some media outlets to exploit this causes them to present fake news that should not be fully relied upon. This is especially true for media that tends to be very extreme in its bias, whether on partisan, ethnic or gender lines, and should be considered when evaluating the reliability of some media.

Lastly, there is also the possibility that journalists may not be able to present the whole truth due to concerns about their safety, if they are writing about controversial or sensitive topics. One saddening example would be of journalists in Mexico covering the ongoing drug war there. Recently, a prolific journalist known as Javier Valdez Cardenas, famous for such in-depth pieces on "*narcos"* (referring to drug cartels), was shot dead with twelve bullets in his chest. On the same day, two other journalists were targeted, one of whom (Jonathan Rodriguez) also died, marking more than two hundred deaths of journalists stationed in Mexico since the beginning of the drug war. The death of Jarvez was especially chilling due to the time of his death having coincided with his recent article detailing the violent rise to power of a member within the Sinaloa Cartel – indicative, perhaps, of lines that should not be crossed; of truths that should not be told. In dangerous situations such as the above, then, relying on the media to be truthful in reporting about these matters is perhaps too cruel and idealistic a hope. After all, the people behind the media too have their own families to raise and lives to lead, and if threatened, they cannot be fully blamed if they should decide to post untruths and omit information rather than risk their lives.

In conclusion, it is definitely understandable today to have a jaded outlook on the media and the veracity of its news. However, there have still been commendable efforts made towards the goal of preserving journalistic integrity, and hence not all media should be disregarded as untrustworthy. After all, every

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flock as its own black sheep, and instead of generalising, we could instead dole out our reliance and trust in media based on outlets' specific contexts in reporting about particular issues, on a case-by-case basis.

Teacher's Comments:

Chloe, I'm delighted by the sensitive treatment in which you formed your analysis around your cautious optimism about reliance on the media. I'd liked to see how you'd analysed how the western film industry can possibly portray other regions and nationalities. All the best.

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"Urban living and nature cannot co-exist in modern cities today. Do you agree?

The urban environment and nature have a tendency to be seen as opposing and fundamentally unable to co-exist due to their inherent characteristics. This was exemplified in the recent cases of animal culling in Singapore, targeting macaques, which bit humans, and jungle fowl, who were disrupting the area around them due to their excessively loud crowing in the wee hours of the morning. It is no wonder, then, that there are claims that urban living and nature cannot co-exist in cities today, given ever-increasing population densities and a need for expansion. However, to then say that they are completely unable to co-exist is too quick a judgement, especially today, when the importance of nature is becoming increasingly accepted. Therefore, while there are difficulties to peaceful and effective coexistence between urban living and nature, it is possible for both to be integrated in cities today.

Critics of the idea often point to the innate characteristics of urban living, and as a result, cities, as reasons for why coexistence is impossible. Urban living is associated with a high population density style of living, surrounded by others, and with a focus on jobs away from the primary sector of resource extraction, which includes industries like agriculture. Urban living tends to require a greater consumption of resources from nature than rural environments, as people often drive and electricity is being used in huge amounts thanks to giant shopping malls or billboards, among other reasons. The same critics like to say that it is inevitable for there to be a clash between humans and nature in the urban context, especially as the cities today are continually having to expand to cater to influxes of people. It is true that urban living often results in the concretisation of lands, with green spaces bulldozed in favour of roads, or in a notable case in Singapore, a prospective MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) line. Even though issues of preserving the nature that has sat at the Central Catchment Reserve, in the very heart of the city, arose, the final decision was that merely an environmental risk assessment would be carried out, rather than a cessation of the project. This clearly seems to denote that ultimately, the needs of the urban population will outweigh the benefits of nature, forcing nature out of the urban context.

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Additionally, others raise the point of view that urban living, with highly planned and manicured environments, does not even allow for the existence of nature in its truest form. In this case, nature is regarded to be 'wild', free from human touch or interaction. Therefore, the truly 'wild' nature cannot co-exist, or even exist, in urban living situations. This line of argument does hold water, as we look to the situations of urban life in cities today. Given that people travel all over the city, the parts of nature that are a threat to human safety surely cannot co-exist in a city. If a tiger were to suddenly appear and walk through the streets of London, it would certainly spark panic, and there would be a threat not only to the humans, but also to the tiger, as people could shoot at or hurt it in their panic. Hence, an attempt to co-exist with the more dangerous forms of nature could cause harm to befall both those engaged in urban living and nature itself. While it is unlikely to see a tiger in modern cities today, there are plenty of other initially unassuming creatures or plants that are dangerous to humans.[1] Urban living thus cannot co-exist with a truly wild nature, because it would require fundamental shifts in the way we live, to the point where characteristics of urban living could be lost. Another example to bring up would be the thousands of skyscraper buildings, a relatively modern construction, in cities worldwide, which have sprung up due to the urban lifestyle that requires many to live in apartments and small houses instead of mansions, for reasons of space and money. These skyscrapers pose a danger to many of the animals in nature, and we see this manifested in how thousands of birds are reported each year as having slammed into the glass windows of these structures, having been unable to distinguish them as hazards. So, we see why many claim that urban living and nature cannot co-exist.[2]

However, it seems that many of these issues that lead critics to condemn the idea of coexistence stem from the fact that modern cities have often tried to overcome, not work with, the forces of nature. Instead of considering ways for urban living that incorporate or integrate with nature, many efforts to improve and build cities and urban living tend to work against, or without regard for,

[1] Editor's comments: Awkward substantiation in an otherwise well-developed essay. While this idea is valid, there are certainly cities where animals abound (e.g. scavenging foxes in English towns and cities and venomous snakes in Melbourne city)! Moreover, the tiger example is a speculative one. Do avoid such types of substantiation where possible.

[2] Editor's comments: Substantiation for this paragraph could be more convincing. Skyscrapers are not the only element of urban living threatening wildlife; loss of habitat, vehicles and toxic substances put out to control pests all inhibit animal populations in urban communities.

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nature, and this can generate the impression that urban living and nature are at odds, when they do not have to be. Take Singapore's Kallang-Bishan floodway as an example. It was originally a river, before it was channelized and concretised into a straight drain for the purposes of stormwater runoff. This did alleviate the issue of flooding that had plagued the area, and served as a boon for some to claim that nature had to be conquered for the urban dwellers in the area to continue living well. However, this was only a stop-gap measure, and in years where nature's forces resulted in heavier precipitation, the channel overflowed and inundated some of the houses anyway. This led the Singapore government to try and change the way they were approaching the issue, leading to the destruction of the concrete man-made channel, back to a gently meandering river, with wildlife and vegetation. Now, the area serves as an extremely effective catchment area and floodplain, nature taking the water that the asphalt roads and bricked pavements cannot handle. This is an exemplary ideal of coexistence, where nature acts to preserve the urban living concept by protecting the houses and urban dwellers when it is given the chance and worked with, instead of against. This is not the only case, as the destruction of dams near cities in the U.S. and Latin America have also shown that cities and those living in them can benefit when working in tandem and co-existing with nature. [3] Hence, coexistence between urban living and nature is definitely possible, and may be even more so in modern cities, where technological advancement has made it possible to engineer effective solutions like the aforementioned turning of the channel of concrete back into a sustainable river through creative engineering.

Another reason that urban living and nature can, and indeed should, co-exist is the increasing acceptance of nature as a necessity to good living, due to recent scientific progress showing its benefits. Urban living no longer excludes nature, but has seen a shift towards its inclusion instead. In many modern cities, the idea of urban living has often grown to include the provision of green spaces for leisure and recreation, and in light of that, it may be becoming increasingly possible for them to co-exist in the cities of today as mindsets change to accommodate. This shift can be seen in a range of cities worldwide, though it has been less recent for some. Many Scandinavian countries, including Norway and Sweden, have sought to increase the greenery and nature in their cities through schemes and policies that encourage planners to ensure that every

[3] Not clear how dam removal shows the possibility of co-existence. Some elaboration required e.g. this has been undertaken by urban communities for the sake of environmental rehabilitation and has succeeded in boosting aquatic life such as salmon as they regain access to their original spawning grounds.

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person in the city has access to a green space in their neighbourhood. Singapore too, seeks this, with a goal of 80% of the population to be living within 1km of a green space. It is a phenomenon even present in developing countries like India or Brazil, both of which have implemented urban planning that accounts for green spaces in their cities today. Therefore, as mindsets and ideas of what constitute urban living change, especially important in today's context as studies show that exposure to greenery and nature has health benefits, the possibility of coexistence between urban living and nature is set to increase.

Finally, the idea of coexistence implies that there is some form of give and take involved in the process. While parts of nature may be difficult to reconcile with the concept of urban living, others are less so. Urban living is regarded by many to mean a lifestyle centred in the city, with traits such as convenience and a fast-pace. These characteristics are not, in fact, at odds to certain aspects of nature, especially if the existence of said nature brings benefit to those leading urban lifestyles. Keeping an herb garden or beehive, as is allowed in the state of New York in the United States, can actually be beneficial to the urban dwellers. In fact, since these types of cultivation do not need much space, which tends to be scarce in modern cities, and additionally, can provide a source of income or eliminate the need to purchase certain goods, which may reduce the costs of living that are generally very high in most modern cities, they might actually be a complement and advantage in tackling urban living and its associated problems, rather than something to be eradicated or avoided. Hence, nature may not be at odds to urban living, provided that the subset of nature involved fits nicely into the existing characteristics that define urban living, like convenience or high population densities, and the ability to co-exist may be greater if people are more aware of this.

To conclude, while the initial response of many may be to dismiss the idea of nature being able to co-exist with urban living, and the sentiment does have a point of successful contention when the nature in question cannot exist together with the other characteristics of urban living, we cannot say coexistence is entirely impossible and cannot be done. Rather, there are many ways for nature and urban living to successfully co-exist, especially in today's world of advancing technology and changing mindsets, provided that effort is made to ensure that they are complementarily implemented, instead of at odds.

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Teachers' Comments:

An intelligent discussion incorporating a detailed discussion of cited examples that artistically evaluated key points in a paragraph. Relevant, coherent and well-considered. Some suggestions/questions were inserted for a possible more intensive discussion. However, supporting details could be more developed. Balance and detail could be more convincing and well-supported.

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"Urban living and nature cannot co-exist in modern cities today. Do you agree?

In recent years, environmental degradation and pollution issues have increasingly become more pressing. We have seen widespread destruction of nature to give way to the development of urban areas we live in today. As the world's population increases further, together with the increase in the proportion of people living in cities, there is cause for concern on whether nature will further be impacted in the future. At first glance, in the modern cities that we live in today, it may seem that nature is a necessary trade-off to the energy-intensive urban lifestyle. However, I believe that it is possible for nature and urban living to coexist in these cities today, as not only have improvements in technology helped us integrate eco-friendly features into our daily life, nature has also evolved to be an integral part of many urban dwellers' lifestyles.

Granted, as people in modern cities become increasingly affluent in recent times, urban lifestyles have also become more energy-intensive, harming our natural environment. The age of globalisation has allowed for unrestricted movements of people and goods, facilitating global trade and economic growth. The bulk of this growth benefits those living in cities, particularly those who usually work in higher value-added industries such as service or research. Thus, we can see many of these cities growing at unprecedented rates, especially cities like Shanghai which were previously less developed. As such, there is a growing proportion of people in the middle-income group who have greater purchasing power and desire to consume more goods in their urban lifestyles. [4]For instance, Beijing has seen a boom in the number of vehicles on the road as many move towards ownership of their own private vehicles for transport. This causes problems, especially for the environment. As the number of cars increase, together with congestion issues due to the lack of supporting road infrastructure, the air in Beijing has worsened and seen increasing bouts of severe pollution. The air quality in Beijing has deteriorated to dangerous levels, part of which has been contributed by the problem of excessive road usage. On a more general scale,

[4] This rather long sentence is not directly relevant to the tension between urbanisation and nature; it can be omitted so that you focus on the transportation infrastructure characteristic of cities.

