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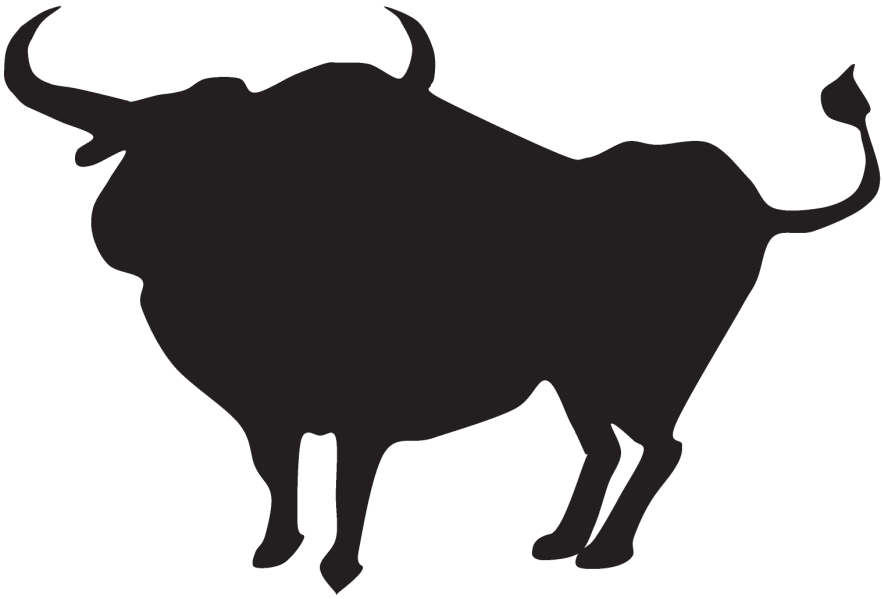

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Note: The comments that follow each student response may include both markers' and editors' comments.

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2019 | Y6 GP | CT2 | Paper 1 **Austin Tan Meng Kiat | 19S06H**

Is our pursuit of beauty justifiable?

Since time immemorial, the human race has had an inexplicable, yet innate desire for beauty and aesthetic perfection. While notions of beauty have changed over time, our desire for it has not waned, and in fact has arguably gotten more fervent in a world pervaded by social media and idealised beauty standards. In this light, the human pursuit of beauty, especially that of physical beauty, seems to have gained a bad reputation, perpetuating unrealistic standards and leading to negative impacts on self-worth, especially for teenagers. However, if we expand our horizons, we may realise that beauty is present in everything, across spheres of sport, art and music, and that our pursuit of beauty not only has positive impacts on character, but is also innate to us humans, and can serve real purposes in communities. Given this renewed understanding, our pursuit of beauty is not only justified, but also vital to human survival and development.

In recent years, the pursuit of an idealised standard of beauty has gotten much flak[1] for having negative psychological impacts on the self, particularly for young teenagers who are in their formative years, and have consequently the most impressionable minds. With the rise of Internet technology and social media, and how it has pervaded into daily life now, the display of an ideal physical beauty is not limited to glossies or celebrity magazines anymore, but is all around us, constantly reinforcing our mindsets and showing itself through television shows, movies and Instagram feeds alike. Glorious and glistening six-pack abs and crystal-clear skin have become more the norm than the exception on the silver screen today. These displays of physical beauty are the manifestation of countless hours of hard work and intense dieting and daily routines, as many 'superhero' actors and supermodels would attest to, and are nigh impossible to reach. Where does that leave us mere mortals? For one, increasingly many young adults are hitting the gym in an attempt to shave off calories, and within Asia the Gangnam district in Seoul, Korea has become infamous for its specialty in plastic surgery clinics. Meanwhile, there has also been an increasing trend of self-esteem issues and eating

[1] Colloquial language – simply 'received criticism' would do.

disorders in the young, with a sharp rise in disorders like bulimia across developed countries like the U.S. Admittedly, the specific pursuit of an idealised beauty standard is harmful for it is not just unrealistic, but more importantly has an excessive focus on simply the results of beauty, and not the journey getting there, thus leading many to have a warped and unhealthy understanding of what beauty entails as well as their own body image.

Yet, while it is true that the overt pursuit of an idealised beauty standard is worrying, it is heartening that such a phenomenon is increasingly downplayed with the more responsible transmission of information and values by media users and businesses today. For one, actors like Chris Evans or Chris Pratt, who are famous for their roles in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, are very open about how unrealistic their physiques displayed on the silver screen are, and how much work it takes to get them there. Similarly, influencers like Michelle Khare or Evan Ghang on YouTube do extreme challenges that emulate these superhero workouts, giving viewers a more nuanced understanding of beauty and the work that comes with it. This is further in line with the trend of increasing liberalism and acceptance of diversity online today, with people becoming accepting and inclusive of all body types and skin types. Online fashion retailers have become more conscious of the sizes they supply and constantly expand the sizes they offer, making online shopping for plus-size women much easier today, in stark contrast to the past. Cosmetics retailers like Fenty beauty are similarly lauded for having a wide and diverse foundation range that caters to women of colour. Hence, the more responsible transmission of values today through business as well as media mean that the pursuit of an idealised beauty standard has been tempered, and increasing acceptance of diversity mean that people have a more holistic and healthy perception of beauty today. Crucially, this movement toward a more nuanced understanding of beauty has been catalysed by the democratisation of access to media and the presence of responsible role models, where in the past the idealised beauty standard may have been entrenched due to the one-way nature of traditional media, as well as the lack of discourse and plurality of views about body image and appearance.

Moreover, if we expand our understanding of beauty and aesthetic perfection, we realise that the pursuit of beauty is justifiable for it represents the echelons of achievement for humans. Even from the previous examples raised, it is clear that achieving beauty represents the peak of human physique. In fact, since long ago humans have already had a notion of beautiful people being more capable and

moral, as evinced by the conceptions of beauty by ancient Greek thinkers. Today, this can be seen through examples like the various beauty pageants globally, such as the Miss Universe pageant, where participants are expected not just to be beautiful dolls, but role models who can give perspectives on issues like war and the refugee crisis, as well as effect social change through the championing of human rights and the setting up of charities. Evidently, our pursuit of beauty is a manifestation of our pursuit of excellence, and thus represents our push to always better ourselves and push ourselves to the limit. In the realm of sports, sports like gymnastics or figure skating, or even physically-intensive arts like ballet, all have a correlation with beauty by necessitating poise and grace, which may only come with countless hours of practice and training to improve oneself and achieve mastery over one's body. Even in sports not traditionally seen as just aesthetic, the finesse with which the sportsmen move, be it Roger Federer, Lionel Messi or Tiger Woods make their plays seem so fluid that they become beautiful in their own right. Crucially, the pursuit of beauty is justifiable because beauty is not such a shallow concept that links merely to one's appearance. Rather, it represents human mastery over oneself and achievement, and thus entails discipline and drive. In pursuing beauty, we are thus working to improve and work towards the best version of ourselves as individuals.

Beyond individual betterment, the pursuit of beauty and the capturing of beauty, or the lack of it, is something inexplicably innate to us humans, and thus the pursuit of beauty is something that fulfills. This is perhaps best observed in the arts, where artists have always sought to capture timeless beauty, and viewers have always been captivated by their pieces. Be it the Mona Lisa, with her mellow smile, which attracts thousands of visitors to the Louvre just to get a glimpse of her, or the Girl with a Pearl Earring, which captures the mysterious yet simple beauty of the subject, the arts are clear evidence of how humans have always been obsessed with physical perfection. Even where artists have captured the lack of beauty, such as Leonardo Da Vinci's series of 'bruttezza' which captured the ugliness of the deformed or the sick (contrasted with his constant search for the golden ratio for human physical perfection), or Picasso's Guernica that depicted the pain and terror of people who suffered during the Spanish civil war through their ugliness, it is clear that humans are just as morbidly fascinated and mortified by ugliness because we desire beauty. Thus, beauty and its pursuit is an innate human need, and thus justifiable for it satisfies us.

On the level of communities, the pursuit of beauty can lend itself to sociocultural and political causes. In the realm of music, beauty goes beyond mere harmonies and chords, and elevates us and serves real purposes. For racial and ethnic groups, music serves as a purveyor and symbol of culture, and can act as a bridge for the preservation and understanding of culture by youth. For example, Asian music is distinctly beautiful in its use of the pentatonic scale, and the use of such traditional tunes injects a strong sense of local flavour into the music. When placed in more modern songs, such as the 2017 Singapore Youth Festival set piece for choirs Bunga Sayang, which features flavours distinct to the Malay Peninsula as well as its own pastoral themes, the beauty of music acts as an obvious manifestation of culture, accessible to the younger generation. Critically, since music is entwined intimately with culture, the pursuit of beauty in music helps capture, replay and preserve our heritage. Meanwhile, in pop anthems, the pursuit of beauty in its rawest form that touches the heart makes it an effective vector in moving the heart and rousing people to change. Be it Kendrick Lamar's Alright, oft-used as an anthem for Black Lives Matter movements, Ariana Grande's God is A Woman, that pushes for feminism in breaking the glass ceiling, or Childish Gambino's Grammy-winning This is America, which is a commentary on the situation of gun violence, police brutality, and longstanding discrimination towards African-Americans, it is clear that the beauty of such songs lies not just in their face musical value, but more so on their message and push for greater egalitarianism.

Hence, the pursuit of beauty in music helps as a binding force for communities and an anthem for change, particularly given our increasingly tense world today.
In sum, while the pursuit of beauty may be deemed unjustifiable due to how unhealthy the pursuit of an idealised beauty standard is, it is important to acknowledge the purpose of beauty in wider contexts today. As the adage goes, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder". Let us look for the beauty in everything, and pursue it to become even more human, and more accepting.

Comments:

Austin, well done! Wide ranging knowledge and resourcefulness in conceptualizing the idea of beauty. This, coupled with your adroit use of the language make your essay a joy to read.

2019 | Y6 GP | CT2 | Paper 1 **Bryan Ge Ruo Da | 19A01B**

Discuss the claim that science has a positive impact on sports today.

Mention "sports" to an ancient Roman, and he will undoubtedly regale you with heroic tales of beefy men duking it out within coliseums and stadiums. This is a story of physical might — as the Olympic motto exhorts, sport is all about human boundaries and constantly striving to go "faster, higher, and stronger". Yet, fast-forward to the 21st century and the picture painted is drastically different. Indeed, the sporting world is dominated by scientific progress, from supplements curated molecule by molecule, to constant shifts in athletes' gear, pushing the envelope of material science itself with zero cessation. In light of science and technology's increasing strength and importance in sports, some amongst the old guard have chafed, arguing that it is meddling in a supposedly pure sphere of physical achievement, corrupting the sporting spirit and diminishing the world of sport itself. To be fair, they have a point: scientific advancement could be argued to have had a negative impact on sport today, with it allowing for cheating and inappropriate behaviour more easily and frequently, and with the dominance of science diminishing the intrinsic value of sports as an institution of human achievement. Yet, such a perspective is unfortunately outdated, and fails to appreciate and recognise the overall positive impact that science makes on sports in modern times. Indeed, not only does science actually enhance the value of physical achievement, challenging our mortal boundaries, it also democratises sports for all to enjoy, levelling the playing field.

