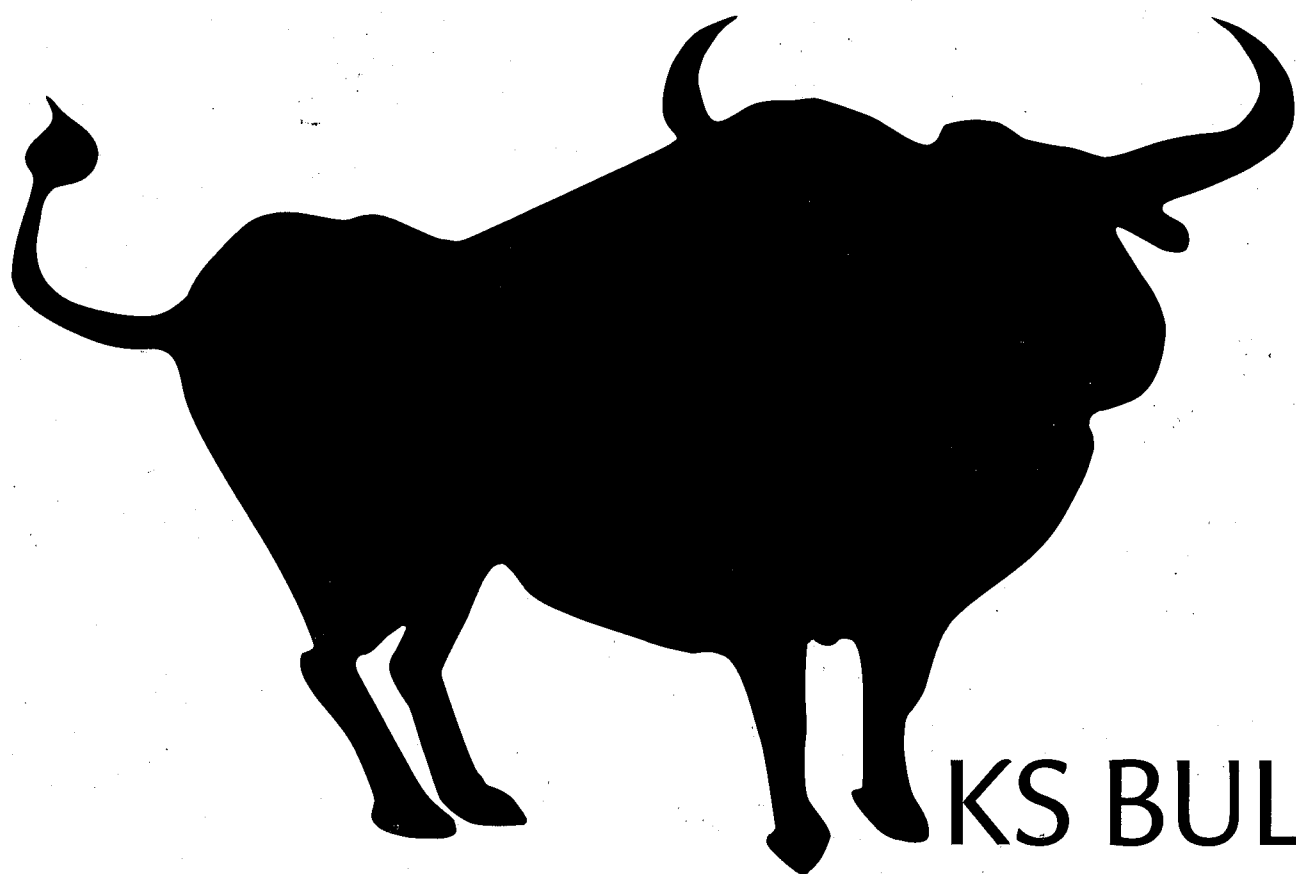


Raffles Institution Junior College
Knowledge Skills Department



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Message from the Principal

I read Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending*, winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize, two weeks ago and was reminded of how powerful ending paragraphs can be. The crux of Barnes' story lies in the very last page - and that is where the reader finally "gets it" and is led to discover the genius of the author.

Let me cite you my favourite endings from two classic novels.