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increased consumption by households require increased manufacturing and production to meet these demands, further contributing to carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Thus, we can see that as people have higher incomes, nature suffers as a result of increased consumption, showing that there is indeed a trade-off between nature and urban living especially in the world today.

However, in today's world, the development of technology has allowed for those living in cities to incorporate environmental-friendly practices in their lifestyles, integrating nature into modern living. In recent years, there have been developments in technology which have not only increased the energy efficiency of machines, but also reduced their costs as well. Home appliances, including fridges, televisions and air-conditioning units, have since added eco-features, such as Panasonic's air-conditioners which use intelligent sensors to monitor room conditions to minimise energy consumption. Lowered prices have reduced cost barriers of such products, making them more price competitive with traditional models. This has facilitated more and more people to adopt them instead, building eco-friendly initiatives into their lives. Another example would be electric and hybrid vehicles, which have seen prices go down due to improvements in battery technology. Although currently, these cars may still not be widely adopted due to other factors like fuel ranges or accessibility of supporting infrastructure, the increasing trend of people buying cards like the Toyota Prius paint an optimistic outlook for such eco-friendly features in daily transport. Thus, we can see that, in many cities today, improvements in technology have made it much easier for the individual to contribute to nature in their lifestyles, reducing their harmful impact on the environment. It acts as a mitigating factor against current trends such as carbon dioxide emissions and global warming, showing that caring for nature can indeed coexist with an urban lifestyle today.

Moreover, in today's highly competitive world, increasing stress levels have given an opportunity for nature to play a recreational role in the lives of city dwellers. As the world becomes more competitive especially due to competition from foreign countries, many workers and students experience increasing stress levels to edge out over their rivals. Such stress often leads to negative impacts on psychological health and well-being if left unattended to. Thus, many people living in cities often seek ways to relieve the stress from work, through engaging in recreational activities. In many countries, nature then plays a huge role in

providing a way for people to calm their mind and take a break away from the high-rise urban landscape. Nature, as a form of recreation, has become an integral part of urban living for many. For example, in New York City, many would visit the Central Park to have a stroll or hang out with their peers due to its scenic nature away from the buzz in the city. This is prevalent in other major cities too, such as London with Hyde Park or Singapore with multiple parks and nature reserves spread across the country. There are other ways of engaging with nature too. For instance, there is a growing trend of people engaging in urban farming, where they can engage in recreational gardening in empty plots of land in the city like on rooftop gardens. Thus, we can see that nature has grown to coexist with urban lifestyles, by providing a means of recreation and relaxation in the stressful world we live in today.

Also, nature needs to coexist with urban living in some cases where countries rely on it for economic development, especially in the face of global competition today. Countries often need to maintain an edge over their competitors to encourage economic growth and development, to improve their citizens' standard of living. To do so, they need to tap on their strengths to set them apart from everyone else, and for some countries, nature plays an important part in their economic development. For example, some countries especially those in the Caribbean and South America do rely on ecotourism for economic opportunities and growth. Should nature be sacrificed in such places, these countries would face a decline of the tourist industry and lose out on their competitive advantage and potential economic growth.[5] Another example would be Singapore, which has prided herself as a "City in a Garden" as a source of attraction for tourists. National sights integrated with the urban lifestyle play a part in attracting them, such as at Gardens by the Bay or Marina Barrage. Being extremely essential for the future growth and economic development of a country,[6] nature thus sometimes need to be integrated into urban living, for there are few other choices. There needs to be sustainable development, to ensure that nature, a precious resource for them, do not get depleted or destroyed. Urban living then needs to coexist with nature in these cases, especially when global competition is intense, for economic growth.

[5] Support here is problematic given that while you are discussing entire countries rather than urban communities per se and urban lifestyles.
[6] These examples suffer from the same weakness as the above; this paragraph could be more clearly relevant.

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In conclusion, although in many cases, urban living causes a trade-off with nature, it is still possible for them to coexist in today's times. The development of technology has enabled us to do so, stress from work has allowed it to evolve to fulfil a recreational need, and for some, in the face of global competition, they just simply need to preserve such a core resource. Although trends seem gloomy with respect to nature as cities continue to develop, I am sure that in the future, the situation will definitely improve as we see more of nature in our daily lives.

Teachers' Comments:

C – A pleasurable read as you've provided a well thought-out and balanced treatment on the issue at hand with a range of arguments to support your thesis. Substantiation is also wide-ranging to boot. Well done.
L – Fairly fluent and very coherently organised with the exceptions of minor slips (perhaps due to timed/exam conditions and stress factors). Last content paragraph could be more directly relevant but nothing that detracts from the merits of the script on the whole.

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'At a time when the world needs capable leadership, many politicians do not seem up to the job.' Do you agree?

Our world is changing at an unprecedented pace, and with the advent of technology such as the internet, our world is becoming more interconnected. Hence, countries increasingly need competent leadership to navigate a complex web of internal and external issues facing every country, and political leaders need to have the foresight to deal with the many threats facing countries and the international community. However, it increasingly seems that many politicians are not up to this difficult task.

Some may argue that there are some politicians who are capable enough to make bold moves to help their country and the international community navigate through difficult situations. These leaders are unfazed by the many crises facing the world today and are able to make sound decisions that help to alleviate these issues. For example, when faced with the serious humanitarian crisis that is the Syrian refugee crisis, German chancellor Angela Merkel made the bold decision to open Germany's borders to these refugees who were fleeing the devastating war in Syria. This greatly helped to reduce the number of refugees that were fleeing their country and could not find a new home, helping to alleviate a serious crisis. In addition, her decision set an example for other countries to follow, encouraging other neighbouring countries to accept more refugees as well. Accepting a large number of refugees with different backgrounds and cultures into a country and helping them to integrate undoubtedly posed a large logistic challenge and put a great strain on a country's budget and hence only a capable leader would be willing to take such a bold step and be able to manage the situation well. This shows that even in the light of the increasingly serious and difficult crises facing the international community today, there are some leaders who are willing and are capable enough to take bold steps to alleviate seemingly insurmountable crises.

However, political leaders so capable are seemingly becoming the minority today. In an attempt to gain power, many politicians are taking the easy route out – refusing to face global problems head on and instead pandering to popular sentiments within a country. In many Western countries today,

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politicians are sticking their head in the sand, refusing to acknowledge global issues and promising to close off their country to the outside world. One of the more high profile incidents was the United Kingdom's vote to exit the European Union, also known as Brexit. Politicians such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage capitalised on the British people's fear of immigrants and refugees, choosing to ignore the growing crisis just outside their borders and going with the popular sentiment to close the country's borders and stop the flow of immigrants and refugees into the U.K. These politicians do not want to face the growing refugee crisis, trying to win people over using popular sentiments instead, showing that they are incapable of not only dealing effectively with a serious crisis, but also winning voters over with tangible and feasible policies to improve their lives. The pro-Brexit politicians managed to push their agenda through, which may lead to undesirable consequences to people outside and within the U.K. Such politicians who are incapable of facing the numerous issues facing the global community today are not unique to the U.K. They gain power by pushing populist, protectionist policies that are unsustainable in the long run, showing that in a time where international cooperation and aid are required, there are politicians who are seemingly incapable of stepping up to the plate.

In addition, in today's hyper-partisan world, politicians are incapable of cooperating to solve serious issues within their country and within the international community. Instead, these leaders choose to place more emphasis on their party's agenda than on the betterment of a country's citizens. Crucial issues like healthcare and government budget are being used to push partisan goals, and as a result have less chance of getting passed into law. This results in citizens suffering from inadequate government aid in crucial areas such as healthcare and infrastructure. For example, politicians in the United States Congress are sharply divided along party lines, and do not cooperate to pass bills that are beneficial to its citizens. Americans pay the highest amount for healthcare in the world, and yet it took 45 years before a comprehensive healthcare bill was signed into law by President Obama. Politicians from the opposition party refused to support the bill, and employed strategies like filibustering to prevent the passage of the bill. This eventually led to a shutdown of the U.S. government, as Congress could not pass a government budget that funds Obamacare. The shutdown led to other consequences such as government employees having to work without receiving a salary. Evidently, despite the fact that the American people were facing serious issues such as a

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poor healthcare system, U.S. politicians were incapable of seeing the bigger picture and could only focus on petty partisan politics, resulting in the American people having to suffer from insufficient government aid. Such short-sighted politicians are detrimental to the well-being and satisfaction of a country's citizens, and are definitely not up to the job.

Countries across the world are facing serious national security threats, and with the rapid spread of terrorist groups such as ISIS, the need for international cooperation is more crucial than ever. However, short-sighted politicians are unable to see past the potential disadvantages to their country, and impede the international community's efforts to stamp out such threats. One such example is the current U.S. president, Donald Trump, threatening to pull out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which is a cooperation between America and European countries to bolster security, because he felt that the U.S. was putting in too much money into a programme that he feels does not benefit the U.S. Such myopic views threaten to disrupt international cooperation, and may reduce the ability of America and European countries to protect their citizens from foreign attacks. In a more recent incident, Donald Trump revealed classified information about ISIS from a U.S. ally to Russian officials to boast about the intelligence he receives. This is another short-sighted move that threatens the cooperation amongst global intelligence communities. Intelligence agencies may be reluctant to share information with the U.S. in future, impeding the U.S. government's ability to effectively counter terrorist organisations such as ISIS in the future. Incapable, and arguably incompetent leadership leads to a country not being able to protect itself against the complex and multifaceted threats facing the world today. Politicians such as Donald Trump who make short-sighted decisions not only threaten the security of their own country, but they also expose other countries to the risk of a terror attack as well, and hence, they are not up to the job of protecting their citizens against security threats.

In conclusion, there seems to be a trend of politicians who are not able to navigate the complex world today after being elected into office. They pander to populist sentiments, shy away from the outside world and are too short-sighted to see the bigger picture. It is now up to the checks and balances of a country's government to effectively counter the effects of incapable and incompetent leaders, and hopefully help the country better cope with the complex world we live in today.

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Teacher's Comments:

On the whole, you answered the question. Your argument is also clear. However, it would be to your advantage to broaden your scope. You seem to be well versed with American politics but a range of countries would broaden your scope. E.g. India where Modi is promoting Hindu nationalistic sentiments among the population – creating tension at a time where he should be promoting economic policies to further India's development.

'The idea that science and technology will solve our problems is a delusion.' Discuss.

Science and technology has often been regarded as the main drive behind humanity's progress. Through medical advancements to smartphone technology, science and technology has increased our lifespan, brought people from all over the world closer than before and is largely the reason behind why mankind has managed to survive and thrive over thousands of years. Yet, is science and technology the panacea to all our problems? Perhaps the idea that science and technology alone will solve the challenges of today may reflect some naivety, or even delusion, on our part because scientific advancement alone cannot solve our problems, is sometimes the cause of our problems and is ultimately a tool without a proper moral guide.

First and foremost, it must be conceded that science and technology has improved our lives in ways beyond what we would have thought was humanly possible. Where in pre-historic days we faced hunger and starvation unless we hunt or gather enough food, our study of science has allowed us to successfully domesticate animals and grow crops sustainably to effectively satisfy our basic need for food in a convenient and safe manner. Ventures into medical technology have also helped us extend our life expectancy by decades, and have progressed to the point where we are able to eradicate diseases, like the smallpox virus, completely,whereas a hundred years ago, people of the medieval age were susceptible to disfigurement and death by the virus. In more contemporary terms, even though scientists have not found an absolute cure to cancer yet, they have been able to develop treatments for previously deemed fatal forms of brain cancers, saving lives that would otherwise be doomed to a fatal end. Indeed, scientific advancement is undeniably a powerful force that propels tremendous improvements to our quality of life. This is made possible by the methodical and logical process of the scientific method, that allows us to identify the root causes of problems and effectively target them. As science allows us to deepen our understanding of the workings of the world in a highly logical and systematic manner, we are able to pinpoint underlying issues and correct what have gone wrong. For instance, the mad-cow disease that struck livestock and people who consumed the diseased cows

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remained rampant in its initial stages as people were unable to identify the vector of transmission. Without a clear understanding of the problem, people were helpless to prevent the spread of the disease. Through scientific research, the culprit was identified to be prions, and with that, doctors were able to provide a proper diagnosis and contain the spread of the virus. The ability of science to facilitate problem solving in this manner makes it undeniably one of the biggest forces for change and solving our problems.