In modern times, sports' reputation has been dogged by innumerable doping scandals that seem to dominate front pages, and the corollary of this cannot go unnoticed: some argue that sports has been allegedly tainted by scientific advancement today, allowing for more pervasive cheating. Indeed, the unfortunate truth of the situation is that modern developments in technology constantly bring new performance-enhancing drugs to the fore. They serve as an orchard-full of forbidden fruit for athletes to take a nibble of. And so who can be surprised when some do? If not for scientific development creating new drugs and rendering them available for athletes, there would be zero possibility of doping in the prelapsarian

Eden that is sports; thus, the onus must fall onto science for bringing corruption to sports. Most recently, Russia's sporting team has been embroiled in yet another doping scandal, and the problem is more pervasive than ever before in the history of sports: hundreds of athletes, many previously crowned as the crème de la crème of their various fields, were found to engage in doping. Indeed, this has all been fuelled by the utter pervasiveness of performance-enhancing drugs like steroids, which are so ubiquitous and easily obtainable that entire countries' sporting federations would fall prey to embracing them. Hence, in today's day and age, where there are more drugs on the market than ever, and where research and development become increasingly efficient, creating more potent drugs at cheaper prices, this is undoubtedly a negative impact on sports, as the very ease of accessibility encourages cheating itself, undermining the legitimacy of sporting achievement. The problem goes beyond drugs too: athletes' gear that constantly improve athletes' performances has become so advanced in today's age, when nanotechnology is all the rage, that to use them has been labelled as cheating. For example, a new "sharkskin" suit developed for long-distance swimmers was deemed so effective that it was banned from competition; yet, a random check of swimmers at national-wide competitions in Belgium found that almost 40% of them still used these contraband paraphernalia. Hence, we can see that scientific advancement has led to the temptation and encouragement to cheat and gain an undeserved artificial edge in competition. This has definitely tainted the reputation of sports as an institution today.

Furthermore, scientific advancement has become so efficient that sports, regarded to be a temple of physical achievement, is becoming less about human achievement and more about who has a better team of engineers behind them. Today, sports is no longer that pure institution fêting the apogee of human ability; instead, technology is used as an artificial crutch to carry one past the finish line. The upshot is thus that human achievement, the very core of the purpose of sports, becomes less and less significant, thus undermining the meaning and purity of sports today. For example, golf balls have become increasingly stellar. Previously, players had to choose their balls based on whether they wanted to compromise on distance or accuracy. Now, new balls are so advanced that they achieve a Goldilocks balance between the two, becoming increasingly prevalent in competition, and allowing players (who might not even be that physically gifted) to easily excel. Does this not rob sports of the very meaning that it was supposed to have from the very beginning? What is the point of competition if technology

ends up the winner? Hence, these scientific advancements encroach on the value of sports, diminishing it drastically. Furthermore, beyond external tools to increase sporting excellence, today's technological landscape means that it is literally possible to change the fabric of human ability from the inside out. With gene editing, how can we continue to value human achievement, when dozens of athletes with Phelps' exact genetic makeup step up to the poolside? Indeed, genes have been found and identified as the reasons behind some of the greatest athletic achievements today. With the possibility of manipulating these genes, it all becomes a little bit pointless. Hence, science erodes the merit of sports as an institution of human achievement as sporting success can no longer be defined on these grounds.

Yet, to take such a fuddy-duddy[2] standpoint would be utterly ignorant of the landscape of sports today. In fact, completely antithetically, it is science that enhances human achievement and allows us to push further and further, challenging what is within the realms of human possibility. Hence, it in fact boosts sports, and not the other way around. Furthermore, technology also has greater positive impact on sports in how it levels the playing field for all, making sports substantially more accessible.

Indeed, science enhances human achievement and allows us to challenge the frontiers of physicality. It is important to note that these enhancements do not detract from the gravity of sporting achievements, but instead make them even more impressive, by allowing the best to become even better. For example, through intense R&D of sole thickness and material, Nike created the "VaporFly 4%" shoe that allegedly helps runners to run 4% faster. They then challenged the very bedrock of human achievement by holding the event, Breaking2 which endeavoured to get marathoner Eliud Kipchoge to run a sub 2-hour marathon, a barrier that no human has ever broken before. Hence, it is science that allows for enhanced human achievement; a runner like Kipchoge is already the best in the world, but his feats are bolstered by science to smash human barriers previously thought to be unbreachable. Furthermore, statistics and data science have allowed sports teams to play more efficiently than ever, with the tracking of millions and billions of data points to heighten human achievements. For example, football team Liverpool has had a meteoric rise, playing gorgeously and effectively, and one cannot ignore their newly-hired data scientists behind the scenes who have

[2] Avoid this informality. 'Old-fashioned' would do.

helped coach Jürgen Klopp manage better and more efficiently. They finished the 2018-2019 season in the Premier League with a near-record number of points, and thus this impressive sporting feat was helped along by scientific advancement. Beyond helping human athletes get better, science has also engendered the challenging of human achievement through the creation of worthy adversaries in the form of Artificial Intelligence (AI). For instance, Google's revolutionary DeepMind AI has clashed with Go masters and chess geniuses, pushing the envelope of these mental sports by giving an actual challenge to human prodigies who rarely see defeat to other human players otherwise. In fact, DeepMind was so formidable that it was a sporting achievement in and of itself that Go masters managed to win some games against it. This thus shows that science enhances sporting achievements by challenging human ability and its limits, making the greatest even greater and allowing for bona-fide physical achievement. As a result, this is indubitably a positive impact on sports — brought on by recent technological developments.

Science has also had a positive impact on sports by levelling the playing field and allowing every human to experience the joy and adrenaline of physical competition and play. With the advent of scientific progress, such as in material sciences, people who previously could never touch a field, court, or pool now have ample opportunities to enjoy sports. Thus, this democratisation of sports, bringing it to more and more people to whom it was previously inaccessible, is undeniably a positive impact spurred by science. For example, when Paralympic champion Oscar Pistorius first burst onto the sprinting scene, his prosthetic legs made from carbon fibre were absolutely revolutionary, and it was this scientific feat that ultimately allowed for Pistorius' physical feat. Even just fifty years ago, how could a man like Pistorius, without both legs, even dream of crossing a finish line? Hence, it is modern scientific advancement that allows for persons with disability to pursue sports as a genuinely viable career or hobby, and thus this increase in inclusivity and participation in sport is an amazing phenomenon. Furthermore, scientific advancement means that anyone around the world can enjoy the same quality of play. For instance, companies have recently begun programmes in African countries like Ghana and Cameroon in which they provide sturdy and efficient footballs to underprivileged children; the price was actually affordable due to enhancements in production processes and engineering. This thus means that hundreds of thousands more disenfranchised children now have access to amazing gear that enhances the quality of play tremendously, levelling the playing field. This

feat was brought by scientific advancement, a fact which cannot be ignored. Hence, all in all, scientific progress allows for greater accessibility to the world of sports, by those to whom sports was previously utterly unattainable. Thus, as more people can enjoy sport today, science has definitely had a positive impact.

People tend to think of the human body and science and technology as completely distinct and mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is not difficult to conjure images of a menacing robot arm, cold and metallic, callously tweaking our pure institution of sport and human achievement. However, the truth is that science and flesh must work in tandem to enhance and improve human achievement, as well as advance the world of sport to all. Though we may be boosted by artificial intelligence and robot brains, it is human brawn that ultimately triumphs. Though our sporting achievements may be based on cold hard steel, it is our mental steel that will allow us to surpass all expectations. It is hard to imagine, then, that the ancient Romans would not agree.

Comments:

An excellent response, with apt wide-ranging illustration. Highly insightful and original. Very competent use of language. Very clear structure. Very clear and fluent, confident and secure. Wide-ranging vocabulary.

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2019 | Y6 GP | CT2 | Paper 1 **Chuah Cheng Yu Marvin | 19S06T**

Discuss the claim that science has a positive impact on sports today.

The stakes in competitive sports have only ever trended one way in history: upwards. With a global audience and ever-enlarging prize pools in professional sports, athletes are increasingly looking for ways to gain even the smallest of advantages. The development of sports science has provided athletes with yet another avenue to seek an advantage in their search for supremacy. Yet the introduction of modern science into the world of sports has not been without its drawbacks. Looking past the surface-level benefits that science has brought sports and athletes, which is mainly centered on performance-enhancement and recovery, there have been a host of unintended negative consequences that modern science has brought upon sports. I am of the opinion that science has an overall negative impact on sports today due to the long-term consequences it has on athletes and the over-arching effect it has on sports in our society today.

Proponents of the opposing belief mainly bring up the positive impacts that science has brought to athletes. They claim science has not only aided in the recovery of athletes by taking care of their needs beyond the field of play for them, they have also boosted their on-field performances to a level never before witnessed. Dieticians and sports psychologists have shortened the recovery time needed by athletes by planning professional routines and diets for them, to the point where every single calorie is planned for consumption weeks ahead of time and athletes are told, to the minute, how they should be spending their downtime. On-field, recently developed stats-trackers and analytics have enabled team performances to be more in-sync than ever while the same professionals who plan athletes' recoveries also have a hand in helping them achieve peak performance on game days. The Houston Rockets of the NBA have taken to sports science in an extreme manner. Not only have the diets and recovery schedules of each of their athletes been planned for them, in line with the rest of the NBA, they follow data analytics to the point where they have eliminated a specific type of shot that has

proven to be less efficient that the rest almost entirely from their play: the midrange shot. The elimination of this previously bread-and-butter shot for lay-ups and 3-pointers has paid dividends, with the Rockets having made it to at least the Western Conference semi-finals in the last 2 seasons in the playoffs as well as averaging around 60 wins out of 82 during the regular season. The positive impacts this has on sports is clear as fans and athletes alike are thrilled by what athletes are able to achieve on-field and this has only helped in their pursuit of excellence. The enhanced spectacle only serves to benefit the sport, providing a good counter-example for why science is detrimental to sports today.