Albert Camus, in his allegory *The Plague*, has his narrator, the doctor, say this in the last paragraph:
And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.

Victor Hugo, in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, leaves us with an image of true devotion:
About eighteen months or two years after the events which terminate this story ... they found among all those hideous carcasses two skeletons, one of which held the other in its embrace. One of these skeletons was that of a woman.... The other, which held this one in a close embrace, was the skeleton of a man. It was noticed that his spinal column was crooked, his head seated on his shoulder blades, and that one leg was shorter than the other... it was evident that he had not been hanged. Hence, the man to whom it had belonged had come thither and had died there. When they tried to detach the skeleton which he held in his embrace, it fell to dust.

We spend time crafting good introductions to our essays. What if we also end with impact? Some writers do that with a stunning set of statistics, others use methods such as an apt quote, a disturbing scenario, a contrary view or contrarian observation. The next time you read a novel or an essay, examine how the author ends his or her thesis and learn from the best of them.

Happy reading.



Lim Lai Cheng (Mrs)
Principal

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2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 1

'It is increasingly challenging to be a man today.' Do you agree?

Song Chunzi | 12S03E

We used to live in a highly patriarchal society. Men used to be the sole breadwinner and head of every family and the highest positions in almost every country were all held by men. To be a man, even till today, entails dominance and stature, arguably over women and other men. Things, however, have changed. The advent of feminism and advocacy for women's rights has seen more women being empowered; some, however, have been empowered arguably at the expense of men. While it is true that many societies still conform to the conventional notion of patriarchy, I believe that in many places, especially those in developed countries, societies have imposed more expectations on men and have also advocated for female equality which unfairly disadvantages the males, and these have led to males facing more challenges today in trying to keep up with society's definition of being a 'man'.

It used to be that the only expectation society had of men was to provide for the family by bringing home the bacon, while females took care of household chores and nurtured their children. In today's society, however, the roles of men and women are no longer this clear cut. With more females entering the workforce as a result of more gender-equal education made available to them, society has increasingly called upon men to take up a more equal role in the family. Iceland and Sweden, two of the most egalitarian societies in the world, have even granted men paid parental leave, a privilege once unique to women, in an attempt to push forth the idea of equal child care burden. It may then seem that women and men now share equal burdens and men are thus not more challenged than they used to be. However, is this really the case? The truth is that while society now strives to make men take up equal roles in the house, the expectations of them as the primary breadwinner in families still predominate. In Asian countries, it is not uncommon for women's incomes to be seen as supplementary to the males. The income tax return form in Singapore further exemplifies this by assuming that men are the main income earners of households. The economic expectations of men have not diminished in most societies. Just as successful women are lauded for being able to cook and clean (a Channel NewsAsia programme where the news presenters delightfully coo at seeing women being able to hold up both the skies of work and home comes to mind), so men are also required to take up similar dual roles. If they only work and do not help their wives at home, they risk being labelled as unfairly domineering over women, but the opposite also attracts the wrath of society on them for being incapable. It is not easy to fulfill both of these roles satisfactorily, and thus men do face more challenges today than they used to.

Furthermore, adding on to men's financial responsibilities is the problem of rising costs of living. Inflation has taken its toll on many families, especially the less well-to-do ones in developed countries. The increasingly fiscally challenged society makes the burden on men's shoulders even more pronounced. When monetary problems arise, men are also more likely to blame themselves for being less capable. Therefore, current financial conditions also make societal expectations for men even harder to meet.

In a bid for gender equality, gender quotas have also been widely implemented in such areas as politics and the workplace. Gender quotas vastly jeopardise men's opportunities and make it tough for men to sustain their positions of superiority. Among the 20 countries with top female representation in parliaments, 17 utilise some form of gender quota. India, for example, mandates that 33.1 percent of parliamentary seats be held by women. While I acknowledge their good intentions, it is rather patent that this superficial form of equality largely discriminates against men. British Columbia's New Democratic Party, for example, makes it compulsory for at a woman to hold at least one of the three top party positions. This resulted in a lack of replacement for party leader Carole James, when she wanted to retire. The problem was not a lack of suitable candidates –



many males had expressed their interest. The crux of the issue was that eligible men were not allowed to take up the position due to the rules implemented. Besides the lack of opportunities for men to further establish their stature and power, and thus live up to societal expectations, such policies to achieve greater gender equality actually benefit women at the expense of men. Men and women are both human beings – they are essentially the same. How is it justifiable, then, that just because they are men, they are accorded less opportunities? Men are finding it harder to rise to the top, and this is not a matter of societal expectations; it is that their ambitions are unfairly compromised simply because societies want to look like they have achieved greater equality. Clearly, men of today face many more obstacles than they used to, simply because they are men.