Science and technology also seems promising in solving our problems despite some of its creations leading to environmental and health problems as it seemingly provides solutions to the problems it has caused. The golden age of scientific advancements in the 1920s that spanned for decades led to the invention and subsequent widespread use of machines such as fuel-driven cars and machinery for mass manufacturing. This propelled transportation to the next level and sated our desire for material goods. Years later, we now feel its detrimental effects: high carbon emissions from an overpopulation of cars as well as from a booming manufacturing industry that boasted rows of factories dutifully puffing out greenhouse gases. This has led to a rapid rise in global average temperatures, a phenomenon known as global warming. In China, where the manufacturing industry is still thriving, levels of smog have risen so high that in city areas like Beijing, doctors have seen a significant rise in lung cancer cases. Yet, all is not lost, for green technology is rising in popularity and promises to reverse the damage done. Many green innovations have emerged such as Tesla's electric cars, that guarantees zero carbon foot print. Not only that, solar and hydroelectric power are all alternative sources of energy that have shown tangible potential to be able to replace environmentally detrimental practices of using fuel energy. In this way, even though scientific advancements have created new problems in its place, there seems to be still a glimmer of hope that science and technology can be the answer to our problems.

Yet, one alarming trend we see is that many of such innovations do not end up being actively utilised to solve the problems they claim to solve. Hence the ideal that science and technology can singlehandedly solve our problems border on delusion, as many other human factors come into play for it to effectively solve the problems we face. For instance, the aforementioned sources of renewable energy have shown the promise of entirely replacing our current sources of petroleum oil, natural gas and coal. Yet, bureaucracies and

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power struggles have impeded the implementation of such solutions: oil remains a valuable trade commodity and the OPEC participant countries continue to ensure that it is so. Furthermore, the US has also recently discovered new shale oil fields that sent oil prices further tumbling down. With oil prices remaining low, it is hard for the relevant industries to turn to greener renewable energy as they may lose their competitiveness by incurring higher cost. If we remain blind to other such limiting factors and do not target them, we will only end up developing more solutions, that sometimes lead to more problems, without ever solving the issue in question. Since the development of hydroelectric power, more dangerous sources of energy like nuclear energy have been developed, which brings with it the threat of radiation poisoning as a trade-off for zero pollution. Hence, it would be myopic to suggest that science and technology can be the solution to problems when there is a multitude of other factors that need to be addressed.

Moreover, science and technology is sometimes itself the creator of problems. Science and technology has the unique ability to bring our ideas to life, be it for better or worse. For instance, recent developments in genetic cloning have outraged many as it appears to violate the sanctity and value of life. To see human and animal embryos treated as lab experiments and to later make proposals to harvest them for medical use make us question our morality and our views on life. Similarly, scientific advancement has facilitated the development of nuclear weapon and has arguably opened new avenues for more bloodshed. On hindsight, perhaps such developments should have been stopped in its infancy. In this light, science and technology enables us to make our ideas possible but it does not provide any guidelines on what should be the limit for scientific research.

Ultimately, pressing challenges today have become increasingly ideological and political. Such problems cannot, at its root, be solved by technology. There have been continual advancements in science and technology for the past thousands of years. Admittedly, while there is still room for advancement, increasing life expectancy and developing faster forms of transport and communication are no longer relevant pursuits today. Instead, the greatest concerns today are not due to the lack of scientific solutions, but it is the lack of accessibility to these solutions. A case in point would be the prevalent hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa, where many still suffer from malnutrition and starvation, even though mankind has long science developed ways of efficient

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food production. In fact, developed countries have been reported to throw away enough food from overproduction and wastage to provide for such people who still live in hunger. Hence there is a need for a shift in focus to facilitating the usage of existing scientific solutions to those who lack access to it due to political or economic problems. For many of these countries, widespread corruption remains the root cause of their poverty and until that is solved, people in these countries are helpless even with new technological innovations – like Golden Rice – being developed.

All in all, science and technology perhaps rightfully remains a powerful force for improving human life and eliminating suffering in this world. It is however, rather delusional to suggest that it can, by itself, solve our problems, given that much of today's problems are multidimensional and do not such call for technical answers but require management of political and economic struggles of stakeholders. Science and technology at its core is merely a force multiplier to bring humanity to greater heights; but to find our way there, we would need to be guided by our own moral instincts and our understanding of human nature.

Marker's comments:

A mature analysis that took into account the key terms of the question and also made strong and accurate evaluative statements.

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'The idea that science and technology will solve our problems is a delusion.' Discuss.

Not long ago, researchers from the Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (IBN) in Singapore published ground-breaking research on the use of nanofibers to solidify and hence clean up oil spills. Indeed, astounding innovations such as this have cemented the position of science and technology as a front-runner in solving the problems of our modern day. Yet other technologies have also raised problems for humankind, such as ethical and social implications, casting doubts as to whether science and technology truly is the game-changer it is heralded to be. In my opinion, while science and technology can offer promising progress, it often does not live up to our expectation of solving world challenges and hence this idea is most certainly a delusion. Science and technology can create more problems, because it is agenda-driven and it is inadequate in coming up with effective solutions.

Some may argue that science and technology have provided effective solutions to certain challenges we face today, and this gives the impression to some that it does live up to what many tout it to be. Technologies developed through research often target specific problems, and these innovations can improve people's lives. To take a case in point, we can consider the research recently done in Singapore on water-cleaning technologies. Researchers have developed a 'teabag' coated with activated carbon from spent coffee, which effectively removes heavy metal ions and common bacteria strains found in contaminated water. The ease of access to this product in developing countries that are plagued by water pollution issues will undeniably mark a significant step forward in providing clean water for these people. This is merely one of the many scientific and technological advancements that stands as a promising solution to our problems. It is unsurprising that some believe that science is doing its job in resolving challenges.

However, it is imperative to recognise that this is but the tip of the iceberg. In a bid to solve many of today's challenges, science actually churns out more problems in the process. This is largely due to the fast pace of scientific and

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technological developments with which humankind is struggling to keep up with. No technology exemplifies this more clearly than artificial intelligence (AI). While intended to automate processes for greater convenience for people, latest AI developments instead pose considerable threats to people's livelihoods. Robots programmed to perform menial, repetitive tasks have left lower-skilled workers in the lurch, struggling to stay relevant in today's rapidly evolving economy. Already, robots have replaced food and beverage staff in Japan and South Korea. Evidently, people expect that science and technology solves problems such as a manpower crunch, but it instead results in further negative repercussions as we are woefully unprepared for such advancements. On the surface, AI technology may seem to help free up manpower for higher-skilled jobs, but the negative impact that has resulted means that this hope cannot be further from the truth.

In addition, while science and technology research led by companies often have noble goals of benefitting humankind, the reality remains that the effectiveness of such efforts are limited due to the pursuit of other agendas. For instance, in drug technology, companies developing the drug are often motivated by profit-maximization aims, resulting in sky-high drug prices that may be simply unaffordable for people who need it most. Solvadi is a drug sold for more than a few tens of thousands of dollars for a month-long dosage, yet a similar alternative can be found for just a thousand dollars. Such price hikes are commonplace as companies desire profit. It is therefore evident that in theory, while such advancements can solve medical problems, the reality is not as rosy. Restricted access to such technology and products, especially for people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, stands as a major obstacle in making them an effective solution to such problems. Thus, it can only be said that this perception that science and technology can solve our problems is nothing more than a naïve dream for some.

Moreover, it would be a folly to not recognize that many of our social problems of today cannot be easily resolved by science and technology. While science may provide part of the solution, certain root causes are deeply mired in human nature. Consider the Paralysis Challenge of the Longitude Prize a few years back. Research was proposed to focus on the development of rehabilitation technology for paralyzed patients. This technology would include innovations like exoskeletons and with such technology, patients could recover their natural movement. This was heralded as a major step forward in helping these patients

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reintegrate into their communities and rejoin normal life. However, while such a technology does indeed restore normalcy for the patients to a certain extent, social science experts point to the fact that much of the stigma these patients faced was due to society's treatment of disabled people. The discrimination they faced meant they were often shunned by others. It is painfully obvious that in changing such deep-rooted mindsets, science and technology cannot do the trick. Where social problems are so deeply intertwined with human nature, science and technology may seem to be able to solve the problem but in fact cannot tackle its root causes. Therefore, the idea that science and technology will solve our problems is a mistaken mindset in such situations.

All in all, while science and technology has provided some solutions, it remains more often than not regrettably limited. The power of science and technology in solving our challenges is, in my opinion, a delusion. This is not to discount the immense value of science and technology, but perhaps a timely wake-up call that it will not be the solution to everything, as much as we hope for it to be.

Teacher's comments

C: A strong response in part due to being sensitive to the key word in the question & showing how there appears to be a misplaced faith in S&T as we gloss over its limitations.

L: A very pleasurable read – very fluent, precise & script is free of errors. Cogently & coherently structured, aided by apt vocabulary choice & complex (but not convoluted) structures.

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'The fact that poverty still exists today is an embarrassment to mankind.' Discuss.

Great leaps in the development of science and technology have always catalysed shifts in eras of human history, and it is no wonder that the Stone, Iron and Bronze Ages were named after the new materials developed and used in those times. Technological developments have historically solved many of the problems humankind has faced, enabling us to generate immense amounts of energy and increase the human lifespan through advancements in agriculture technology and medical science. However, the problems we face today are complex and multifaceted – from inequality, climate change, war and conflict to food distribution, each of these issues cannot be divorced from the specific political and social circumstances that they are located in. While science and technology may provide ways to solve such problems, to believe that it alone is the panacea would be foolish, for the underlying causes of such issues cannot be tackled by science.

It is undeniable that science does enable us to solve many challenges we face in our world today. Advancements in medical science such as the countless vaccines developed to prevent disease spread and treatments to cure illnesses have had a palpable impact on the world we live in. Green energy is burgeoning, due to costs of such technology rapidly diminishing due to technological development. Science and technology does herald much promise for the future – 55.6% of the world's additional power generated originated from clean energy sources such as wind and solar power. Germany announced in 2016 that they are close to having all their energy needs supplied sustainably. It does seem, on first glance, that science and technology will solve the problems that we face in our world today, given the potential for benefit it brings to human societies.

Despite the solutions science and technology provides to the problems that we face, some problems are far more complex due to social and political circumstances that hinder these solutions from being effectively applied to benefit society. Metaphorically speaking, while science may provide the water with which we may use to fight fires, these efforts remain fruitless if there exist

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insufficient infrastructure to douse the flames effectively. Social situations such as poverty may prevent access to medical care, and inequality entails staggering amounts of food wastage in rich nations but starving, malnourished populations in others. The world does have the medical resources to treat people, and the agricultural technology to supply sufficient food – yet social circumstances dampen the potential of science and technology. Millions of people are afflicted by HIV/AIDs in African countries, yet when there exist effective anti-retroviral treatments that can allow people to live full, meaningful lives, the prohibitively high costs, fear of social stigma and falsehoods propagated by their leaders prevent people from access to such treatments. Their societies are being hollowed from the inside by a preventable, treatable disease, yet the average lifespan of the Gambians has fallen by 20 years over the past 2 decades. Science and technology alone cannot solve such problems that are deeply entrenched in the workings of these societies. Political and social change needs to occur first, in order to allow technology to brighten the lives of people within such societies.