Although the above argument holds true, there are scenarios where disastrous consequences have arisen from the involvement of science in sports. The pursuit of excellence and performance-enhancement in sports has caused athletes to recklessly abandon their own safety and well-being. Athletes, mainly martial artists, weightlifters or track-and-field athletes, often take performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) made available by modern science in unhealthy dosages. PEDs serve to boost an athlete's peak performance but also result in some negative side effects. Many mixed-martial artists (MMA) have been known to take common PEDs such as steroids to temporarily boost their bodily functions for a fight. As a result, many fights tend to occur in an unfair manner and once the winner has been stripped of his or her win due to the discovery of drug abuse, the legitimacy and morality of the entire sport is called into question. There is an obvious danger to athletes as an overdose of these PEDs could easily result in their early deaths and cheapens the spectacle for fans when a winner has been decided unfairly. Professional footballer Wayne Rooney was also reported to have taken many dosages of painkillers daily to mask a recurring ankle injury to play in the 2010 World Cup for England, further illustrating how science has stripped athletes of appropriate recovery time and endangered their bodies in the process. The development of PEDs and specialised painkillers have many negative impacts that will eventually catch up to an athlete long after he or she has retired that will haunt him or her for the rest of their lives, demonstrating how science often has a negative impact on an athlete even in the very areas where it is supposed to enhance.

Secondly, the development of science also gives rise to overly harsh and potentially unfair treatment of athletes. The development of science has made checks on athletes such as blood or urine tests extremely affordable and accessible to any organisation, and the availability of some information has sent

the sporting world into an area of doubt and uncertainty. South African middle-distance runner and Olympic medalist, Castor Semenya, was banned from taking part in women's events after she was discovered to have natural abnormally high level of testosterone. The International Association of Athletic Federations informed her she was to either undergo testosterone-reducing procedures or be banned from entering women's events, with a statement released from them even containing the derogatory line "She is welcome to participate in the men's event in the future if she does not undergo …[the] procedure." The development of technology through science that is advanced enough to accurately determine the testosterone levels in females has opened up a host of controversies that takes away the sheer enjoyment of sports as a whole. Given these developments, debates surrounding the fastest athlete in a race may eventually shift from how he truly deserves his win to scrutinising his hormonal levels, which not only takes away from sporting discussions and fan enjoyment but is also horribly insulting to the athlete. The development of such technology may have provided us with previously unknown information but has also unfairly opened up new areas of discussion on athletes and ultimately devalue sports more than benefit it.

The most pressing argument against the involvement of science in sports as a whole may be how high-level sports science has developed expensive routines and technology that have only served to widen the inequalities currently existing in sports. As with the development of any new forms of technology, the parties with the means to afford them are the ones who benefit from them. This exact scenario occurs whenever cutting edge technology or research is made in the sporting world. This only widens the apparent gap in talent and skill that already exists between athletes and teams that have different levels of resources available to them. This obviously blunts the competitive edge in sporting competitions, where the athletes who have already enjoyed access to world-class coaching get to benefit from new technology or research, which places them further ahead in the competition. The wealthiest of football clubs in England that play in the Premier League have access to science in the form of professionals and facilities that aid in the performance and recovery of athletes that clubs in the lower tiers of English football could only dream of. Singapore is so underdeveloped in the sporting arena that machines that accurately determine body-fat percentage are still widely unavailable as compared to the U.S. where nearly every college and university has one. The involvement of science in sports and the development of cutting-edge technology and routines only serve to detract from one of the most

important elements of sports: the spirit of competition. The wealthy who benefit from scientific discoveries to the greatest extent will continue pulling away from the rest of the competition. The widening of this inequality also goes against how sports should be inclusive and available to all, where everyone has an opportunity to compete and emerge victorious, not just the wealthiest who have access to expensive technology. This widening of existing inequalities is perhaps the most poignant argument against the incorporation of science in sports as it damages the spirit of competition and produces technology that, more often than not, has pre-determined the outcome of many contests.

In conclusion, although science has conferred many benefits to athletes and fans on a surface level, the gradual mixing of sports and science may have irreversible long-term negative consequences. Athletes will feel the effects of PEDs well after they retire, sporting discussions will now center around the physical make-up of an athlete's body instead of his accomplishments, and inequalities may now be widened to the point where high-level sports may only be available to a select few.

Comments:

You generally make a reasonably compelling case that does consistently attempt to show the hand of science in how contemporary sports unfolds. Your illustrations are very clear and you have successfully woven in reasonable evaluation at key points. Nonetheless, there is one gap that recurs: is it the "science" that is to blame, ultimately? Greater consideration of other key influences in sports today, weighed against the science, would have raised the level of engagement. Still, a thoughtful response throughout.

Excellent linguistic ability shown overall. There is good variation in sentence structure, while expression is confident and controlled. Ideas flow coherently too.

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2019 | Y6 | CT2 | Paper 1 **Catherine Kausikan | 19A01B**

'Fiction has no place in a pragmatic world.' Discuss.

Once upon a time, the oeuvres of Dahl and Dickens were heralded as intellectual masterpieces, enjoyed and celebrated by adults and children alike. It was an era where reading fiction was seen as a valuable, even integral part of everyday life. Today, as our world becomes one full of uncertainty and flux, the place of fiction in our increasingly frenetic and hectic lives has come under fire. With more pressing societal concerns hounding at our backs, it is easy to see why many would believe that the world of fiction -- one so far removed from our reality -- has no place in a pragmatic world focused on material and tangible outcomes, on survival rather than fancy. In this time where serious issues of climate change and global political turmoil weigh heavily on our minds, can spending time reading about fantastical dragons and bloodthirsty magicians really be justified? Yet, it is unfairly dismissive to say that fiction has absolutely no place in this modern, pragmatic world we live in. Yes, there are no dragons here, but that is not to discount the great value fiction brings to our lives today -- particularly because of the pragmatic society we live in. Fiction reveals key aspects of the human condition and acts as a critical reflection of the social and political climates we live in, allowing us to better understand and navigate this pragmatic world. It is also economically valuable and can provide catharsis for the stressed individual; all this cements fiction's place in our pragmatic world and necessitates our recognition of its significance.

Some assert that fiction, being so far removed from our lives, can have little relevance to our own reality, and thus has no place in a pragmatic world concerned only with the utilitarian. The very nature of fiction is that it is made up of stuff and nonsense -- completely made up by authors out of their imagination. Given this, it is only logical that fiction is unable to equip us with the skills to navigate a world focused solely on productivity and order. Indeed, the two seem diametrically opposed: where fiction encourages creativity and indulges our fancies of living amongst the magical or supernatural (think Neil Gaiman's 'The Sandman' or Rowling's acclaimed series 'Harry Potter'), the needs of a pragmatic world require us to be practical, logical, and sensible. Can we really gain any of these traits from filling our minds with stories of superheroes and fairies? It seems

that, by definition, fiction has no place in a pragmatic world as it is worlds apart from what we experience on a day-to-day basis, providing mere entertainment and temporary distraction from the far more pressing issues of today. One could even say that fiction detracts from us being able to live out our lives meaningfully and efficiently in this pragmatic world, since entertainment should take a backseat to work and productivity. Fiction is driving us away from what is far more important in a pragmatic world: understanding and grappling with the socio-political complexities of today and generating tangible, economic output to contribute to society. Fiction seems to have no place in this society, especially when compared to its far more practical and educational counterpart: non-fiction. These are the books that we should be spending our time reading; it is titles like 'Dealing with an Ambiguous World' and 'The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck' that deal with our societal climate and lifestyles that can truly help us live our lives better. Comparatively, fiction's value in our world is at best, trivial, and this has led critics to believe that fiction has no place in a pragmatic world.

Counter

Yet, to so quickly dismiss fiction in one fell swoop is unfair and over-generalising, revealing a reader who is not well-versed with this rich, valuable genre, who has trivialised the value of fiction in a world that depends on functionality and practicality. It is undeniable that fiction's place in a pragmatic world is not obvious, and while other genres may seem more suitable to the current global climate, a closer examination into fiction reveals the rich smorgasbord of functions that the genre has in a world that values material outcomes. In fact, it is precisely because the world is so pragmatic that we need fiction now, more than ever, and the place of the genre is cemented firmly in our world. Our desire for productivity must be balanced and tempered; left unchecked, pragmatism will engulf the human population in a tide of dull mundanity and routine. Take a moment to imagine a world without the creativity of fiction, the machinations of modern society completely dictating a population of mechanical, unthinking workers. It is fiction that can provide the enriching balance that a pragmatic world requires, a well-needed break that allows people to rejuvenate and boost, rather than disrupt, their productivity. Further, while it may not seem as if fiction can provide the skills and knowledge we need to navigate a pragmatic world, this could not be farther from the truth. Aside from cultivating a creative brain needed for innovation -- a crucial concern of the pragmatic world --, the genre of fiction offers a wealth of information and value, ranging from the economic to the social and political.

The most pragmatic place fiction has would be its value as an economic industry. In a world that emphasises money for survival and profit, how can we discount

the millions of dollars in revenue that fiction brings in today? One only needs to look at millionaire authors like David Baldacci and J. K. Rowling, both wildly successful in their forays into writing fiction. Further, fiction books can spawn lucrative film and TV adaptations that generate even more revenue, not to mention the vast plethora of standalone fictional movies and series that consistently top box office charts. Titles like Stephen King's 'It' earned millions as a novel on the bookshelf, and went on to break box office records as it made over $2 million in its first weekend in cinemas. Moreover, the ubiquity of movies like 'The Lion King' and 'Love, Rosie' -- all fictional screenplays -- only serves as a testament to their commercial, and economic, success. Given this, how can we say that fiction has no place in a pragmatic, money-making world? If anything, the domination of fantastic films from various fictional universes is proof that fiction has more than found its place in today's society: its ability to provide an escape route from reality has made it a priceless commodity.

Additionally, fiction is important in a pragmatic world because it illuminates aspects of the human condition and highlights salient social issues in society. Despite the stories themselves not being real, even works that seem absurdly detached from reality can reveal truths about ourselves and society that help us to better understand both ourselves and the people around us. This is imperative in a pragmatic world, given that fiction can help us to better realise the social needs of society and allow us to more quickly address them, as well as highlight individual and social failings that can then be ameliorated. George Orwell's 'Animal Farm', despite featuring sentient animals like pigs, revealed insights into communist and Fascist society that was highly applicable to the global climate following World War II and the subsequent Cold War. Another example would be Jane Austen's seminal novel 'Pride and Prejudice', where human complexities are brought to the fore as the reader follows Elizabeth, the protagonist, in her attempt to navigate through a pragmatic society that placed emphasis on material wealth and status over genuine happiness. It seems then, that we have far more to learn from fiction than we would first expect; perhaps there really is something in us similar to a rotund, grunting pig so awfully fond of Communism. By offering us a world far from reality, fiction affords us the gaze of a detached observer reflecting on a world that though seems different from ours, can actually turn out to be quite similar. We must then acknowledge that fiction does have an integral place in a pragmatic world, offering perspective and insight that can help us navigate through society more efficiently and adeptly.