On the same issue of gender equality, several issues surface when men are not allocated the same rights as women in today's society. Custodial issues are one prime example where the female parent is automatically awarded custody of their child even if the father could be the more nurturing party. This, in some cases, deprives the men of exercising their right to parenthood. Regardless of their disproportionate burden in the financial arena, men who are fathers still have the instinctive paternal inclination, and would want to nurture their offspring. With the swiftly rising divorce rates in the world, it is not difficult to see how this could compromise men's happiness and fulfilment in life. Therefore, societal changes that lead to the breakdown of families and consequently the separation of fathers from their children could also add to the challenges of being a man.

However, regardless of the many challenges posed to men by society, these are observably more applicable to men in developed countries. In less developed countries, men still hold a much more superior position compared to women. Women in Ethiopia, for example, are regularly abused by men, and these acts of abuse of almost 70% of the women there are defended as an assertion of authority that males are naturally accorded with. Unlike in developed countries, women in Third World countries are not only unable to fight back, they also accept these practices because they think that they “deserve” it. Clearly, in these countries, men are still at liberty to exercise their authority over women and prove to other men their power and authority. The pace of change in these countries is glacial; therefore, while men in industrialised countries find it harder to keep up with societal expectations, men in places where women still have little power can inexorably do what they have always done, and thus face few new challenges.

All in all, being of the male sex has traditionally brought with it notions of power and dominance, not least over women, their counterparts. Being a man, more than anything else, means what society thinks males should do. While little has changed in the developing countries, the male sex in developed countries has largely found itself increasingly trying to catch up with the changing expectations that society has of it. While it is laudable that women rights have increasingly been advocated for and enhanced, it would be unfair to consequently judge men in a different light, or worse, compromise their opportunities simply because they are not women. Men and women are fundamentally equal. Any fight for gender equality should thus aim for equality regardless of biology, and not jeopardise one sex over the other.

Marker's comments:

You have written an essay that is nuanced and engaged with key issues. While there is an obvious emphasis on the socio-political dimension, the high quality of discussion ensures that breadth of discussion is not compromised.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 2

'Technology has made us worse communicators, not better.' What do you think?

Elyssa Tan Jing Ting 12S03K

Since the beginning of time, communication has existed as the foundation for humans in establishing relationships and conveying ideas. Such a primal and almost instinctual need for such a means of interaction has, of course, spurred people throughout the ages to create better ways to expedite the process of communication. The boom of technology in the 21st century is testament to that trend. While electronic devices such as computers and cell phones have served to make us more efficient communicators, it is still unclear if these improvements have made us more effective communicators.

Efficiency in communication brought about by technology can be seen in a practical sense. If anything, we have definitely become better communicators in utilising the resources available to us to convey our ideas in a faster and more concise manner. Gone are the days when snail mail was the only means of long-distance interaction; when a message intended for a person across the country had to endure several days in the postal service. Today, emails and text messaging have become staple means of long-distance communication, which is understandable as messages are delivered to the intended recipient with just a single click or touch of a button. Such efficiency has been made possible by the invention of cell phones and the Internet, and these all fall under the large umbrella of technology. Furthermore, the very fact that these means of communication are exceptionally speedy and do not cost much, has led us to take our liberties with it - sending short, brief messages in full knowledge that it would be socially acceptable and not at all taxing on the wallet to send more should the message be incomplete or need to be supplemented. Heavily-worded letters are no longer required; a brief and succinct description would do. Technology has indeed been the catalyst for such a phenomenon and the efficiency that this medium has brought us has made us better and faster communicators in this respect.