Other societies face problems that simply cannot be solved by science. War and conflict stemming from clashes in belief and ideology, and the human propensity towards using violence as a self-defense mechanism are not issues that a magical pill or new, cutting-edge technology can resolve. Indeed, science can solve the symptoms of such issues. Surveillance, strong military defence forces and advanced weaponry may be able to eliminate threats of terrorism, but they only serve to tackle the symptoms of such problems rather than the root cause. Rifts in society and faultlines of race and class simply cannot be eliminated by science. The roots of inequality – human selfishness, greed and a capitalist economy cannot be eliminated by science and technology. Such things that are core to our humanity and rooted in the functionings of our society are not solved by science. Even as technology has given us abundance in material wealth, the capitalist system makes it such that any increase lands mostly in the hands of the wealthy and powerful. It is no wonder, then, that problems of food wastage and distribution are rampant in our world. To blindly take for granted that our problems will be solved by science, then, would be naïve, or even harmful, because much greater efforts have to be taken by our societies to take steps towards a better world.

However, what may truly be the most dangerous stance to take is the denouncement of science and technology itself. In a political climate where

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science and technology is easily manipulated by those in power, if science and technology is not relied upon and utilized, its power to solve our problems will only further be diminished. One need only look to the climate change renouncers in the United States and the budget cuts for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)and the Environmental Protection Agency brought about by the Trump administration to perceive the growing trend of anti-intellectualism in the world today. It is the denial of science that truly endangers humankind's ability to progress. If the funding and resources for research and development are cut, following this trend, its ability to provide solutions and bring benefit will be decreased further. Furthermore, the uncertainties posed by corporations and lobbyist groups influencing and manipulating scientific research for their benefit pose further threat – research institutions in the United States have manufactured "results" proving the non-existence of global warming, and corporations in the meat industry only fund research that denies the threat of rearing of livestock to the environment. This erodes the reliability of science in our world. As such, the ability for science and technology to solve our problems is further limited.

Ultimately, the development of science and technology cannot be separated from the environment it is in. Technology can cure illness, generate energy and supply food, but its powers are limited by the circumstances that we apply it in. Political and social instability and conflict cannot be resolved by science and technology. To believe in the absolute power of science and technology would be foolish. Perhaps, the more important question here would be how to best enable the development of and application of technology we have access to, by first assessing and tackling the social and political circumstances that surround the problem.

Marker's Comments:

C- Response reveals sensitivity to the actual demands of the question and also supported by relevant substantiation

L- Very fluent and cogently and coherently put forth with minor slips. Vocabulary choice is apt and essay structure is very sound.

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'The fact that poverty still exists today is an embarrassment to mankind.' Discuss.

We live in an era where Mankind lauds its marvelous achievements of having sent people to space and created Artificial Intelligence programmes with the ability to beat top world players in games like chess and Go. It seems inconceivable that a race that has achieved so much still has one-seventh of its population surviving, or rather, trying to survive on one dollar a day. Each year, millions of children die from starvation and malnutrition brought on by poverty and the inability to obtain or purchase the bare necessities. Despite being mentioned in both the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, poverty is still rampant in many forms worldwide. While some feel that the existence of poverty is not an issue so serious that it is an embarrassment, I feel that its existence is a reflection of something deeper which we ought to feel shame about.

Those who claim that describing the existence of poverty as an embarrassment is going too far do have their reasons for saying so. After all, there is no shame in acknowledging that a problem exists, as long as one follows up with actions to mitigate or solve the problem. Awareness of a social issue is often the first step in solving it and making the world a better place. Given that some advancements have been made in this area recently, how then can we call such an issue an embarrassment to mankind? Around the world, non-governmental organisations work around the clock for the betterment of the poor in less fortunate countries, and governments also throw their weight behind programs such as the UN World Food Programme. To prevent poverty from taking its toll in terms of negatively affecting one's health, countries have utilised technology to create inventions such as the long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets, which are a major improvement over previous iterations of mosquito nets, as well as the LifeStraw, to provide clean drinking water. With these, families currently living in poverty are able to spend their resources such as time and money on areas such as education to get the out of the poverty cycle. For example, after a deal between some African countries and Chinese corporations enabled the construction of a power grid with subsidised cost of usage to African families, a study found that families with access to the power

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grid were 25% more likely to start a business which brought in an average of $1000 a year. Not too bad, in a region where the average household income is $700 a year. More importantly, children were found to show a 78% increase in terms of time spent on studies, a crucial step in lifting them out of the cycle of poverty. Hence, with non-governmental organisations, governments and sometimes even corporations throwing their weight behind the cause of eradicating poverty, and making actual, real improvements to the lives of people, to simply dismiss poverty as a blemish on our record that we ought to be embarrassed by does not do justice to the efforts of the aforementioned parties.

Moreover, the nature of poverty makes it a difficult problem to solve in the first place. If there is no shame in admitting the existence of a problem, then what more can be said about one that is intrinsically difficult to eliminate? Poverty is a tough nut to crack because it represents a vicious cycle – one of unemployment leading to lack of time to pursue one's or allow one's children to pursue further studies, which leads to unemployment due to lack of qualifications, and so on. This endless, self-perpetuating cycle is very hard to break out of, and is further exacerbated by the fact that the poor often live in rural slums which are inaccessible, making it very difficult for aid to reach them. How many organisations would forge on, completely undeterred, if they knew their job entailed 3 days of hiking in a place with no roads or railways, while carrying all their aid packages and supplies just to deliver them to a rural village in Uganda? Hence, proponents of the view that the existence of poverty is not an embarrassment take the stand that a difficult problem which we are working hard to solve is not something we should hang our heads over, but rather forge ahead with our heads held high knowing that we are working for a worthy cause. After all, it is nigh impossible to completely eradicate poverty, even in today's world, hence it is no cause for embarrassment.

I feel that while poverty itself is not an embarrassment, it does reflect some deeper social issues which should trigger a wave of emotion including some element of shame. Firstly, if we examine the causes of poverty, we find that one of the contributing factors is corruption in the governments managing the areas where poverty is widespread. To date, more than a trillion US dollars have been sent to Africa, and it seems incredulous that so many Africans are still living in poverty today despite the cumulative contributions of so many bodies up till now. The reason is simple; many officials grease the palms of a

few around them, and then help themselves to a share of this pie known as an "aid package". Mind you, these are not the stereotypical evil megacorporations looking to maximise profits; these are officials and civil servants who are supposed to be working for the betterment of their countrymen. The nepotism that goes on behind the scenes to get family members into positions of power so that they can siphon money from well-intentioned donations from abroad is simply disappointing. Even heads-of-state, such as the previous presidents of Zaire and Zambia, are sometimes in it for their personal gain, such as when they pocketed millions of dollars meant for their people. A blatant lack of integrity is a matter which one should feel ashamed of, especially when it has allowed a problem as serious as poverty to persist up till now.

Secondly, the plight of some of our fellow humans is being capitalised on by other seeking to exploit these circumstances. This act of utilising someone else's situation to one's advantage is not something we should ignore. For example, to access the oil in Ogoniland, Nigeria, oil giant Shell decided to enter by means of obtaining a drilling permit in the mid-1950s. However, they employed few, if any locals, and when they did, they often paid them the minimum wage. Moreover, to cut costs, Shell pipelines were not maintained often, exposing the locals to oil spills and fires. This was devastating considering that the primary source of income for many was through fishing. Never mind that Shell turned a blind eye to the state of affairs in Ogoniland, what made it unacceptable was that they exploited the fact that locals were uneducated and could not take this issue to higher authorities for their own profit, while pushing the locals deeper into poverty by destroying their means of livelihood. To date, many locals there still live in poverty, and tracking the development of poverty and its continued existence in such a place is honestly quite saddening. Elsewhere, cases like this are also not unheard of. Chinese corporations, for example, often enter countries with an uneducated populace, making use of them to mine out valuable resources such as diamonds, and then pull out, leaving the people without their source of income and the country with a gutted mining sector. Hence, this form of opportunistic exploitation resulting in poverty today is something which we ought to reflect on.

Lastly, the fact that poverty exists amidst such flippant spending on other sectors is also a cause for shame. Governments have found to be pouring vast sums into other areas such as non-essential research when there are more pressing problems such as poverty. For example, India's space programme,

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with its billions of dollars of funding, is still going strong despite poverty-induced starvation all across India. This reflects that the government might be prioritising space research over the well-being of its own people. Let us not forget that while there are lofty goals to aim for, and yes, those goals are worth achieving, each dollar we mindlessly pour in is one less meal for a person who might not have eaten in a few days. Hence, the existence of poverty amidst the budgets of governments today is another cause for concern, reflection, and embarrassment.

In conclusion, I feel that the existence of poverty today is a reflection of more serious social issues which should prompt a round of serious introspection on our part as one human race. Poverty may not be a very relatable issue for some of us who go home every day knowing that there will be food on the table, but out there, there are real people who grapple with these issues on a daily basis. However, as anyone who was caught red-handed as a toddler would know, shame is a natural reaction to having done something wrong, or not well enough, but it does not condemn us to an eternity of wrongdoing, just as children learn from their mistakes to become better versions of themselves

Marker's comments:

A strong analysis that has observed key terms in the essay and be able to reflect the appropriate tone and angle of argument to the examples cited.

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'The fact that poverty still exists today is an embarrassment to mankind.' Discuss.

"Poverty is the worst form of violence,"Mahatma Gandhi once proclaimed, alluding to the debilitating nature of poverty as well as its egregious impacts on the impoverished and the society at large. Today, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that poverty remains one of the greatest scourges of mankind. Despite multiple efforts from both the public and private sectors in combatting the perennial issue, more than 100 million people still live under the US$1.25 poverty line. This eventually gives rise to the claim that the existence of poverty today represents an utter embarrassment and an eternal stigma, in view of the favourable conditions for the elimination of poverty in today's world. However, I beg to differ as such a statement does no justice to the existing efforts on the ground, nor does it accurately capture the multifarious nature of the problem. In fact, poverty as a social issue may never be truly eliminated, given the multitude contributing factors as well as their sheer complexity, as this essay endeavours to argue.

Prima facie, it does appear that with favourable technological and social changes in today's world, the eradication of global poverty could be easily achieved and the fact that widespread poverty persists signals a grand embarrassment to mankind. Indeed, technological advancements achieved in the past few decades serve to augment world productivity and enable broad-based improvements in standard of living, hence setting a favourable condition for the elimination of poverty. Characterised by high-yield variety of crops, enhanced irrigation technologies and modern management techniques, the Green Revolution in the 1960s made possible quantum leaps in global food production and provided a sustainable way in feeding the world population. This has immense impact on reducing poverty since with greater food security and stable output, people may allocate their scarce land resources to alternative productive uses while enhanced nourishment levels may enable higher productivity of workers, which raises standard of living and extricates people out of poverty. Meanwhile, improvements in transportation technologies as well as increasing global interconnectedness have made possible reallocations of global resources

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through aid programmes to the poor, hence enabling developing societies to thrive and move out of poverty, despite possible constraints in environmental endowments and natural resources. With technology and globalisation setting up a favourable environment for the elimination of poverty, it might be argued that the world today is better-equipped than ever to eradicate poverty once and for all. However, widespread poverty still persists in today's world --- an indication of our human inability to adequately address such a social problem even when powerful tools are readily available. Hence, in view of the stark contrast between entrenched poverty and favourable technological changes, it seems justified to argue that the existence of poverty today represents an embarrassment to mankind.

In fact, if we are to take a deeper look at the efforts on the ground today, one would realise that the failure to eradicate poverty sometimes steams from entrenched institutional problems and government failures, rendering our unsatisfactory performance in eliminating poverty an utter embarrassment to ourselves. In many developing societies where poverty is rife, ingrained governmental red tape and corruption often stand in the way of the alleviation of poverty. For example, it is estimated that more than 40% of international aid to African countries such as Malawi and Zambia are siphoned off by government officials overseeing their distribution, depriving such countries of the best hope of extricating ourselves out of poverty. International aid provided by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while well-intentioned, come with unrealistic conditions such as forced liberalisation of capital markets which imposed grave harm on recipient nations due to the great uncertainty introduced to their nascent financial systems, contributing to a series of crisis and ultimately, poverty in these societies. Hence, it may be argued that the fact that poverty still exists today is nothing but a testimony to prevalent governmental inefficiencies and institutional problems, which represent a source of utter embarrassment to ourselves.