Next, fiction offers us alternative perspectives, particularly relevant in the socio-political context, allowing us to question the institutions that rule us to pick out

their flaws and then move society forward. In a pragmatic world consistently striving for idealised perfection, order, and harmony, the alternative, reimagined discourses that fiction provides is indubitably important and valuable, something that affirms its place in a pragmatic world. Fiction's appearance of artifice also affords it valuable space for critique, as it is able to pass commentary in a far more acerbic tone than a factual article or op-ed in a newspaper, where the consequences for such bluntness are far direr. Nigerian author Adichie's anthology 'The Thing Around Your Neck' calls out the failings of the Nigerian government and gives voice to the marginalised, a potent call for action. Closer to home, Sonny Liew's 'The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye' offers an alternative narrative to the state sanctioned Singapore story, provoking Singaporeans to think about possible issues with the otherwise seemingly infallible government. While these fictional stories seem to disrupt pragmatic society, they are actually crucial in strengthening and improving it, sparking change that can allow our world to function more smoothly and harmoniously.

So, though critics may scorn fiction as the stuff of childhood and fancy, with no place in a pragmatic world, they are far too quick to condemn and trivialise the intricate complexities of this magnificent genre. Let us escape into this otherworldly realm of wonder; we may learn more than we expect from our fictitious friends Willy Wonka and the BFG. As we come to 'The End' of this essay, we would do well to acknowledge and respect fiction's place in a pragmatic world, lest we incur the wrath of King's Pennywise and his posse.

Comments:

Strong awareness of issues. Good awareness and insights. However, not every argument is sufficiently illustrated. Also, you have made the effort to Answer the Question – by addressing the context of a pragmatic world, albeit to varying degrees of success. The last argument is not well-developed. Very good use of language. Wide-ranging vocabulary. Confident and secure.

5

2019 | Y6 | CT2 | Paper 1 **Eugene Chua Weiheng | 19A01B**

'Fiction has no place in a pragmatic world.' Discuss.

The multiplicity of situations fiction can depict imbues it with enormous power. It can whisk us off into fantastical lands of cloud-capped towers, dump us in gritty post-apocalyptic landscapes, or simply enable us to look at life through another person's lens. Yet, in a frenetic age where many of us are preoccupied with our quests for money and comfort, these possibilities are relegated to the back of our minds; rather than focusing on its merits, we disregard fiction in our misperception that it is irrelevant to our lives and nothing more than a distraction. In so doing, we are depriving ourselves of the opportunity to pick up skills and gain cultural capital that can in fact benefit us in our pragmatic focus on bettering ourselves; in this light, fiction should be anything but disqualified from the world we live in.

Some detractors suggest that the practical concerns of the real world often do not cohere with the imaginary situations depicted in works of fiction — thus, fiction has no place in it. To them, the attributes of fiction that make it so attractive to some — its portrayal of imaginary situations and handling of the events that occur in these non-existent universes — are inapplicable to the world of non-fiction that all of us occupy. As we seek to maximise the use of our time to succeed in life, fiction hence appears to offer few to no lessons that we can glean, and is therefore ostensibly irrelevant. For example, the dystopian worlds that Cormac McCarthy's characters inhabit bear little resemblance to our contemporary lives. Gone are the days of wild, untameable cowboys and Indians that feature prominently in Blood Meridian; in their place are the gleaming frontier cities of Phoenix, Austin and Houston — technological innovation centres that hunt for graduates with the best qualifications. Yet to pass is the future of marauding bands of cannibals and gangs that McCarthy envisions in The Road; right now, California and the Pacific Northwest are hotbeds of research and development which hire the most educated individuals. These gloomy scenes of our past and our potential futures, while offering up an enjoyable and heart-wrenching read, seem to be so far removed from the realities we inhabit that they are irrelevant in enhancing our understanding of the world. They appear to evince that the created worlds of fiction have no place in our own, and do not benefit us

in any practical sense by nuancing our perspectives of the world. Similar criticisms can be applied to works of science fiction — while Heinlein and Herbert put forward convincing narratives about the lives of humans on the moon and on Arrakis in The Moon is a Harsh Mistress and in Dune, these portrayals seem to be confined strictly to the realm of fantasy, and hence are unable to bring us much tangible benefit, and are therefore rendered irrelevant.

Other critics suggest that fiction is a mere distraction that keeps us from caring about the pursuits that really matter, that truly advantage us by equipping us with abilities and knowledge which we can apply to claw up the career ladder. Our time, these detractors argue, can be better spent on reading non-fiction or on learning a new skill, which can actually give us an edge in the cutthroat world that we live in. Thus, time spent on perusing comic books appears to be time spent frivolously. The city of Gotham, where the Batman series of comics takes place, is simultaneously a refuge for criminals and a respite for readers; readers looking for nothing more than action and comedy to take their minds off work and school. The utopian, prelapsarian green space of Andrew Marvell's The Garden provides a fantastical place for tired souls to "reckon their time with herbs and flowers", and for readers to escape to a paradise where their problems do not hound them. Yet, the speed at which the rest of the world accelerates past the sedentary mind can mean that even the shortest of breaks become detrimental in our pragmatic societies. Though rest may be important, it is imperative to make the best use of our time, and the best use of our time seems to be something other than fiction — upskilling, socialising, studying. Even our literature syllabus seems to recognise this, placing less emphasis on appreciating texts and more on the skills of analysis and evaluation that studying fiction can train. By prioritising these instead of the value of the works themselves, this can be seen as a way to pull fiction back from the apparent irrelevance that it may otherwise find itself languishing in. The pragmatic concerns of our education system seem to necessitate that we eke out what little value appears to possess, and turn this towards the refining of skills that are more useful in life.

However, fiction possesses inherent value which keeps it relevant in our day and age; it can in fact develop skills that advantage us in practical life. The prevalence of the internet in contemporary society means that many of us encounter a deluge of information on a daily basis; fiction can equip us with the ability to critically analyse and therefore stay abreast of this flood of knowledge. Practical criticism of novels, plays and poems enable readers to be sensitised to authorial intention, and make us aware of the various techniques that they use to achieve their ends. Reading other works of fiction can also equip us with the evaluative lenses

necessary to distinguish between the truth and the lies often peddled on the internet. This can be clearly seen form Russian author Vladimir Nabokov's work; his twin seminal works Pale Fire and Lolita both feature unreliable narrators who challenge readers to discern between the realities of the situations they are in, and the sugar-coated versions that they offer on the page. Both novels respectively feature professors trying to obfuscate the truth about a poem by a dead poet, and the relationship he shared with a prepubescent girl. While they are difficult to get a handle on, a reader of these works comes away with a firmer grasp on techniques that allow him or her to better analyse information when applied to the real world context. Therefore, fiction can certainly be said to tangibly benefit readers; it gives them an edge which can set them apart to employers and educators in our pragmatic world.

Furthermore, the ability to connect which fiction can help readers gain is equally — if not more important than the skills one can learn; fiction offers a powerful avenue for them to forge relationships with others. Fiction can most obviously be a launch-pad for otherwise different people to connect with each other, as the imaginary landscape both readers have journeyed through can serve as a shared experience that joins them even as other characteristics divide. The Harry Potter series of books by JK Rowling — for example — has been translated into a variety of languages that includes Mandarin, French and German; while readers may come from different cultural contexts and possess different values, this common experience with fiction can spark conversation and bring people together in an age where other forms of media divide. Additionally, while it may be challenging to gauge its true impact, reading fiction can nuance one's understanding of human nature and enable us to focus on the similarities that unite us rather than the differences that divide. Novels such as Flowers for Algernon and The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time, and their adaptations for the film screen and the theatre, have been praised for their humanising portrayals of intellectual disabilities and the people who suffer from them. Armed with a better understanding of how to communicate with others through fiction, readers can benefit by being able to relate with them more easily; as a skill that employers prioritise in the workplace, this can help them stand out, clearly showing that the benefits of fiction are not obsolete in our pragmatic world.

While fiction may superficially appear to be a tool for us to relax and appreciate the imaginary creations of talented authors, the reality of it is far more complex. Its power extends beyond the confines of the prologue and epilogue; readers can come away with tangible benefits that give them a leg up on others in school, in the workplace, and in life in general. Whether one chooses to pragmatically focus

on these attributes gained, or to more idealistically regard the respite that fiction offers as equally useful, the role that fiction plays in our world is irrefutable. One just had to pick up a book to be sensitised to its place.

Comments:

Response is a competent one, with strong awareness of issues and a very good grasp of subject matter. Some insights are evident and good links to the question. Wide-ranging illustration. Highly competent. Good structure. Clear and fluent. Clear topic sentences.

6

2019 | Y6 | CT2 | Paper 1 **Hannah Chia Kai Xin | 19S06T**

'Fiction has no place in a pragmatic world.' Discuss.

"Don't spoil the End Game". Perhaps you have heard this phrase recently as it refers to an appeal by Marvel producers and fans to not talk about the events of Avengers: Endgame for at least three weeks after the movie hit theatres in late April. The strong push came as the movie represents the culmination of a story more than 20 movies in the making, and the work of fiction has many ardent fans. In today's world, where so many things jostle for our attention and serious issues like wars, shootings, climate change and more, are always constantly being reported on, it is a wonder that works of fiction still enrapture us. Some may argue that works dealing with imaginary realities take away the focus from real life issues, and thus have no place in a pragmatic world. However, fiction can be a powerful medium to raise and discuss issues in the real world, help people understand others and see their own experience recognised, and provide hope, comfort and escape in a difficult reality.

Those who are convinced that fiction is not necessary from a practical perspective believe it is more important and powerful to focus on realities in real life. During Singapore's development, for instance, the Arts, including fiction, were deemphasised to focus on STEM fields, as these were seen to have more economic worth and could help the country to succeed. This was a practical decision to invest a country's resources into what had the most return for its citizens. On an individual scale, the number of books read tends to drop off as one enters working adult life. The competing demands on our time mean that the hours spent reading, or binge watching television series, take away from time spent pursuing career success. Many adults simply have little time to read due to having a career, caring for relatives or children, and seeing to their own daily needs. Fiction does not teach any concrete skills and takes up valuable time, so pragmatic people may decide that fiction should have no place in their lives.

However, fiction can and should be used today as a powerful medium to urge people to focus on practical realities that need our attention. For example, the dystopian genre of fiction is particularly effective at urging us to consider the consequences of our actions if we continue on our current paths. 1984, by George

Orwell, illustrates the consequences of a "big brother" state where we are always watched, and with our data being collected constantly by large conglomerates today, this piece of literature proves a powerful insight into how dangerous allowing this to continue could be. Fiction paints an evocative picture of a world that does not exist but could come to be in an extremely vivid manner. By reading a story, figurative language and compelling plots can show us the many possibilities of dystopian worlds that we could create if we do not act quickly. It can be more effective than non-fiction as the message comes cloaked in a story, making it more palatable to its audience. Simply put, it is more fun to read about Katniss Everdeen, unfairly made to fight in an unfair system whose pain is broadcast for the entertainment of the privileged elite, than to read an essay or about unfair power structures or the sensationalism of the media and our desensitization to violence. Complex themes can be introduced through fiction in a way that appeals to more people. Even children can learn – storybooks like the Super Seagrass Search have been distributed to the National Library Board in Singapore as part of National Biodiversity Week to teach about environmental conservation to primary and preschool students.