However, it can be argued that the technologically-induced brevity has taken a toll on our social lives, making us less effective communicators with regard to interpersonal relationships and interactions. Undoubtedly, the invention of computers, the Internet, and the rise of new media can be held responsible for this. Take for instance, social networking giant Twitter. Twitter prides itself largely on brevity in its characteristic 140-character status updates it limits its users to. Of course, as the great Shakespeare once quipped, "Brevity is the soul of wit". This is undoubtedly what Twitter tries to promote and has had its impact on the rising community of satirical Twitterers who have compacted jokes and snarky comments on society within a single status update. The conciseness in this is undeniable. However, this does not translate well in the real social world we live in as the constant expectation and the primal need for communication lie more in the details rather than in brevity. Even as the presence of such websites demanding brevity gets increasingly palpable in our lives, the expectations of the people we interact with on a daily basis goes far beyond that of short, intermittent messages or witty one-liners and extend more deeply into detailed conversations. The technology which requires and has made us accustomed to succinct communication may have rendered us slightly inept at the reality of social communication and made us less effective communicators.

Of course, the slight deterioration of social interaction brought about by technology has not rendered us entirely unable to communicate effectively. In fact, it has instead made effective communication easier in the spread and conveying of ideas. Technology and its various means of communication have, as established, increased the speed and efficiency at which ideas are conveyed. It has served as a medium for people to share their thoughts and ideas with a large mass of people. An example in recent history is the Arab Spring, where hundreds of protestors in countries like Libya and Egypt harnessed the efficiency of communication through the Internet and communicated their ideas effectively by organising protests and movements on the social



networking site Facebook. The people with this common goal were united through the connecting force of the Internet, which was a technological invention that helped them convey their thoughts and ideas effectively to a large number of people. Hence, technology does expedite the process of communication, translating to better communication through the conveying of ideas to a large audience almost instantaneously.

Technology, in its various mediums of communication, has indeed provided us with opportunities to improve the quality of human interaction and relations. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of communication through technology hinges largely on how it is utilised and how the individual chooses to react to it. Technology will only be an advancement to this vital form of interaction if its power is used and harnessed appropriately.

Marker's comments:

You have given a well-informed response that shows keen awareness of current communications technology and its ramifications. Good job!



2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 3

'Technology has made us worse communicators, not better.' What do you think?

Afzan Bte Abdul Khalim : 12S06C

With the modernisation of cultures and the advancement of telecommunications, people separated by large bodies of ocean are able to communicate with one another in more convenient ways that were not accessible even to individuals living in close proximity centuries ago. Ease of communication has improved radically with time: letters to e-mails and telephones to video conferences in free and readily available software such as Skype and Oovoo. Even so, humans, especially those living fast-paced lives, are increasingly obsessed with speed. Hence it is not surprising that newer technology such as fibre-optic communication is developed to address these recently evolved needs. Nevertheless, such technologies are like a double-edged sword and while the benefits are obvious, it has disadvantages and pose possible problems as well. Certainly, one must not confuse the convenience of communication through technology with an improved ability to communicate with others.

Most people are quick to say that technology has allowed us to reconnect with old friends and distant relatives. Popular social networking sites such as Facebook and even the newly-launched Google Plus have developed ways to make it easier for us to track down the profiles of our loved-ones, acquaintances and even our teachers or bosses. In fact, with the ubiquitous smartphones such as the iPhone and Blackberry, one can be updated with their contacts' recent activities even on the train or secretly during a lesson in class, as long as there is a working network that connects them to the Internet.

However, such ease has led to laziness. People are increasingly using these social networking sites as an excuse for not meeting up in real life, such that chatting on Facebook could possibly replace a chat over coffee while emails have replaced handwritten letters. Most people are so obsessed with speed and convenience that they fail to acknowledge the charm of the earlier, traditional ways of staying in contact with friends and relatives. Yes, recent technology has replaced inconvenient ways of communication but it does not necessarily provide the same experience and value that face-to-face conversations do. Yet people are taking the easier way out and even though they are connected with each other, they are possibly emotionally distant, which can worsen relationships instead of enhancing or even sustaining them. Surely such laziness does not lead to effective communication if it distances people from one another.