However, by espousing the belief that the existence of poverty is nothing but an utter embarrassment, proponents of the given statement risk adopting a simplistic treatment of poverty as an issue that could be fully eliminated with advanced technological solutions, impeccable governance and collective will by the international community. Yet one must take note that poverty is, in fact, a multifaceted issue with a whole range of contributing factors. As such, it would be hard to believe that poverty can ever be eliminated even with the best

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technological solutions and clean, efficient government, given the sheer multitude of intersecting causes, some of which are clearly beyond our capacity to be fully resolved. In Syria, multipartite conflicts of political interests as well as the emergence of religious fundamentalism have led to prolonged warfare that have plunged two-thirds of the Syrian population into absolute poverty. Also prominent are the ravage of natural disasters, as exemplified by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami which is believed to have left more than 100 million people under the poverty line. In some developed societies, poverty may simply be a result of personal sloth and the lack of clear ambitions, which is best illustrated by the millions of poor in countries such as the U.S and Australia, who rely heavily on meagre state pensions and refuse to make full use of available opportunities to upgrade their skills and break free of the poverty cycle. Hence, the eradication of poverty would demand the total elimination of all possible contributing factors --- an uphill battle with little possibility of winning given the sheer complexity of many of the contributing causes. Some forms of poverty see their roots in human flaws and natural disasters which have no absolute cure, while others result from deep-seated problems within the human society such as conflicts and discriminations which are not likely to be fully resolved even in the long-term. Hence, the mere fact that poverty still exists today should not be interpreted as a form of embarrassment to mankind since poverty itself is a problem that simply cannot be fully eradicated.

Moreover, the world today should hardly be embarrassed by the mere persistence of poverty, given the various efforts made that have successfully addressed poverty on the ground. With greater awareness of the adverse impacts of poverty, governments worldwide have taken active steps to tackle its root-causes and alleviate the suffering of impoverished people. In addition, recognising the damaging effects of widespread poverty on the world economy, the international community has joined hands to tackle the perennial problem, in the hope of reducing global poverty and achieving tangible improvements in standard of living. In response to deep-seated poverty at the Horn of Africa, the Backpack Farmers Programme was rolled out as a collaborative project between local governments and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to educate farmers on sustainable farming practices and has since achieved sustained success in improving average income in participating countries. Indeed, such measures are far from perfect and can never fully resolve poverty given its complex nature. However, it would be hard to deny that government measures and international efforts have achieved commendable progress in alleviating the

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extent and scale of poverty. After all, the number of impoverished people in Africa has halved in the past 30 years while countries such as China and Singapore are prime examples of countries that have pulled themselves out of widespread poverty. Rather than being embarrassed by the mere existence of poverty, the global community should in fact, take genuine pride in its substantial achievements.

In conclusion, it would be naïve to declare that the mere existence of poverty today is an embarrassment to mankind, due to the complex nature of poverty as well as real progress achieved on the ground. Rather than the existence of poverty itself, perhaps a more fitting source of embarrassment would be the failures and imperfections in measures introduced to combat poverty, as those are the real stumbling blocks which stand in the way of human being's perennial quest to "make poverty history".

Teacher's Comment:

A pleasurable read obviously. Very knowledgeable on the given topic as evidenced by the range of examples cited and the arguments put forth. Apt and ambitious vocabulary with some minor slips that do not detract from overall merit. Ability to deal with complex sentence structures is evident.

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12

2017 | Y6 | GP CT2 | Paper 2 | Passage

John Taylor writes about the benefits of teaching students to think for themselves.

When the philosopher Karl Popper, writing in Unended Quest (1974), dreamed of his ideal school, he imagined a place where learning takes the form of free, intrinsically interesting enquiry, rather than mere exam preparation. I share Popper's dream. I think that school becomes more enjoyable and more effective when, instead of simply teaching students to pass examinations, they teach students to think for themselves.

To understand how this can be achieved, we need to remember something that Socrates drew our attention to long ago, but which in our eagerness to turn schools into engines of economic productivity we have forgotten, namely that education is a philosophical process. It begins with questioning, proceeds by enquiry, and moves in the direction of deeper understanding. The journey of enquiry is powered by critical reflection, discussion and debate. It leads not to final answers but to a greater appreciation of the limits of our knowledge, both of the world around us and of our own mysterious selves.

It is this appreciation that Socrates termed 'wisdom'. He tried to goad his fellow Athenians into beginning to think for themselves by questioning them so as to expose their limited understanding of ideas that were central to their lives, such as justice or courage. Undertaken in a constructive spirit, Socratic questioning becomes the starting point for a process of enquiry as we seek to expand our understanding. It can also engender humility and openness to the ideas of others.

If schools are to fulfil their purpose, they cannot afford to neglect this philosophical dimension of learning. They need to see themselves not simply as dispensers of the knowledge necessary for success in the world of work but as communities of philosophical reflection, spaces where students can explore the meaning of what they learn, and think for themselves about what it means to live well. Understood in these terms, philosophical education is not a discrete subject but an approach to learning that finds application at all points of the curriculum.

Philosophical education begins when a teacher adopts the role of 'Socratic mentor'. In a conventional classroom, the teacher is seen as the provider of the information that students 'need to know', this being determined by the requirements of whatever test looms on the horizon. Philosophical education takes the form of shared enquiry, a process in which the teacher guides the class towards understanding through dialogue, not monologue.

The template for such enquiry is provided by Socrates, who once demonstrated that he could, by a process of questioning, teach geometry to a slave-boy who had not been taught any mathematics previously. When teachers adopt the role of Socratic mentors, their questioning of students stimulates them to think for themselves about the problem at hand, rather than passively absorbing information.

Yet, despite the evident advantages of teaching students to think philosophically, the dominant mode of education remains staunchly traditional and of a particularly inhibitive nature. The world over, the joy of learning is being sucked out and education reduced to a

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dry, soulless process of 'delivery' of prescribed syllabus material, dictated by the demands of standardised tests and aiming to satisfy extrinsically determined outcome measures. As well as being damaging to students' intellectual development, this dry, assessment-driven approach is socially and politically undesirable. The result of teaching where there is no scope for challenge, disagreement or the open exploration of alternative answers to life's deepest questions is closed minds: dulled intellects lacking a capacity to question what they are told. Schools that operate in this way fail to equip young people with the defensive capability of reflecting critically on the constant flow of electronic information and misinformation in which we are all immersed. They risk raising a generation ill-equipped to resist the allure of simplistic, populist or subversive rhetoric.

In contrast, students who are taught to think for themselves are better prepared for life: better equipped to face the uncertainties of the future, to think creatively and independently, and to play a role as active, reflective citizens in democratic decision-making processes. Though the focus of philosophical education lies beyond employability, it nevertheless offers benefits here too, for in a fast-changing, unpredictable world, the workplace of the future needs not well-trained sheep but creative, independent thinkers; confident individuals who don't expect someone else to tell them the right answer but who know how to think for themselves and find new ways forward.

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth leading. Yet for students now, education means a life of examination. The best thing that could happen in schools is not further reform of structures, processes, curriculum or assessment, but a rediscovery of the Socratic purpose of education, a vision which prompted him to sit with slave-boy, poet and politician alike, to inspire them to start thinking for themselves.

A striking feature of these Socratic conversations is that the slave-boy comes out rather better than the supposedly more knowledgeable Athenian leaders. He emerges from his encounter with Socrates having learned some mathematics, while those meant to know what they were talking about became confounded by their inability to give an account of what they thought they knew.

This tells us something important about the range and power of Socratic dialogue in education. You might have thought that such methods work only with privileged, highly articulate high performers in the education system. But you'd be wrong. Recent research into the effects of Socratic-style philosophical dialogue with primary-school children found that it enhanced their performance in both reading and mathematics. Moreover, the biggest positive effect was on disadvantaged students. Study after study has noted that, as well as its cognitive benefits, Socratic dialogue improves student confidence and articulacy.

To close the achievement gap in our schools, let's go back to where education started and do what Socrates did: sitting with his students, asking questions and, through dialogue, teaching them what matters most – how to think for themselves.

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13

2016 | Y5 | KI Promo | Paper 1 **Leia Teo Wen Hui | 17S03N**

In the passage, John Taylor explores the potential advantages of teaching students to think for themselves and puts forth his criticisms of conventional education. How far would you agree with his views, relating them to you and your society?

Taylor presents several benefits of teaching students to think for themselves as well as criticizes some of the downsides of conventional educations. While some of his views are somewhat disputable and not particularly relevant to Singapore, a large part of his ideas are agreeable to and are reflected in our Singapore society.

Taylor argues that 'schools… neglect this philosophical dimension of learning.' (lines 21-22). He believes that school have failed to teach their students to think critically, to engage in a process of enquiry that allows them to better appreciate the limits of our knowledge. This is not very applicable to Singapore. While there are grounds for this argument, seeing as how many Singaporean students passively absorb information dispensed with scarcely any discussion in mass lectures and the like, it is unfair to condemn all schools as having neglected this aspect. In fact, there has been a rise in this form of learning – Independent Programme Schools have philosophy classes that are a compulsory part of curriculum, teaching students how to think critically and reason, as well as the introduction of Knowledge Inquiry as a subject offered in Junior Colleges islandwide. This observation is likely due to the Singaporean government recognising the pressing need to nurture students who are capable of reflecting critically in our increasingly ever-changing and fast-paced world, in order to continue to secure our relevance and position as a financial hub on the international stage. While not every school offers such learning opportunities to develop critical, independent thinking, it is, in the very least, a step in the right direction as Singapore gradually progress towards a population capable of actively questioning what they have been told and thinking critically. As such, such a sweeping condemnation by Taylor is not true in Singapore and is not very relevant.

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However, Taylor also argues that learning is 'dictated by the demand of standardized tests' (line 43). I agree with this view to a large extent. There are countless standardized tests around the world, from the British 'A' levels to the USA's SATs – and even more education systems; tutoring services and practice books are geared towards training students to be able to answer questions that appear on these tests. As such, much of what is taught and learnt follows the strict requirements of these standardised examinations. This rings true especially in Singapore, where our pervasive culture of pragmatism and consequently the desire for a stable, high-flying job in future has compelled students to conform to such a learning style, and schools to adopt a drilling sort of teaching style to ingrain in students only the necessary knowledge to excel in such tests, with the short term goal of achieving stellar results to attend a good university in mind. Due to this pragmatism, students often choose to study and memorize facts rather than question them. While some may point out how Singaporean students are offered opportunities to learn beyond the standardized tests, such as with H3 subjects where knowledge is no longer limited to the H2 'A' level curriculum, there is ultimately still an examination to 'test' what students have 'learnt', defeating the purpose of the subject in the first place. In such a situation where an examination is still present, the practical culture Singaporean students have grown up in supersedes the desire to learn for the sake of learning, and instead follows the prescribed syllabus to study for the exam eventually. Hence, Taylor's point here is highly relevant to Singapore.

Overall, Taylor's views are mostly applicable to Singapore and agreeable to as they reflect a global trend of dulled learning, one that Singapore is not spared from and in fact, actively promotes for the sake of academic achievements and on a larger scale, the future of our economy and place in the world.

Teacher's Comments:
Lucidly written and evaluative. Consistent effort to substantiate ideas with evidential support.

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14

2017 | Y6 GP CT2 | Paper 2 | AQ Xu Yukun | 17S06L

In the passage, John Taylor explores the potential advantages of teaching students to think for themselves and puts forth his criticisms of conventional education. How far would you agree with his views, relating them to you and your society?

In the passage, John Taylor argues that questioning should replace all simple provision of information as it helps us to think and thus learn for ourselves. I agree that questioning and challenging knowledge does help us to gain new insights, and this a view that has increasingly been championed in my society. However, I disagree with the replacement of all imparting of hard knowledge, given that in many cases this would limit the ability of students to question in the first place. This is also reflected in my society, where both forms of learning are used, to many positive effects.