Additionally, fiction provides an avenue to allow people to understand cultures and experiences outside of their own. Books like 'The Curious Incident of the Boy in the Nighttime', which follows a boy with a form of autism as he tries to solve a mystery, put the readers directly in the shoes of the protagonists. The first person perspective in the book portrays odd habits, like never eating yellow or brown foods, as something perfectly natural. Other ordinary situations like taking a train are shown as scary and overwhelming from his perspective, and the details described in the book help neurotypicals to understand more of what it's like to be born with autism. This is important, as empathy is vital to secure support to make changes in the real world. By its ability to put people in the shoes of the main character and to really imagine how they would feel in a similar position, fiction succeeds in stirring empathy.

Today, while there is a need to be pragmatic, there is also a need to be kind. The rise of school shootings in America and worldwide has led to suggestions like holding lock-down drills or even arming teachers or having police; but these do not address the root cause. Simultaneously, student suicide are on the rise. Both could stem from a sense of alienation, which encouraging empathy could help to alleviate. And following the examples in fiction, some steps to foster empathy can be taken. For example, the book Wonder and the TV series 13 reasons why, which focus on bullying, both triggered conversations on bullying in school – some schools even chose to christen their schools 'Kindness Zones', following the

example in Wonder. These demonstrate how books can foster and motivate empathy towards groups who need it today.

Furthermore, for those depicted in books, seeing their own experience reflected can be deeply validating and encouraging. Books like 'Speak', which follow a girl's experience with sexual assault, can help those recovering from similar situations by encouraging them to share the experience with others. By hearing an account, even a fictional one, of someone who goes through a similar thing, can help one find their own voice and platform to engage on important issues. Similarly, reading about stories from one's culture, religion or ethnic group can feel inspiring and empowering. Fictional stories like myths are often passed down through oral retellings, especially in Native American cultures – hearing these fictional stories can help to connect one to their culture and heritage. This sense of identity, imparted by feeling understood and part of stories, is something that remains important in a pragmatic world to give people a stronger sense of self.

Another way fiction benefits us and should be included is its capacity to offer hope, and inspiration to us. The world today can be exhausting and gloomy, and it is difficult to remain motivated to solve problems practically. Fiction can fill this niche and remind us what we are working towards. For instance, Hayao Miyazaki's movies romanticize daily life in calming 2D animation: their mass popularity stems from their calming simplicity. Speaking on these movies, Miyazaki has said that they aim to show the value in a slow life and the natural environment, and it is clear from their mass popularity that his message has resonated. People tired of a fast paced life find their anxiety calmed while watching Miyazaki's movies, even if they are imaginary. Or perhaps precisely because they are imaginary. Fictional cartoons have seen a rise in adult viewership, with series like Avatar the Last Airbender, Steven Universe and Voltron having strong fans among older audiences. The reason why these shows are so appealing is that they have hope and happy endings. Even if the characters suffer, most of them will probably survive and make their world a better place. Such a message is particularly inspiring in a pragmatic world which reality looks grim, and the respite and hope such fictional works provide definitely has a place.

Therefore, it is clearly evident why fiction still has a place today, when it is important to deal with reality. Just because it is important to be practical doesn't mean that humans can stop imagining. Indulging the imagination and consuming fiction is valuable because it provides us rest from exhausting realities. It provides a place where we can learn to understand others, and have ourselves be understood in turn. And perhaps most importantly of all, fiction can be more than

an escape, but actually a means to consider and engage people in real life problems and events. Some things can be more important than fiction, but usually, there is a place for fiction alongside it. Fiction lets us envision the kind of people we are and the kind of world we want to have. It asks, where are we going to? And I for one am excited to see what's in the end game we imagine.

Comments:

This essay grew in strength as it progressed, with evaluation + illustration working very well in paras 3-5 especially. You manage to argue quite convincingly, though stronger contextualisation would have been better with a range of examples.

Excellent linguistic barring a few blips in spelling. Very good opening and conclusion.

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2019 | KI Y6 | CT2 | Paper 1 **Samuel Foo Hern Khai | 19A01A**

'The best kind of knowledge is the kind built on evidence.' Discuss.

Few moments are perhaps more gratifying to us weak and emotional humans as when a close friend or loved one, no matter how often they constantly reiterate their 'love' for us, actually does something out of their way to present us with compelling evidence of the magnitude of their concern and affection. They may be the most honest and reliable testimonies possible in everything they claim, and we may be justified in believing that the words they profess are sufficient for us to be justified in believing them, but even then, talk is cheap: tangible evidence is what is truly able to bring warmth to our hearts and maybe even tears to our eyes. For the same reason, I would presume that there were few moments as exhilarating for physicists around the world as the time that the discovery of the Higgs boson was made known: even if models of particle physics made indubitably clear the integral role the boson plays in mediating all the quantum interactions of our daily lives, evidence was what we required, perhaps psychologically as much as epistemologically, for us really to validate this aspect of our understanding of quantum physics. It is perhaps unsurprising that many legions of empiricists have clung to evidence as the chief and most important provider of knowledge, particularly evidence of an external sensory type, as opposed to the "a priori lemmas of logic" evidence is not only epistemologically needful but also emotively salient and persuasively powerful. In this essay, I raise some of the best reasons for the importance of evidence to the formation of the best type of knowledge: using different criteria for optimality like necessity, recognisability, etc. I then continue to explore the limitations inherent in evidence and the role of the rationalist side of the philosopher's toolbox beyond the search for more data. However, I conclude by asking if evidence may not only narrowly refer to empiricist observation or material entities alone, but also be a term for the grounding of our knowledge in general and thus necessary, by default, for our knowledge.

Let us begin by exploring the classic empiricist case for the primacy of evidential knowledge as opposed to the fruits of deduction or introspection: simply that it may be the only way we can obtain knowledge about the external world. Here is a very simple example: let's say that you are tasked to determine the internal angle

of a hexagon. If you believe in the purity of deductions and a priori reasoning, you may be inclined to try and use the formula for internal angle (n-2)*180/n where n is the number of sides to deduce the angle without needing to look at any shapes. But let's say you are also not very good at remembering such formulae, and you struggle for a long time trying to recall and apply it to little use. In that case, assuming there's also a hexagon shaped table outside, wouldn't the obvious solution just be to take a protractor there to work out the angle through direct measurement? This is the point the empiricists take to the extreme. Locke, for example, claims that because no fundamental ideas, even the precepts of reason are innate, there is even, from the first step, a need to venture out into evidence and experience to fill our tabula rasa minds. Such thinking was extended by cognitive psychologists like Piaget in the 20th century who postulated that the concept of number, famously considered by Kant to be synthetic a priori, could actually have originated instead from experiences of engagement with objects in the real world, and would thus rely not on reason or axioms, but the evidence for its applicability to our world, that we get through experience. Thus, the empiricist case is that evidence is not just desirable but fundamentally necessary for the formation of knowledge, and therefore evidential knowledge is the best form of knowledge in that it is the most fundamental.

At risk of conflating evidence with experience due to its shared importance to empiricism, there would also be an obvious point to be made about how certain things cannot be justified or known without the evidence we gain from sensory perception, which is something on which even rationalists agree: obviously we can't know whether or not we like chocolate unless we collect evidence by tasting it, which is why even rationalist programmes like Descartes', though they distrust evidence as the source of first principles, still look to use their rationalist deductions as a means of justifying the acceptance of sense perception and its insights. But the most interesting clash is in why evidential knowledge is to be preferred to purely deductive knowledge when both appear valid means to knowledge (excluding the extreme empiricist doctrine that evidential knowledge is foundational and thus dominant by default).

The first thing we should look at is how evidence makes our knowledge tangible, bridging the world of theory with the world in which we live. To bring us back to the Higgs boson example, it is arguable in that case that the mathematical work that described the boson was already sufficient for us to accept it as indispensable to our universe, but what still makes us give the discovery of physical evidence so much weight is the fact that pure theory, even if working on foundationalist logical principles, is still only held to a standard of coherence within the realm of the

theoretical. However, scientific knowledge, clearly, is to help us understand the real world and thus has to be held to a standard of correspondence with said external, observable world. Evidence is, therefore, what allows us to demonstrate that correspondence and assure us that the theory is applicable to the reality it describes and predicts. So, here, evidence is related to the need to meet standards of truth relevant to the field and topic in question.

But, even if this is a small indulgent tangent, I think the most interesting thing is the psychological, not purely epistemological side to evidence: for the 'best' knowledge comprises not just ideas that make us think, but also ideas that make us feel: because evidence is often what is needed for us creatures of flesh and bone to wake up to reality. An example from theology: perhaps the most indubitable proof of God's existence is actually the famous ontological argument of St. Anselm. But given that alone, it is unlikely to make us want to go to church or have anything to do with God. By contrast, even if my next-door neighbour's testimony, about what change God has brought to her life is notably less rationally solid and slightly questionable (was it God or just the people in church, for example?), this tangible evidence of God's impact is probably more likely to make me want to become religious: I will tell others that I have started going to church not because I could be convinced that existence is a first-order predicate after all, but because I, too, want to be touched in the same way my neighbour was. Thus, evidential knowledge, even if somewhat logically shaky, can be far more spiritually meaningful.

In any case, let's turn from those idealistic heights to return to some more technical issues about the actual pitfalls of relying on evidential knowledge alone, for all the glory in which it was seemingly cast. The first issue is the matter of evidence being sometimes insufficient when it comes to absolutes: the famous problem of induction, by which I cannot prove an absolute statement, especially one that encompasses infinites, simply with individual cases of evidence. This becomes a pertinent problem in mathematics, where even though every new even number tested gives more evidence to support Goldbach's conjecture, evidence of it continuing to hold cannot give knowledge of its actual truth, because it has to be demonstrated for every even number, and we are simply incapable, within our current understanding of reality, to process all the evidence required for a brute force verification. Rather, the mathematical solution is to use induction from axioms and principles to demonstrate the universal truth of conjectures through axiomatic reasoning, not evidence. Thus, clearly, the empiricist paradigm of evidence-garnering is in fact irrelevant to the mathematical enterprise of seeking knowledge about conjectures.

Furthermore, the issue also has to be raised of our inability to accept evidence at face value, despite the naive perception of evidence as often forming the 'smoking gun' that gives rise to new confirmed knowledge. Different pieces of evidence have varying levels of evidential value, and we can't always just use a direct observation to find out the truth about something. For example, the Higgs boson couldn't be detected just from looking at the trail left behind in a cloud chamber in the way the positron was discovered. Rather, it had to be inferred from the residual products it formed after its very brief lifespan; the analysis of these products would clearly depend on our underlying mathematical and statistical knowledge for us to be able to reliably determine the true recorded existence of the Higgs boson. Thus, there is arguably little or no knowledge that is built solely on evidence alone; rather, we see that constant interaction is needed between evidence and theory for us to make sense of either. As we journey in this hermeneutic circle, both theory and our ability to assess and obtain evidence are effectively refined. Thus, evidence cannot be the sole base on which to build 'the best' type of knowledge.

This co-dependency is reinforced by the fact that overreliance on the alluring, easy accessibility of evidence alone may lead us into spurious conclusions due to the ability of appearances to deceive. For example, an uncontacted tribe may reply to the claim of a missionary that the world is truly round with the 'evidence' that the ground at their feet is flat: this seems like indubitable evidence despite that with the modern scientific perspective we know that the appearance has to be read with a grain of salt, since the smoothness of the flat ground, due to the Earth's great relative size, only belies the true curvature of the Earth, which is not visible unless considered from a much larger perspective. This throws up the need of finding some means of prioritising different apparent sources of evidence. While this is not a repudiation of the importance of evidence, but rather also can be taken to highlight the need to always be collecting new evidence, it does draw attention to the need for critical examination of the evidence, a process that also requires critical reasoning and logical principles, which cannot be excluded from the collection and use of evidence.

In conclusion, while the above discussion has done much to expound the central role of evidence to the construction of knowledge, it also highlights the limits of evidence that warn us against an overly chauvinistic view of evidence. Lastly, I would also like to ask if evidence might not also refer to the process of logical deduction in as much as sensory perception or external observation: for is not something like Wiles' proof of Fermat's Last Theorem similarly referred to, in layman parlance at least, as evidence of the theorem's truth? With this insight in

mind, perhaps evidence might also in fact be a catch-all term for 'justification' in general, in which case evidence would clearly not just be a needed for the 'best type' of knowledge, but also a prerequisite for knowledge as a whole.

Comments:

Excellent exploration of issues raised in the question. Very good explanation, clear lines of reasoning and effective examples for the most part. Analysis is insightful although not always thorough. Great job overall!

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2019 | KI Y6 | CT1 | Paper 2 Section B -Passage

In a recent *New York Times* article entitled "Darkness on the Edge of the Universe," Physics professor Brian Greene (an esteemed scientist and mathematician) of Columbia University made an admission so startling that it caused me to do a double take. According to Greene, the space between scientific theory and observed data can be mind-numbingly huge. Since Einstein, science has attempted to account for and understand dark energy. Greene confesses that the "most refined attempts to calculate the amount of dark energy suffusing space miss the measured value by a gargantuan factor of 10^{123} (that is, a 1 followed by 123 zeroes) — the single greatest mismatch between theory and observation in the history of science."

If Science can be so wrong, where does that leave History? After all, science is performed in a laboratory with gizmos and high-tech measuring devices. The mindscape is History's laboratory: not a Bunsen burner in sight. Where science can be recreated no matter the location upon our tiny planet, the recreation of history can never occur, no matter how hard Civil War re-enactors try. Yet Science and History have two commonalities: one, they both seek "the truth," and two, they are both human creations and therefore sufferable to the human habit of error. So, which is closer to the truth? Intuitively, most people pick Science, but I choose History.

History often has different approaches because it is so subjective. It allows many points of view, or "multiplex" of views, as Jeffery Perl once put it. Therefore, one event from several different angles creates a history filled with depth, intrigue, somehow almost three-dimensional. Science, on the other hand, is not as multiplexed as History. Though peer reviewed, science is often surrounded by a monolithic point of view with one or two other upstart schools of thought nibbling at the periphery. History, in stark contrast, is less centred on one mode of monolithic thought. Several schools of thoughts compete simultaneously, and within each school are those rogue historians that refuse to be bound by a single school and jump from among many thoughts to complete their research.

Greene's article also presented a moral – all good stories have them. But the moral of the story involved Albert Einstein who produced the famed "theory of relativity." But the theory presented a problem: when Einstein reviewed his own mathematical formulas, they proved that the universe – along with time – can be shaped, twisted, bent, and warped. Einstein, according to Greene, refused to believe the universe's malleability and wrestled with this problem for ten years. Einstein responded by reshuffling some of the numbers in his original theory by introducing the mathematical existence of a "cosmological constant," otherwise known as dark energy. Einstein felt certain that this constant held the universe in check – equal amounts of energy (dark and light, gravity and anti-gravity) that existed to cancel each other out. But in 1929, an American astronomer knows as Edwin Hubble, proved that the universe was expanding, that distant galaxies

were moving away from us and at ever faster and increasing speeds. Einstein was crushed. Hubble used the original math from Einstein's initial theory of relativity to prove the red-shift, blue-shift "relative" movement of distant galaxies. Einstein's creation of "dark energy" appeared flawed.

But wait, says Greene, fast-forward to the 1990s where astronomers scrambled to explain why distant supernovae were speeding up rather than slowing down. Two teams came up with the same answer, the only way these massive exploding stars can be accelerating was to reintroduce Einstein's flawed "cosmological constant." Einstein's dark energy filled the explanation perfectly. If Einstein had been alive, another Nobel prize would have been awarded to him.

The moral of this story? Always question…always. It's what historians do, and what scientist ought to do. Until then, History will be closer to the truth than science.

Adapted from "Science versus History: Who Wins at Truth Seeking?"
by Joe Krulder

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of knowledge in History and Science. Respond with your own argument, supporting or challenging the author's assumptions and conclusion.

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2019 | KI Y6 | CT1 | Section B **Joshua Yong Zhi Hao | 19S06D**

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of knowledge in History and Science. Respond with your own argument, supporting or challenging the author's assumptions and conclusion.

The author argues that History is closer to the truth than Science for two reasons. First, historians always question while scientists do not, and it is by always questioning that a discipline gets closer to the truth, as evidenced by the inaccuracies which dogmatism has led Science into. Second, History allows for a multiplicity of views unlike Science, and a multiplicity of views makes for a more thorough understanding of the truth. I largely disagree with the author's conclusion because I believe he has overlooked the thorough questioning that occurs in Science and the failure of multiplicity of views to be as valuable in Science as in History due to fundamental differences in both disciplines' natures. Moreover, he uses few and questionably representative anecdotes to support his claims.

The author argues that historians always question while scientists do not. That historians always question he does not further support – and reasonably so, for this point is difficult to doubt. Many historical claims once considered a strong consensus were seriously questioned and their basis scrutinized later on by historians. For instance, it was once held among a vast majority of historians that having eliminated his rivals to become leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin held every significant action of the Communist government in an iron grip. But especially after the Cold War, many historians have proposed an alternative narrative: that so often the government machinery went out of control, with even those orders that were followed by one level of government then abused, modified or ignored by the next. Indeed, little if anything in History is not up for contention by future historians. However, the second part of the author's claim – that scientists do not always question – seems very misrepresentative of science. For a scientific law to be held, tests which falsify it must be devised and enacted, and a clear correspondence between the hypothesis, experimental predictions and experimental results outlined in a journal submission. The submission is then peer-reviewed by various experts before publication, and the

whole time other teams of scientists repeat the experimental methodology detail for detail to check that the results are really as claimed. So science evidently questions any claim before it can be held as a law. Moreover, no scientific law is ever verified beyond further questioning – Aristotelian physics, geocentric astronomy, the balance of bodily humors and geocatastrophism are all mainstream theories in medieval and pre-modern times which have fallen by the wayside today thanks to scientists who questioned them, devising tests to falsify them and then alternative theories to supersede them. So while scientists may at times seem to feel more sure of their laws and theories than historians ever do, which seems to be what suggested to the author that they do not always question, it cannot be granted that scientists do not always question.

The author argues, using the history of dark energy's conception and (mis-)treatment as a concept in science as support, that always questioning is how a discipline gets closer to the truth. Specifically, from his emphasis on Einstein's reluctance to question Hubble's calculations and conclusion that "dark energy" was a flawed concept, it seems the author insinuates that Einstein and other scientists would bring science closer to the truth if they retained the degree of scepticism to all scientific claims that historians do to all historical ones. But such an argument is problematic. An individual instance where confidence was misplaced in scientific ideas need not be representative of the situation for the tens of thousands of other scientific ideas in the scientific community. Indeed, it is not – dark energy is one of the most elusive concepts in science to date, but most other scientific concepts in which sufficient confidence has been placed to earn the name "law" or "theory" have not disappointed that confidence. For instance, quantum mechanics, which few doubted was the best approach to small-scale physics yet since its inception in the early 20th century, has been relied upon by the Chinese government to communicate instantly with a satellite across a distance of 300km using a phenomena known as entanglement; the gravitational waves predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity over a century ago were recently detected. The nature of Science – the aforementioned rigour of the scientific method by which all ideas are screened – simply allows for greater confidence to be justified than in History, whereas the author himself admits, historical events such as the Coup of Rome where Mussolini seized power cannot be repeated, and thus theories such as that Italian military sympathy was the main cause for that coup's success cannot be falsified by attempting to repeat the event. Since a historical theory cannot be falsified as easily as a scientific theory or law, it would be justified for more confidence to be placed in scientific theories or laws which remain standing than their historical counterparts. Hence the author's claim

that science should "always question" to the degree that History does cannot be granted either.

To support his second main argument, the author claims that the multiplicity of views present in dialogue in history which is missing in science gives a discipline a better understanding of the truth. In speaking of the depth and intrigue History offers, he seems to support this claim on the basis that the truth comes with a good degree of subjectivity – that different perspectives are part of what constitutes the truth, which supposes that no one perspective can be judged more accurate than the others. While this may be the case for History, however, the same cannot be said about Science. Granted, in History different perspectives arise from different understandings of what event is significant, which in turn rest on different value systems and contexts of the person with the perspective – value systems and contexts which cannot be said to be more or less correct. But in science, such a multiplicity of values gives way to a much more singular value – what the observer and bias-independent physical world out there is like. What is significant is thus similarly singular – that which accurately describes and predicts the physical world's behaviour. Based on this rather singular criterion, then, in practice it is almost unseen for two different scientific accounts to be equally accurate for all but extremely new fields. Ultimately, the value-subjectivity which leads to the value of multiple perspectives in history for approximating the truth does not apply to science.

In conclusion, the author's two main arguments, based on the value of History's supposedly greater scepticism and multiplicity of viewpoints respectively for getting closer to the truth than Science, both fail. Hence, the main conclusion that History is closer to the truth than Science cannot be granted.

Comments:

Excellent response, Joshua! Cogent piece, using language that is consistently clear and effective. The reconstruction of the author's argument is clear and accurate. Understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge in Science and History is comprehensive and insightful, with sufficient examples to illustrate your point. The implications of issues are also clearly explored. Evaluation is clear, logical and relevant.

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2019 | KI Y6 | CT2 | Paper 2 Section A - Passage

Is art knowledge? If so, how should it be conceived? To argue for art as a body of knowledge, we should either start out from a tight definition of knowledge and, upon emphasising its superiority to other definitions offered, proceed to show how nicely it also accommodates all that the arts have ever claimed to be and do; or again, we could avoid much argument by formulating both art and knowledge in terms so general and lofty, bathing them in so rich a glow that nothing, except possibly one's own good will, would stand out distinctly anymore. But both ways fail to truly consider the kind of knowledge art can give us. The way forward is to examine common ground between art and other fields of knowledge, such as science, and if art is found comparable, then we should embrace the arts as a legitimate body of knowledge.