In the passage, the author argues that a process of enquiry encourages students to consider for themselves the issue that they are trying to solve, instead of simply taking in information, and that this prepares students better for their lives ahead of them. Indeed, in a world that seeks innovative talent more than any other, where originality scores you points, this is the case. In my society, Singapore, this creativity is developed with the introduction of new subjects such as Project Work into the A level syllabus, as well as the restructuring of the syllabus to reflect more of what happens in real life. Questions such as the estimation of the weight of a coin in PSLE impart not only common sense, but also make us try to think out of the box to use what we know to understand and explain the world around us. The prioritisation of lifelong learning with many workplace retraining programmes in Singapore further underscores the need for us to continually question what is around us to understand more and thus maintain a competitive edge in this ever more globalised world. Questioning makes use of our innate curiosity to want to know more, to push us to find out more through experimentation. As more societies become more developed, this will increasingly be a vital skill, especially for my society, Singapore, where simply having drills is not enough to survive.

The author also espouses the point that schools should convert all forms of learning to the process of enquiry, and that rote learning should be removed.

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While this may be ideal in theory, it is not practical in the real world, where speed of imparting of knowledge is just as, if not more, important. If only questioning is used to impart knowledge, students would be encouraged to figure out what they need to know by themselves, but this would take up more time, and when today's syllabus already spans so many topics, and many schools in my society have co-curricular activities in addition to academic commitments, there is simply not the luxury of time to partake in questioning as the form of learning all the time. Instead, while requisite knowledge is imparted to students in lectures and the accompanying notes, the students are then encouraged to question and use this knowledge to solve problems that increasingly cater to real life in their tutorial sessions. This two-pronged system allows for a balance that not only saves time but also gives students the stable foundation of knowledge which is required to question more distant concepts, and thus combines the best of both worlds, allowing students to seek knowledge in future, and use the acquired questioning skills to understand what they learn.

Einstein once stated that wisdom is what remains after we have forgotten what we have learnt in school. This is interestingly true, as the problems we face become more complex, and require us to be able to continue learning and questioning by ourselves, instead of simply being spoon fed. Yet, as these problems get more complex, we must also keep more and more of what we were taught in school, using questioning to build on what we picked up in school, and reinforce our memory of what we learnt in school, instead of using it as our whole repository of knowledge, as we did in the past, because that is simply not possible anymore, especially in my society, where cutthroat competitions deems both the ability to learn by questioning and the possession of prior knowledge necessary.

Teacher's comment:

Comprehensive and impressive work! Good job.

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In the passage, John Taylor explores the potential advantages of teaching students to think for themselves and puts forth his criticisms of conventional education. How far would you agree with his views, relating them to you and your society?

In the passage, Taylor opines the advantages of philosophical education as well as criticises the dominant form of education present today. As his views are fairly objective, I agree with them to a large extent. However, I believe that my society has yet to see a monumental shift towards enquiry and traditional education is still ubiquitous, although efforts have been made to change this.

Taylor proffers the view that teachers are often viewed as the "provider of… information" that students "need to know" and that this information is being determined by the "requirements of whatever test looms on the horizon" (paragraph 5, lines 29-31).[7] This suggests that education has become a passive activity of absorbing information on the student's part and regurgitating information on the teacher's part. Learning also seems to be very one-sided and monotonous where the teacher seems to be giving a "monologue" (paragraph 5, line 33). This process of absorbing and regurgitating information is very relevant to Singapore's context. Immersed in an Asian society that values good grades and results, many students spend their days mundanely studying away. The main objective of education for many would be to enter a well-paying industry, be it medicine or law, rather than an actual mastery and true understanding of the content subjects taught in school. This is clearly evident in our "prescribed syllabus material" (paragraph 7, lines 42-43) for major national examinations such as the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) and the GCE 'O' and 'A' Levels. Despite the all-rounded objectives that many schools promise, the matter of fact is that the content-heavy nature of these examinable subjects require students to mechanically cramp and spit out information rather than to understand the purpose and meaning behind the

[7] Teacher's comment: Quite a number of quotes here, seeming to suggest you are trying to address several issues within one paragraph. The body of the paragraph does not in fact address how teachers are viewed – so this element can be omitted in your presentation of the author's view. (*E.g. Taylor proffers the view that conventional education focuses on what students "need to know" as determined by "whatever test looms on the horizon".)*

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subject material. For instance, many do not understand the actual derivation of formulas such as $E=mc^2$. However, the students can blindly substitute in values into these equations and yet still score well. Evidently, students are able to do well in examinations without completely understanding the nature of the subject and the rationale behind learning.[8] Thus, the true meaning of education does not coincide with the way content is taught and hence, I agree with Taylor that there is a flaw in the conventional education system.

However, in recent years, we have seen a shift in the way that learning is conducted locally. Education in Singapore has been moving away from "passively absorbing information" to stimulating students to "think for themselves" (paragraph 6, lines 37-38). The government also recognises the need for this shift in our increasingly globalized society and that students who are "taught to think for themselves are better prepared for life" (paragraph 9, lines 54-55). As such, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has been encouraging the concept of all-rounded, holistic education where hands-on learning and a movement away from conventional education are preferred. The addition of physical education, music and arts is testament to the fact that we are seeing this shift. The building of schools such as Singapore Sports School (SSP), School of The Arts (SOTA) and Laselle suggests an increased emphasis on providing alternative pathways for students as well as the government's stance towards non-conventional forms of education. Tertiary institutions like polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) also gives us hope that education in Singapore is moving away from classroom teaching to hands-on learning. MOE has also introduced the use of technology in hopes of better student-teacher engagement to develop "creative independent thinkers" who are "confident individuals" that can pave the way forward (paragraph 9, lines 60-62). Thus, this shift in emphasis from rote learning to holistic education is representative of an increasing awareness of the importance of catering to the needs of a rapidly changing world.

Hence, the Singapore government has indeed recognized the benefits of teaching students to think for themselves rather than simply spoon-feeding them information. Thus, we have seen a shift towards such an education recently. However, being a result-driven country, the majority of the populace is still clinging onto the tried-and-tested methods of traditional education that

[8] Teacher's comments: While evaluation is attempted and context is clear, this is a rather sweeping claim.

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has proven results and are not very receptive to the idea of holistic education as of now.[9] Therefore, although I largely agree with Taylor's views, they are not very representative of my society as many have not responded well to the new initiatives as evident in the fact that many students still choose to go down the route of traditional education rather than pursuing an unconventional path.

Teachers' comments:

Fully relevant and there is a consistent effort made to evaluate. Arguments are developed and typically supported by both illustration and analysis.

At points more supporting details were necessary but overall a good answer considering examination conditions.

[9] Evaluation is evident here but details are lacking.

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Critically assess the view that History is a set of lies agreed upon.

It is not uncommon, in today's post-modernist and liberal world, to be well-acquainted with those "well-equipped" in life with a keen sense of cynicism – towards everything from the actual freedom of the press to the verity of the nutrition contents on a muesli bar. The validity of History, does not escape the creeping tendrils of such cynicism, or skepticism, so to speak. Indeed, some have gone as far as to condemn history as a "set of lies agreed upon". This bold indictment raises two key points of contention – the nature of truth in history, as well as the validity of the basis for standards of this truth. Indeed, the declaration does accurately describe the impossibility of absolute truth in history to a certain extent, but its suggestions of a complete disregard for truth as well as the nullity of history are questionable.

To begin with, one must necessarily make the humble concession that history falls short of having that validity of being held up to a correspondent standard of absolute truth. Being a discipline fundamentally rooted in the past, the nature of evidence in history is unchangeably limited. In the study of Ancient Greece, we only know what life was like to an Athenian, not a Thebian or a Corinthan. History, as we know it, is ultimately "starred with lacunae" for it is impossible for us to access reality as it really was. What evidence historians can access often only offers a small glimpse of the past. To further complicate matters, historical evidence, being a product of men in the past, fundamentally contains the bias of firstly, the cultural mores of the time the evidence was produced, as well as the opinions and biases of the individual through which events are filtered into subjective accounts of what really happened. For instance, accounts of Catherine the Great are more often than not heavily drenched in sexist views that looked unkindly on liberal sexual attitudes in women. These biases are carried forward into the accounts written of her, mostly by the predominantly male royal court around her. Thus, the foundation upon which historical knowledge is built seems in itself limited. The limitations of historical evidence in providing us a pathway to truth in History are further compounded by the necessary subjective investment of the

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historian. It is commonly agreed that no historian just 'scissors-and-pastes' evidence to form a chronicle of the past. Rather, a degree of imagination is required of the historian to fill in the gaps inevitably present in the evidence, as mentioned earlier. To fully understand the motivations of the agents in history, the historian invariably has to invest a certain degree of human empathy and postulation about the state of mind of these in the past. However, this opens up many opportunities for subjectivity to manifest, thus undermining the truth of historical claims. Carr's fish illustration demonstrates how a historian selects his source of evidence and his facts just as a fisherman would choose his bait and location for fishing – depending on the fish he seeks to catch. In the same way, the historical method lends itself to the narrative that the historian sets out to construct - the fact that Stamford Raffles was, indeed, wearing clothes when he arrived in Singapore, may seem to one Historian as a redundant fact, but of paramount importance to another tracing a history of British fashion in Singapore. As such, it appears that even before the historian can work on his evidence, the inherent subjectivity of the historian has already made objective truth of his historical claims impossible.

The situation does not improve even after the historian has started work – the tool of the historian, language; itself seems fundamentally bound to a set of values and beliefs. It is arguable that no single account of history, no matter how closely linked to the historical evidence available, can be couched in an entirely central language. The very act of describing an event as "liberalization", rather than an "invasion", or an "insurgency" rather than a "revolution" betrays the historian's attitudes towards the purportedly neutral data. Therefore, no historical claim seems to be free of subjectivity, and no historian can claim to be entirely deterred. In light of all these criticisms of History, it appears that it is impossible to achieve absolute truth, or to paint a picture of the past as it really was. Yet, there is a necessary leap from the criticism of subjectivity to that of "lies". While History fails to access the actual reality of the past, it can give us justified true beliefs of what the past likely looked like, and largely reliable historical knowledge.

This is due to, firstly, the close relationship of historical claims with the evidence. Despite an inherent and inescapable subjectivity, History remains tied to and grounded in the facts of the Historian. In the discipline, there is an immense respect for the accuracy of facts, such that it has been hailed as "a

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duty not a virtue". This close relationship accounts for common historical debates often taking place only at the margins, around a core largely agreed upon – no one disputes that Mao was integral to the Cultural Revolution. Historians only quibble over the extent of his influence. Therefore, there are still limits to the subjectivity of the historian, allowing us to identify when a historian has overstepped the boundaries of his evidence. Historians claiming that the Holocaust never happened, therefore, can be justifiably determined as simply "wrong". This ability to discern a degree of truth and falsity in History points to its merits of upholding a certain respect for truth. The accusation of History being "a set of lies", therefore, goes too far.

The second point of contention is the basis for standards of truth in History. As demonstrated earlier, the correspondence theory of truth is hardly applicable in history. Rather, the coherentist approach of setting out to construct a web of beliefs that are entirely coherent allows for a meaningful pursuit of truth in History. Yet it is undeniable that the place of "agreed upon", or the subjective standards of agreement may pose limits to the objectivity of history. This is because using human opinions as a standard of truth rather than some other objective measure runs into the problem of theory-ladenness. The historical community has long quibbled over whether Reagan or Gorbachev ended the war, but underpinning this largely dichotomous debate is the Great Man Theory. This is in comparison to the other fields of knowledge, where the value of reproducibility and repeatability of scientific experiments allow the scientific community to verify one another's one another's scientific claims, or even in the social sciences where the postulation of adequacy rests upon the subjects' agreement with the analysis of their behavior. In fact, it can be argued that the very coherentist nature of historical knowledge necessitates the place of such agreement. And indeed, the collusionary nature of the historical community could be a valid one, for the nature of justification in the construction of historical knowledge does create a capacity to produce a "set of lies", as long as they are agreed upon.

Thankfully, however, historians are in actuality rarely in agreement. In the historical community, there is a fervent striving towards truth that does not pale in comparison to that of other fields, even those that are deemed more objective, such as the sciences and mathematics. It is this respect for historical truth and the constant recalibration of narratives to accommodate new

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evidence, as well as the care in arriving at justified interpretation that continues to preserve the validity of historical claims. Because there still is a basis for determining truth and falsity in History, we are still able to favour one historical narrative over the other, and discard theories that do not meet the standards. Historical claims of Stalin's communist agenda, for instance, began to be called into question and revised after the fall of the Soviet Union in light of new evidence.

This might seem like a feeble defense of history, but one must realise how integral truth is to the discipline of History. Historical narratives concern the lives of real people in the past, their motivations, feelings and reputations. Therefore, this creates a much more heightened disposition towards uncovering true facts, as compared to the substantiation of mere theory or opinion in other fields. Attempts to overwrite History and impose one's own narrative to one's own benefit is often met with agitated pushback, and condemned as an act that seems to violate an ethical principle by eliminating the stories and lives of real people in the past. This explains why opposition to claims that the Holocaust was a fabrication are thus emotionally charged as well as firm, or why the revisionist textbooks in Japan have been criticized by the Historical community across the world. Falsity in history is treated with little tolerance and the constant struggle of voices to be heard and recognized, a very natural human instinct is what fuels the search for truth in history. In light of this, the portrayal of History as "a set of lies agreed upon" not only exaggerates the faults and limitations of truth in Historical knowledge, but is also an unfounded rejection of the standards of truth upheld in the community.

Teacher's Comments:
Xin Hwee, brilliant piece here! Cogent essay that consistently discussed and evaluated the claim in question with great accuracy and finesse. Just a pity that the penultimate paragraph was not as well done as the rest of the paragraphs.

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Critically assess the view that History is a set of lies agreed upon.

The pessimistic view that History is merely a set of lies we agree upon may seem at first attractive, given the deeply subjective nature of the discipline and the inaccessibility of the object of its study – the Past. Yet, History and historical knowledge are too complex to be so simplified; even if we were to accept that history were lies, we do not necessarily agree on the best way to lie. Lying and the act of lying implies perhaps that we know the truth and intend to deceive, or that we know the truth is quite beyond our reach and we have made up something to mask our inadequacy; this essay however hopes to argue that the state of affairs in history should not be viewed so grimly.

The statement that History is merely a set of lies first and foremost degrades our historical knowledge to the level of plain untruths. Although it is extreme, it is easy to see how historical study can easily lose its grasp on the truth – the "real" past is inherently inaccessible due to the progress of time – we simply cannot travel back in time to re-experience an event. As a result, truth must be accessed through indirect means; a historian may look at newspapers, artefacts, conduct interviews to obtain accounts of the past and evidence for certain events. Yet, these means are often imperfect, such as when there are an abundance of resources or a scarcity of it. We then rely on historians to "fill in the gaps", to select certain resources or to make inferences from the few sources in order to find the truth. For example, studies of the prehistorical age often face this challenge. Since human records have not yet begun during that time, our knowledge of early human stem from the tools they made, structures they built and so on. A clear criticism is that we perhaps do not truly understand their way of life through these scraps of information; yet, we claim to do so anyway, and write textbooks about it. This subjective leap to the truth can be said to be perhaps our lying to ourselves – deep inside, we are not sure if we can access the truth.

However, this is a naïve view. There are still many things we claim to know about the past that, no matter how we try, we simply cannot doubt. Say you think about what you have just eaten for lunch yesterday. Even if you are afraid

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that you have hallucinated it due to a mental illness, you can check with a friend who saw you eating to reconfirm your memories. Although trivial, this can be expanded to much of history – no one really doubts that the Second World War happened, that the 9/11 disaster occurred, or that the French Revolution a couple of hundred years back was a thing. This is because there are so many written and verbal accounts of these events and so many artefacts which, importantly, corroborate and provide a coherent proof about a past event. Hence, historical studies of events which find clear sources of information that corroborate cannot really be said to be lying. Perhaps it is the factor of temporal distance that matters here – the further we go back in time, the less clear and relevant sources we find. The lying, then, only happens at the far reaches of our historical knowledge.

The real problem, however, lies in how we construct historical arcs and stories. So far, we have only talked about historical facts – events which happened, where and when they happened and so on. What is often more interesting is why these events happen, or how the events fit into a bigger picture; often the answers to these questions can be deeply controversial, and there may not be a "true" answer. For example, some historians might claim that Hitler caused World War 2, while others may claim that the event was bound to happen given the overall trend of Germany and Europe. The reason for this controversy could be the problem of causation as pointed out by Hume – all we really have are a series of events and imposing cause-effect relationships on them are unjustified. Add to that all the problems of subjectivity and temporal distance mentioned earlier, and our narratives perhaps are merely lies to ourselves, since we know that the truth is beyond our reach. Hence, we do lie to ourselves, and we do not even agree on the best way to do so.

When we agree on how best to construct our narratives, our lie deepens- our notions of how history should be sometimes even corrupt the certainty of those historical facts previously mentioned. In constructing our narratives, we leave out important sources which may provide contradictory information, and select sources which support us, which is tantamount to lying. For example, the Singaporean government's metanarrative of the nation's struggle against communism as a state enemy during its formative years leaves out details which do not fit, such as the detention and expulsion of those accused to be communists, which were perhaps unconstitutional or immoral moves, in

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Operation Coldstore. Japanese textbooks don't depict the cruelty of Japanese soldiers in WW2, or deny the seriousness of events like the Nanking massacre. Hence, we twist facts and truths to our purposes, deceiving those around us even though the truth is within reach. Through this, History perhaps really is a set of lies that governments and those in power agree upon.

This all paints a dark picture of history, perhaps as a set of lies contained in sets of lies. However, the lies are really the exception rather than the norm. Many of the instances of lying occur due to political agenda, but as time passes and political agendas are outlived, the tendency of History is to reach towards truth once more. That said, the limitations of historical study as brought up in this essay still hold in certain cases, such as when there is a lack of evidence, and all we can do is argue over the best way to construct history. Once again, time, the agent of history, plays a key role, as we discover more evidence and paths towards the truth.

Teacher's Comments:

Fantastic dissection of the question and consistent reference to it all throughout your answer. Also apparent is the fact that your essay is relatively jargon-free, yet clear and convincing. Just a pity that you didn't go deeper with some points.

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How much evidence do we need to justify our knowledge claims?

This issue of the degree of justification required for our knowledge claims has plagued philosophers since this enterprise of thinking long and hard was reinvented by French mathematician Descartes. He espoused the view that we need enough justification for us to believe that our knowledge claims are certain. Otherwise, he opined, his could we afford to trust in the reliability of our knowledge claims and make use of them to produce other similar claims? This proved to be a gruelling endeavour for Descartes because any knowledge claim he could conceive of relied on other knowledge claims as justification which in turn relied on yet more knowledge claims. This infinite regress of justification posed an important question: when do we stem this regress and conclude that a claim is sufficiently justified? Descartes insisted that once we come to a justification that is "clear and distinct" — which is to say, dubitable —, we can rest our almost relentless hunt for justifications. Unfortunately, most of the knowledge claims we possess and cherish like "the world around me is real" cannot be traced back to such a firm bedrock of justification. We usually fall back on justifications in the form of firsthand experience like 'because I can see / hear / smell / taste / touch it' that stem from sensory data which tends to be false. Does this mean that none of our knowledge claims are justified and that we should disavow all our precious notions about ourselves and the world around us? I think not. Infallibility is not necessary for a justification to sufficiently support a knowledge claim. Why? Simply because our knowledge claims do not require that degree of irrefutable evidence supporting them to serve their intended purposes well.

The question "how much evidence do we need to justify our knowledge claims" seems to expect a homogenous answer. That is simply unfathomable. Various disciplines require different degrees of evidence as justification because the knowledge claims generated by different fields endeavour to fulfil different purposes. A claim made in the field of the sciences requires rigorous justification, for example, because scientific propositions are often used to predict future events and hence need to be reliable for them to be of any use. A scientist

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therefore undertakes a systematic means of producing his knowledge claims— the scientific method — as a highly reliable method ensures that it is more likely for his propositions to be of some use.

On the other hand, not as much justification is required in the field of history as historians largely purport that their goal is to explain the past and not to predict future occurrences, as science aims to do. Presenting an inaccurate knowledge claim in history is therefore far less serious than botching up a scientific knowledge claim as the latter mistake could lead to serious direct ramifications such as the loss of lives if one claims that all humans need oxygen and therefore, a doctor provides a new human patient with oxygen to save his life but unwittingly ends up killing him because the claim is false. Thus, the purpose of the knowledge claim made influences the degree of evidence required for justification[10].

Secondly, the nature of the knowledge claim made also significantly influences the amount of evidence required to justify it. Take for example the claim that "all triangles have three sides". No justification is required for this statement to be considered knowledge because it is self-evident. The subject — triangle — necessarily entails the predicate — having three sides. These relations of ideas are hence exempted from the arduous process of justification. One can compare these statements to matters of fact — statements about the world around us — which require far more evidence as they are not self-evident.

Philosophers who disavow radically skeptical stances such as "we can only know what we are certain of" also espouse the view that some things do not need to be justified or only require minimal justification. G. E. Moore, for instance, argued that one does not need "clear and distinct ideas" to serve as evidence for our justification of the existence of an external world. He opines that we merely need to hold up our two hands in front of us and observe their existence for if they exist, reality must too exist. This argument is favored by him because he views it to be commonsensical and far more believable[11] than skeptical arguments like the evil demon argument which outlines the possibility that the eponymous demon could be tricking us into not believing that reality exists when

[10] You have not got to the heart of the matter: how much evidence is needed?

[11] You will need to explain why is it far more believable.

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in fact it does not. Therefore, Moore's stance implies a belief that we need enough evidence for a knowledge claim to be believable on its own and more believable than other contrary claims. Wittgenstein too subscribed to this view as he was convinced that philosophers had set far too strict standards for what can and should be considered knowledge. Instead, he proposed that we adopt a layman's definition of knowledge. In so doing, a ridiculous amount of evidence is no longer required for every knowledge claim (like Descartes demanded). Rather, one only needs to put forth enough [12] evidence to convince one's audience that one's knowledge claim is justified. Take for example a girl's knowledge that Beyonce is in Singapore. Her friend would be satisfied knowing that the claim is corroborated by other forms of evidence like photos of the singer performing on social media and news reports. Further justification will simply not be exhorted[13].

The degree of evidence required to justify our knowledge claims does not solely depend on the nature of the knowledge claim made, but also on how the knowledge claim is constructed. If it is constructed inductively, far more evidence would be required to make a knowledge claim[14]. For example, it would be terribly foolish to see one white swan and generalise that all swans are white. There is simply insufficient evidence to warrant such a conclusion (so much so that no one would believe you if you made such an assertion. This weak inductive argument can be contrasted against the following deductive argument. One might claim that if one swan is not white, not all swans are white and come to the conclusion that not all swans are white upon spotting one black swan beside a pond. Both cases feature an individual making a knowledge claim after witnessing a single swan. However, the latter is actually a sound argument and more legitimate than the former. This is an instantiation of the amount of evidence inductive arguments require to be believed as opposed to deductive arguments. Hence, how your knowledge claim is constructed significantly affects the amount of evidence required to justify it.

In conclusion, the amount of evidence we need to justify our knowledge

[12] Once again, so how much is enough?

[13] What kind of justification is this?

[14] Why? Some explaination is needed here.

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claims is contingent on the knowledge claims we are making. For what reason are we putting forth such knowledge claims? What types of knowledge claims are they? How are these knowledge claims constructed? These questions and the wide array of answers to them determine why there is no single homogenous answer for the question of how much evidence is required for justification.