If we assume that the "true nature of reality" is somehow known, then it will either be that the arts will be more "perfect" a means for that end than the sciences, or vice versa. Given a Platonic realm of ideas, or a universe of mechanical or electrodynamic laws as expressing the basic structure of reality, it will be science, and not the arts, which must appear as the more perfect vehicle to take one there. Starting with the concept of a living, dynamic and "irrational" universe, it will be the arts rather than science which promise a more perfect apprehension of its essential features. Schlegel writes, "it is the beginning of all poetry to abolish the law and method of rationally proceeding reason, and to plunge us once more into the ravishing confusions of fantasy, into the original chaos of human nature". No wonder people associate the arts with emotion and science with the pursuit of truth. Art as emotion seems to be entirely divorced from inquiries into what is "true" or "probably true" about this world, or so they say.

But such a distinction is flawed. As subject-matter, emotions are dealt with in both science and art. Neither has a monopoly on them, or any other topic, for that matter. As states of mind, emotions inhabit the scientist as well as the artist even though the mere "having of emotions" neither disqualifies the former nor distinguishes the latter. The arts may be "infecting" emotions sometimes, but more often than not, they clarify and intensify them. Artistic appreciation is less a matter of having, than of realising the meaning and impact of emotions. The claims that result from that process itself indicate the (very real) possibility for art to produce knowledge.

The traditional way of thinking about art as unfit for any serious 'objective' study of things and science as seeking the truth behind sober, conceptual structures of (theoretical) knowledge ought to be challenged. The separation between art and science has been so overstretched as to have become stultifying. Besides, the ideological basis underpinning this dichotomous view has long been abandoned. Philosophers of science since Vaihinger and Duhem have made explicit a good many of the fictional elements involved in scientific fact-'finding', and the arts have often proven the only medium by which to get close to certain aspects of the hard factuality of human experience and existence. Both

knowledge- and art-makers experiment, impose a discipline on their respective activities, explore, make hit-and-miss trials. Neither employs essentially different faculties. Both imagine, articulate, formulate, and construct. If we embrace science as a legitimate way of understanding the world, then we have to similarly embrace the arts.

Adapted from "Art as Knowledge" by Carl H Hamburg

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of knowledge that can be gained from art and science. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

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2019 | KI Y6 | CT2 | Section B **Joelle Phua Yi Xuan | 19S03C**

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of knowledge in History and Science. Respond with your own argument, supporting or challenging the author's assumptions and conclusion.

The author's main conclusion is that if we embrace science as a legitimate way of understanding the world (i.e. a body of knowledge), then we have to similarly embrace the arts. The author first establishes that the approach to argue for art as a body of knowledge is to examine the common ground between art and other fields of knowledge, such as science, and if art is found comparable, then we should embrace the arts as a legitimate body of knowledge. He then argues that the dichotomous view of science as an objective pursuit of truth and art as emotion and hence divorced from the pursuit of truth is flawed, based on the following premises: 1) Emotions are dealt with in both fields, 2) the traditional view of objectivity and fact-finding in science and the lack thereof in art has long been abandoned and 3) the approaches taken in both fields are similar. His argument appears to take for granted that Science is considered a legitimate body of knowledge; the implication from the main conclusion is that art should be embraced as a legitimate body of knowledge. I disagree with the author's main conclusion, as I find his premises to be false, and his overall approach in establishing art as a body of knowledge is also flawed.

Firstly, the author argues that neither science nor art has a monopoly on emotions as a subject matter, and that, as states of mind, emotions inhabit the scientist as well as the artist. While this may be true, the fact remains that science as a discipline aims to minimize the influence of emotions in its inquiry, and strives to be as objective and neutral as possible. If a scientist were to allow his personal emotions to affect the results of a study, this could have severe consequences - for example, a clinical trial to develop a drug follows strict guidelines to avoid any sort of personal inclination of the researcher or test subjects, and may involve blinding (in which the participants are unaware of whether they are receiving the placebo or the actual drug), or even double blinding (in which both the clinician and the participants are unaware of who is

receiving the actual drug for the duration of the experiment). On the other hand, artists rarely go to such lengths to reduce the impact of their emotions and biases - in fact, these are often embraced, as they may strengthen an artist's individual style and voice. Artists not only embrace their emotions, but often aim to transmit what they feel to others as well. Upon viewing the wartime atrocities in Picasso's Guernica, audiences may feel horror or sadness, and these emotions would be considered an expected and even intended response to the artwork, something that is undesirable in the field of science.

Secondly, the author also claims that the traditional way of thinking about art as unfit for serious 'objective' study of things and science as seeking truth behind sober, conceptual structures of knowledge ought to be challenged. It is true that science cannot claim absolute certainty or to provide absolutely objective knowledge about reality (indeed, if we subscribe to Kant's view of the "noumena", we cannot even claim that there is an objective reality), but science does depend on strong inductive reasoning and can claim a high level of reliability in its findings, due to the Scientific Method, which is widely applied across cultures and countries. Scientific inquiry involves observation, the formulation of a hypothesis, testing and experimentation, and finally a verification of findings by the academic community. The repeatability and reproducibility of results lend credibility to the method, and hence reliability and objectivity of knowledge gained. On the other hand, art has no such standardized procedure to be followed. While the skill employed in creating a work of art may be affirmed by the artistic community, or the 'ArtWorld', the actual content of the artwork and the message behind it is often subjective. While the artist may have a particular message they wish to convey, there is no guarantee that the viewers of the artwork will understand it in the same way. In fact, part of the appeal of art is the possibility for imagination and openness of interpretation - each person's experience of art is personal and unique to them, so we cannot say that art allows us to conduct a serious, objective study of human experience and existence. While science has many limitations, its goal is ultimately fact-finding, to provide insights into empirical reality, while art serves a variety of purposes. Some artists strive to provide insights into reality, while others are merely expressing sadness, joy, or anger, and others still produce art for pure aesthetic appreciation. The goals of art and science are fundamentally different.

The author's third premise leading to the sub-conclusion that the reason why the distinction often made between art and science is flawed is that the approaches taken in art and science as well as the faculties employed are

essentially similar. While experimentation, imagination, and construction do play a role in both domains, as established earlier, the approach to science is much more rigorous and reliable than that in art. Hence, all of the premises presented are insufficient to justify the author's sub-conclusion, and in this sense, we cannot embrace the arts as a legitimate way of understanding the world, as we do science.

Looking at the overall argument, however, I argue that the main problem with the author's argument is the approach that he establishes in the first paragraph. The kind of knowledge that art can give us is entirely different from the knowledge that we gain from science, so to compare the two and see if art measures up to science is a futile endeavour. As the author rightly recognises, artistic appreciation is a matter of realising the meaning and impact of emotions. Art can give us knowledge about our own emotions - for some, art may be a form of catharsis, to release them from distress or rage - and it can also give us insights into the world we live in, depending on our own personal interpretations of artworks. For example, plays and literature often communicate some moral content, teaching what us what is right or wrong, such as Plato's idea of a 'perfect society' or lessons on the dangers of pride and narcissism in Greek myths. In this way, although art may be a far less objective and structured field than science, it can still provide is with knowledge, and serve as a legitimate way of understanding the world.

Comments:

Excellent reconstruction of the author's argument, and good engagement with the main points. While evaluation is broad, there is sufficient depth to your arguments and support from both art and science, though not always even. Understanding of nature and construction of knowledge in both fields is good, with relevant examples used to support points, though not always comprehensive. Well done.

2019 | GP Y5 Practice | Paper 2 Passage

Christina Hardyment discusses the changes within the family in recent times.

Once upon a time, the family was as lifelong nest and safety net. Life was a lottery: those born into good families were more likely than not to thrive, those born into bad ones were more likely than not to go under. Given that life itself was a chancy business, couples tended to stick together for better or for worse. If for worse, at least it wasn't for long. Thanks to late marriages and early deaths, especially deaths of women in childbirth, marital co-existence in the middle of the last century was for only 15 years on average. Today, we are on the whole far more prosperous and healthy and have a much longer life expectancy because of better access to education, contraception, and domestic technology.

Yet, doom and gloom over the present state of the family are rife. Media pundits shake their heads over the hordes of selfish singletons, soaring divorce rates, the costly welfare benefits haemorrhaging into the pockets of lone mothers, and the growing number of disaffected young men who seem all but unemployable. Do we really need to be so despondent? Or is it possible to argue that a new model family is evolving, a little painfully, but much fitter for modern times? Quality of life surveys reveal that people report high levels of satisfaction with family life. Ninety per cent of us rate family life as "very important". Nine out of 10 people marry, and of those who do, nine out of 10 have children. Only one in 10 people lives alone.

The number of "traditional nuclear families" is, however, smaller, because it takes less time to move from life before dependent children to life afterwards. That is why the number of couples without children now represents a quarter of the population. Add to this our new longevity, and it could mean an additional two decades living tete-a-tete. This affects marriages profoundly. A short, uncertain life span encourages people to cling to what they have. It is the increased potential length of what Percy B. Shelley called "the longest journey" of marriage that causes so many of us to break up. Marriages today also last for only 15 years on average.

No one should downplay the personal tragedy and pain of divorce, but we are beginning to accept it as a natural stage in the evolution of the modern couple. Some have pointed out that divorce is not a Western disease; it is an economic luxury. The rich have always divorced when it suited them. "Divorce is a consumer good," says William J. Goode, author of Divorce Patterns. Most divorces are initiated by women, now confident that they can manage financially on their own.

It is worth emphasising, however, that the majority of modern marriages are successful. The prediction that four out of ten marriages may break up is far from meaning that nearly half of us are single. The number of remarriages is on the increase, especially in Britain. If

we calculate the number of people who eventually settle down, rather than just those who strike lucky the first time, then success rates rise from between 50 and 60 per cent to between 80 and 90 per cent.

Friends are also becoming just as important as relatives. The new-model friendships are much more than convenient temporary handrails before you disappear up the aisle with your best beloved. They are the enduring pacts of the American sitcoms *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*. Such elective affinities can reach the parts that family has failed to reach.

In addition, grandparents, more hale and hearty than ever, and increasingly numerous in today's reconstituted families, are still a vital part of the composite family, supporting their children with more or less welcome advice, child-minding, babysitting, fnance, furniture, and accommodation. Nearly two-thirds of child care in Britain is undertaken by relatives, most of them grandmothers, and friends.

To be sanguine about the state of the family in general does not imply complacency about the real difficulties facing young people when they first become parents themselves. One of the most obvious is the ambitious new script for lifetime careers adopted by women. If both parents are working full time away from the home, creating a supportive and sustaining domestic environment and achieving the high standards of modern parenting is a juggling act unsustainable except by a wealthy minority. All too often individuals blame each other for what is nothing less than an impossible endeavour.