Teacher's Comments:
Generally good response here Yadanar. Decent set-up of the issue and you covered a lot of ground in dealing with types of reasoning, kinds of knowledge, nature of claims, etc. However, some parts required greater explanation since the examples do not speak for themselves. Also, the heart of the matter wasn't addressed until only the second half of the essay. Try to be more concise.

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'The researcher's opinions and beliefs always interfere with his research.' Discuss with reference to knowledge construction in History and the social sciences.

A researcher's opinions and beliefs necessarily interfere with his research, in that they influence the knowledge claims that he puts forth into the world[15]. This is especially so in history and the social sciences, where the researcher's objects of study are his fellow human beings. It is inevitable that the researcher is influenced by his own preconceived notions of the nature of human beings which are informed by prior personal experiences and societal messages as such beliefs are elemental core beliefs through which he interprets the world. However, this is not to assert that a researcher's opinions and beliefs are so intrusive that all knowledge produced in the discipline of history and social science are utterly biased and unreliable. Rather, we should hold the view that while social scientific and historic knowledge claims are prejudiced to some extent, these prejudices can be minimised and could even potentially be useful. [16]

Let us first discuss why it is unfathomable to divorce a researcher's worldview from his research. A researcher, like any other human being, is a product of his society. He is indubitably influenced by the social, political and cultural currents of thought circulating around in his time and age. Some of these beliefs are so conventionally accepted that it seems unfathomable and almost heretic to challenge them. Take for example European anthropologists, who endeavoured to catalogue the "Oriental" way of life. While these individuals took great pains to live amongst the natives who were the objects of their study in an effort to observe these natives in their natural habitat, accurate accounts of "Oriental" lives were not produced as these researchers could not escape their interpretative frameworks. Entrenched notions of Eurocentrism and the concept of the diametrically opposed Other — that is the belief that Europe boasted a conglomeration of the most cultured individuals and the stance that those who are different from oneself are necessarily our opposites — lead researchers to believe "Orientals" like Egyptians were heathens (despite evidence to the contrary such as skillful craftsmen and architects. While we scoff at such a

[15] This is too definitive an opening statement. Revise your introduction strategy.
[16] This reads more like a body paragraph than an introduction.

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narrow, simple worldview in today's age of multiculturalism and interconnectedness, it is crucial to note that these assumptions were considered to be fundamental truths to the aforementioned researchers. Imagine vigorously asserting that the world was round to a mathematician-cum-astronomer from an ancient civilisation. He would not deign to engage with that idea because it is so contrary to all he has believed in and been told by sources of authority. Would he change his calculations of the distance from the earth to the sun because of your seemingly spurious claims? Of course not.

This segues nicely into another reason why researchers' opinions always interfere with their research. Researchers are not only incapable of cleaving apart their beliefs and their research, but also incapable of producing any knowledge at all without their opinions and beliefs. Existing opinions and beliefs always interfere with research because they are the source from which all other new ideas spring. Without a web of existing beliefs, how is one to justify one's knowledge claims? Take for instance, the proposition that the French Revolution was bad. This claim could not possibly exist without some conception of "bad" which stems from the historian's existing opinions and beliefs. Only when the historian infuses his existing database of knowledge — for example, the notion that something is bad when it threatens human lives which are God-given and therefore precious — can one make knowledge claims. Even seemingly uncontroversial, bald statements like "many lives were lost" during the French Revolution depend on answers to other questions — what constitutes "many" and what is a "life"? Thus, a researcher's options necessarily interfere with his research because they are the starting point, the bedrock, the foundation of all knowledge claims he makes. Without these preconceptions, there would be no edifice of propositions whose bias we can debate.

Lastly, a researcher's opinions and beliefs always interfere with his research as he is bound by the conventions of language as a social scientist or historian. When a researcher is communicating his findings in disciplines concerned with human beings, it is most often through spoken word or written text. Therefore, a researcher has to pick the words he would like to employ to communicate his ideas. Herein kills the problem. According to post-modernists like Hayden White, once the author selects certain phrases to put his point across, he has inextricably infused his beliefs into the research he intends to present to the world. A historian who claims that "the freedom fighters lost ground", for example, clearly regards the fighters with some degree of respect as opposed to

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one which states that "the terrorists were conquered". The former statement paints the figures in a better light as they do not come across as war-mongering heathens that ought to be vanquished like they do in the second example., While the context of both sentences are roughly similar — this group of people who were fighting no longer have a hold of their territory or power, the connotations of both sentences differ vastly due to the way in which the author of the statement has allowed (consciously or not) his opinions and beliefs to seep into his diction[17]. This is less of an issue in disciplines which do not endeavour to communicate through language as it is conventionally defined. E = MC2 is a case of a propositional claim in the field of science which employs sterile mathematical notion that is self-contained and does not trigger other connotations, like language does. For now, it does not appear that the discipline of history and social science will escape the shackles of language, resulting in propositional claims that are theory-laden to some extent.

However, espousing all of the above arguments is not equivocal to avowing the notion that historical and social scientific propositions are merely or largely opinions, not justified true beliefs. Historians and social scientists do endeavour to minimise the influence of arbitrary personal beliefs on their own research as they are aware that a distinction exists between beliefs and knowledge. The latter should be justified sufficiently and rigorously for it to be a belief that can be espoused by society and not only the self. Occasionally, arbitrary personal beliefs are slotted into one's research unknowingly. Certain academics claim, that this can be mitigated through a process of triangulation of knowledge claims such as peer review[18]. I hold the view the this will minimise the presence of arbitrary, unrelated and unpopular beliefs in research. However, this method will not be able to overcome the interference of core opinions and beliefs (which society at large espouses) with research. Furthermore, no new knowledge could be produced in the fields of social science and history even if one did manage to stow away one's beliefs and opinions when generating propositional claims[19].

In conclusion, a researcher's opinions and beliefs always interfere with his research as he necessarily has to engage with them in order to produce is research and communicate his findings.

[18] How does this process help to mitigate bias?

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Teacher's Comments:

While you chose to take a relatively strong position, this piece was not poorly argued. Good job on getting the big picture! Just a pity that the segment on mitigation was not adequately beefed up to provide more insight on how knowledge in history and the social sciences can still be reliable. More detail and focus can be paid to the specific nuances of the two different disciplines.

'The right to punish someone is contingent on the knowledge of what is right and wrong." Discuss with reference to the nature and construction of ethical knowledge.

Imagine that somehow the trolley problem has happened in real life and some poor sod decided to pull the lever, killing one person stuck on the trolley tracks while saving another five who were on the other track by diverting an out of control trolley down the former path. You are the judge presiding over the court case where the family members of the dead man are calling for blood, while others praise the man for his ethical decision. What can we do in such a case, and more importantly, what constitutes the right to punish someone? Some may say that our right to punish does not depend at all on ethical knowledge, but this essay seeks to argue that our right to punish somebody is indeed contingent on ethical knowledge in three main ways - it is affected by the nature of ethical knowledge, the extent of certainty we have in this knowledge, and is itself an ethical decision that should be made according to the best of our ethical theories.

Ethical knowledge would not help much in our courtroom if it does not exist at all. Proponents of a non-cognitivist view of ethics support such a view; often, our moral statements do not really mean anything about the truth of morality, since they are rather a product of our emotional responses of inner desires; these people would say to make your decision anyway regardless whether you think you are right or wrong, since such moral beliefs are meaningless. For example, Simon Blackburn suggests that moral statements are the result of a causal chain of events; Mary sees a dog being attacked by young hooligans, empathises with the dog's pain through its whimpers and screams, and as a result states that "this is wrong". Hence, the statement does not refer to any morality, but is rather almost like a biological responses, that merely proves Mary's ability to empathise with dogs and express her opinion. However, such a view may be too extreme, and there is good reason to believe that moral statements are truth-apt. First, such an argument could be extended to other statements ad absurdum - " the sky is blue" could also become a biological responses or an expression about the good weather, while somehow not

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referring to an obvious physical world; second, by intuition we assume the existence of morality and speak of statements whether they are true of false. Either way, concluding that moral statements are not truth-apt does not seem particularly useful to our courtroom - let's examine how ethical knowledge may affect our decision to punish assuming we can speak of such knowledge.

An immediate reaction would be to say that of course we must know what is right and wrong before we punish someone; how can we send an adulterer to jail without understanding how adultery is really wrong? The nature of ethical knowledge affects this relationship. Consider the possibility that moral reality exists, and that somehow there is a "truly right" way of living one's life, or a magic formula that can tell you immediately what is right or what is wrong. That is in effect what Derek Parfit tried to do in a seminal book, *On What Matters*, by combining utilitarianism, Kantian categorical imperatives and numerous modifications to reduce ethics to a clear cut, objective system of defining morality. Such a system would benefit us greatly, since such objectivity would mean that certain truths would become universally recognised by everyone, and such universal agreement can give us a strong warrant for the right to punish. Of course, the fact that such reality exists also means that we can find truths that correspond to reality, a convincing argument for our right to punish too.[20] Hence, the possibility of moral reality enshrines our right to punish - although we may not always know what is right and wrong, the possibility for a correct answer is out there, and knowing that we are correct we are confident in our punishment.

The case where ethical knowledge has no objectivity is a more difficult one. There may be no moral reality - what is "right" depends on our opinions and beliefs, our locations and cultures. In one view, morality is relative to the communities we live in; in a tribal village deep in the Amazon, perhaps cannibalism and incest is rampant, and nothing anyone says can really show that these are "wrong" in their culture. This is damaging to our right to punish, since universal agreement is no longer on our side, and there is no reality we can seek truth in. What if you think that the poor sod was wrong, but in his mind and culture, he was completely, and justifiably right? This concern is mitigated somewhat by how there can be local moral "realities" through intersubjective agreement; in your courtroom, you can be assured in punishing

[20] So have we found such truths? State some examples.

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the offender by the laws of the country, hopefully a reflection of what society thinks is right or wrong - something we do on an everyday basis.

Now that we know how the nature of ethics can affect our right to punish, we should examine how the certainty of our justified beliefs about right and wrong affect our verdict. After all, we must be certain about our beliefs; how can we be unsure whether someone has done wrong, and then send him to the death row? Our decisions affect lives, requiring more certainty than other decisions. Since we do not want to harm others. First, ethical knowledge that is certain helps us; beliefs such as "killing is wrong" seem undeniably right, even though they may be violated in certain occasions (e.g our trolley problem), they are often violated not because they are not true, but rather because there are greater evils or other overriding statements[21]. Hence, this category of ethical beliefs is reliable, allowing us to make our verdict. Secondly however, not all beliefs are so obvious; "abortion is wrong" and "euthanasia is wrong" often are hotly debated. How can we better achieve certainty for these statements? Of course, perhaps certainty is not needed to such a great extent in the first place - a young frightened girl raped and left pregnant must make a decision - and sometimes, the urgency of such a decision overcomes doubt we may have in our beliefs. Yet, this idea of pragmatism should not be taken lightly, the way we may accept scientific truths because they are useful; moral truths are more personal and can drastically change lives.

Finally, the decision we make over whether we have a right to punish is itself an ethical one. Whether we punish a wrongdoer or withhold punishment because we are unsure can also be said to be right or wrong. This is because the right to punish is also defined by an intention to help others or benefit society in some way, essentially establishing what is "right" or "just", hinging on our ethical knowledge once again. Hence, we can use our ethical knowledge to judge if we are justified in possessing[22] the right to punish in various situations, such as in the previous cases mentioned where our knowledge of ethics is not completely certain or flawed in some regard. After all, letting an adulterer go may be bad for society in the long term, although we are not sure whether adultery is wrong, hence giving us the right to punish

[21] Evils and overriding statements such as? Do indicate.
[22] You will need to explain how this is significant.

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In conclusion, ethical knowledge deeply informs our right to punish. We should be careful with ethics as we decide on our verdict in the courtroom; what is decided can change lives.

Teacher's Comments:
Great response - systematic treatment of the issue with good support from theory and relevant examples. A large part of your approach/argument is inferred though - avoid leaving this to chance. Good job on the whole!

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