The position of fathers is also in flux. One of the most heartwarming achievements of the last few decades has been the seismic shift in the place of fathers in families. But although fathers are eager to participate in family life, the workplace is loathe to offer flexibility. This means more stresses on the family.

Another difficulty facing parents is their inexperience. The new, compact, closely spaced families have produced whole generations of young people who have never handled a baby before having one of their own. They are far more in need of advice and information from outside the family than their parents were.

Children's lives have also changed. They spend much less time in the home than they used to. One of the most profound and underestimated influences on families has been universal schooling. Since the Second World War, school has become an increasingly important part of a child's life. Daily absence from home, week in, week out, for a minimum of 11 years and a maximum of 15 years of childhood, has dramatically diminished the opportunities parents have to influence their children.

Of course, education has its advantages. But life skills need to be instilled somewhere, somehow. Teachers need much higher status if they are properly to fulfil the role of educators and mentors. Parents need to be closely involved in what is happening. Watch

a child's face light up when he sees his mother arrive to help with a school trip, and you will understand why.

Finally, we need to recognise that real homes cannot be bought off the shelf. Despite the vacuum cleaner and the microwave oven, the home demands constant attention, thought and adjustment to the changing needs of the family within. Like a snail's shell, it needs to be tailored to fit. Unsatisfactory homes lie behind the majority of children who fail to thrive: they also cause depression and divorce. Perhaps the most conclusive evidence that we could allow ourselves – to be much more opportunistic than we currently are about the state of the family – comes from children themselves. A survey published in July by Virginia Morrow, of the Centre for Family Research, at Cambridge University, discovered that children accept wide variations in family practice and structures. Their definitions did not centre on nuclear norms or genetic ties, and they had definite ideas about the importance of siblings, god, and grandparents and friends, as well as about parents.

"A family is a group of people which all cares about each other," wrote 13 year-old Tara. "They can all cry together, laugh together, argue together and go through all the emotions together. Some live together as well. Families are for helping each other through life."

Christina Hardymen sees several changes taking place within the context of the modern family and argues for a shift in mindsets. How far would you agree with her observations, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?

In paragraph 9, the author asserts that although fathers are eager to participate in family life, their hands are tied by employers, who are loath to provide the necessary flexible work arrangements. In Singapore, fathers are in fact more hesitant to take on domestic roles in the household, not only because of a lack of provision on part of their employers, but also because of the pervasiveness of traditional mindsets regarding work and family. To put matters into perspective, Singaporean fathers have come a long way from being the distant breadwinner and disciplinarian of my parents' generation, and are now more involved in their children's education and recreational activities. However, fathers here are careful about over-investing their time in family life. For instance, although take-up rates for paternity leave have doubled since 2013 to around half of all employed fathers, this number is far below that of Nordic countries like Denmark and Sweden, where work-life balance is privileged and both genders are seen as equal contributors at the workplace. This comparatively low take-up rate could be attributed to the rather tokenistic two weeks of government-paid paternal leave given in Singapore, which is woefully insufficient for new fathers to adapt to living with their newborns or to handle their wives' baby blues. However, the underlying reason may well be that fathers fear that their bosses would view taking paternal leave as a lack of commitment to their job, which could, in a very real way, affect their career progression. After weighing potential career costs against the brevity of paternal leave, many fathers then decide to err on the side of caution by foregoing leave. Furthermore, though many mothers now pursue careers of their own, this is usually secondary to the father's career. For instance, a friend of mine has parents who were both successful lawyers, but upon the arrival of their children, it was the mother who swiftly left her job as a partner at a law firm to take care of them, while the father forged on relentlessly with his career in the hospitality business. Patriarchal norms that ascribe career success to a father's core identity remain in our public consciousness to this day, which also contribute

towards a certain hesitancy in Singaporean fathers to participate as eagerly in domestic life as their Western counterparts. A change in these patriarchal mindsets is therefore needed if Singaporean fathers are to have greater freedom to do so.

In paragraph 4, the author argues that with increasing affluence and therefore financial independence, there has been a shift in the public mindset, where divorce is now accepted as a natural stage in the evolution of the modern couple. Undoubtedly, in Singapore, divorces have become more commonplace over the decades, in accordance with global trends of liberalisation: the number of divorces per married male resident has doubled since 1980. However, because of the dominance of traditional Asian values that uphold the institution of marriage, divorce remains highly discouraged except in extreme cases of marital strife. Indeed, the percentage of marriages ending in divorce in Singapore is easily a tenth that of liberal countries such as France and the United States, where the pursuit of individual happiness is prioritised greatly over traditional values. Here, first marriages are expected to succeed, and divorce cases remain very much an outlier. Moreover, contrary to the author's argument, even though Singaporean millennials are earning higher incomes and enjoying greater economic prosperity than their Generation X counterparts, divorce rates among Singaporean millennials are actually on the decline. This may be attributed to the persistence of traditional values, such as loyalty, propriety and respect, which make marriage a much weightier decision than in more liberal countries, leading to more stable marriages and discouraging couples from going their separate ways. For instance, the wedding ceremony for Chinese Singaporeans is usually a very formal affair, with business partners, colleagues and close friends of the family being invited to a banquet to witness the couple's union. In addition, along with bridal dowry, a sum of money, called 'pin jin', is also offered by the groom's family to the bride's family as a symbol of respect. A tea ceremony is also customarily held, where both bride and groom will offer a cup of Chinese tea to their parents as thanks for their upbringing. Therefore, the bonds of marriage are regarded as a serious lifetime commitment, the severance of which is not only a matter of losing dignity in the eyes of friends and colleagues, but also a sign of disrespect to one's parents and parents-in-law. In conservative Singaporean society, divorce is rather frowned upon, and is far from being flippantly accepted as a natural stage in the evolution of the modern couple. That being said, however, in cases of extreme marital strife, adequate support is provided for divorce. For instance, the Ministry of Social and Family Development has been carrying out the Mandatory Parenting Programme, which comprises consultation sessions to better help couples intent on divorce make the best arrangements for their children's wellbeing.

In the final analysis, Singapore's views on family still lag behind the socially progressive mindsets of our more liberal counterparts like the United States or the United Kingdom. In certain cases, the shift in mindsets that the author calls for is a welcome one. For example, if employers and society at large adopt a more gender-neutral view of career advancement, fathers can have more freedom to care for their children, particularly in cases where their children have special needs like autism spectrum disorder. However, in other cases, this mindset shift may not be a positive development. Although we should be accepting of divorcees and single-parent families, normalising divorce as a perfectly natural consequence of marriage may result in couples hastily filing for divorce, rather than developing the resilience to work through their marital problems.

Comments:

Organised and nuanced work, drawing on relevant and specific evidence as well as broad trends from the local context. Well done.

2019 | GP Y5 Practice | Paper 2 AQ Response Ashita Ashish Sule | 20S03J

Christina Hardymen sees several changes taking place within the context of the modern family and argues for a shift in mindsets. How far would you agree with her observations, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?

Hardyment discusses several changes within the family in recent times and opines that there is a need to change existing mindsets, as holding up the traditional family as the model to aspire to is often incompatible with the reality that alternative family arrangements are increasingly prevalent today, and can be just as strong, stable and loving as traditional families. Several points mentioned by the author on the changes taking place within the modern family find its manifestations in Singapore's society and my own experience, given Singapore's increasingly modernized society that has invariably altered family units.

Hardyment posits that "both parents working full time away from home" makes it unsustainable to achieve a "supportive and sustaining domestic environment" (paragraph 8). This is largely true in Singapore, where longer working hours for both parents significantly reduce time spent between parents and children, especially on weekdays. The Families For Life Council found that the main barriers keeping families in Singapore from spending time together are long working hours, which suggests that changes in terms of work commitments in the modern Singaporean family has resulted in fewer opportunities for family time, as parents are less frequently available at home. This could lead to fewer opportunities for parents to cultivate a supportive and sustaining domestic environment as they spend less time at home, making it likely for children to be deprived of certain familial values and cultures that would otherwise have been more strongly instilled in them. However, it is important to note that only the quantity of time available for parents to spend at home may not necessarily determine their domestic environment, which, in my opinion, is more greatly influenced by the quality of time parents spend at home. A survey by the Families for Life Council found that a whopping 92% of Singaporeans ranked family as their most important priority, and family activities that increase quality of family time are popular amongst Singaporeans, such as having meals together,

celebrating family occasions such as birthdays, or going on vacations together. These activities enable Singaporeans to spend quality time with their family, yet, they do not require spending large amounts of time with each other. Hence, despite long working hours for both parents, a supportive and sustaining domestic environment can be created as long as there is meaningful quality time spent between family members, which strengthens their ties and enables them to create a strong and sustainable foundation for a supportive and sustained domestic environment. Since quality family time is prevalent among Singaporeans, familial objectives that are pivoted on a sustainable domestic culture are still achievable. Therefore, there is a need to shift mindsets by viewing quality family time over the traditional mindset of quantity as a main determinant to a sustainable family environment.

Hardyment also proffers that children "spending much less time in the home than they used to" has "dramatically diminished the opportunities parents have to influence their children" (paragraph 11). While it is true that children in Singapore spend much less time in the home, given Singapore's long schooling hours, after school extra-curricular activities, and the increasingly prevalent enrichment lessons such as academic tuition and music lessons, it has not reduced the opportunities that parents in Singapore capitalise on to influence their children. This is evident from the prevalence of "helicopter parenting" in Singapore, where parental involvement is considered essential when drilling a child for examinations and success in life. Helicopter parents in Singapore can be seen doing their best to get their children to succeed, which can be seen from instances where local outlets like The New Paper gush over parents who helped their children excel in school by revising with them, and the proliferation of tellingly-named websites such as Kiasu Parents and the Asian Parent, where anxious parents eagerly trade tips about recent curriculum trends, how to ace admissions interviews, or where to find the best tutors or nutritional supplements. This suggests that Singaporean parents still tap on every possible opportunity they have to influence their children, and it is clear that children spending less time at home has not drastically reduced parents' roles in shaping their children's lives. Therefore, while the context of the modern family is changing given the reduced amount of time children spend at home, in this case, a shift in mindsets among parents has not taken place in Singapore. Yet, taking into account less time spent at home by children, large amounts of parental involvement may in fact stifle a positive family environment, as evident from the fact that Singaporean students are among those who have the highest levels of stress. Hence, a change in mindsets may be necessary to strike a balance between parental involvement and an overall healthy family environment.

In conclusion, the traditional family may have served society well, but times have changed, and modern alternatives to the traditional family have emerged. Thus, it is important to embrace family diversity in today's modern society, and shift our mindsets accordingly.

Comments:

Strong work: a relevant and well-developed response, drawing on fitting examples from the Singaporean context and providing detail to convince.

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