Some have argued that technology has created the platform for people, even those who are socially awkward, to express themselves, and interact with more people than they would in real life. These people have argued that this will then build confidence amongst users and develop communication skills, as well as the ability to deal with people of differing personalities. This is made possible through popular websites such as YouTube and online news links such as CNN and The Economist, where people can express their opinions conveniently under the comments section with the option of hiding behind the cloak of anonymity.

Yet, it is this cloak of anonymity that has led to problems. Some people have taken advantage of their hidden identity by posting rude remarks and comments revealing discriminatory stereotypes. In fact, one can easily find insensitive religious debates in the comments section of YouTube videos, usually sparked off by an individual who does not realise the serious implications of his rude remarks. This has become so serious that countries, such as Singapore, which recognise the potential danger that such problems pose, have passed legislations that make it offensive by law to post discriminatory comments. It is definitely true that disregarding basic social and ethical etiquette when communicating online does not make us better communicators. In fact, it has given some the freedom to offend others with their bigotry.

Technology does not necessarily equip us with necessary social and communication skills for real life. The virtual world may be filled with eloquent online speakers, but in some cases, such people only have confidence in their virtual world. Some individuals are so comfortable with the keyboard that they do not spend enough time socialising with people in the real world. Others might lack actual social skills and while they are comfortable in the virtual world, may tremble with anxiety when talking to colleagues in real life or when sitting for an interview. In these respects, technology has made some people more socially awkward and incapable of communicating with ease in real life.

Technology has undoubtedly made the world smaller and made possible communication between people separated by geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, we must not confuse such ease with actual communication skills. While the changing world of today has made online skills necessary, it is equally paramount for us to continue living our lives without certain technologies. It is permissible to maximise the advantages provided by telecommunications technologies such as sending official emails, but it can be detrimental if such modes of communication entirely replace the charm and experience of meeting and socialising with people in real life. Surely our loved ones deserve more than just a Facebook wall post.

Marker's comments:

Though somewhat raw, you have brought into your essay commendable coverage of key issues, and discussed them with ease.



2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 4

"We asked for workers. We ended up with problems instead." Is this a fair assessment of the impact of foreign workers in Singapore?

See Ming L 12S03K

A staggering 40% of the people residing in Singapore are in fact non-locals, a statistic that has been an issue of contention amongst Singaporeans in recent years. While the Singapore government has consistently defended its foreign workers policy on the premise that the development and sustainability of our economy is threatened by our shrinking and greying work force, thus necessitating the influx of foreign workers to boost, or at the very least sustain our economic productivity, local citizens have decried this policy, citing a multitude of reasons to explain their resentment of foreign presence in Singapore. This essay will seek to discuss the merits and demerits of foreign workers and evaluate whether this xenophobic social atmosphere so acutely encapsulated in the quote is really caused by vices stemming from foreigners.

It has been established that it is imperative that we bring in foreign workers to remedy the problems of a shrinking population, due to our staggeringly low birthrate that has stagnated at 1.2, a far cry from the stipulated 2.1. In time, Singapore will feel the effects of a significantly smaller workforce upon the demise of the current generation of workers and when the younger generation rises to take their place. Of course, one may argue that skills and knowledge wise, the quantifiably smaller work force will still be on par with that of the workforce of today, rendering the argument that has since been established as the government's strong stance for foreign workers naught. However, it must not go unnoticed that this proliferation of knowledge is not exclusive to Singapore – it is a global phenomenon, a corollary of more accessible education and with more people pursuing higher levels of education. To maintain the economic advantage we yield over many countries now, it is incontrovertible that we must ensure that we continue to have a sizeable workforce equipped with the wit and skill to take on the global economy. On this premise, foreign talent, which in itself constitutes a significant fraction of foreign workers, is indeed a necessity. The panoply of problems that are associated with the presence of foreign talent now becomes ever more pertinent, given that they are here to stay. Singaporeans have cited reasons such as increased competition for jobs and an increasingly large pool of local unemployed workers as problems pertaining to the influx of foreign talent. Against this dour backdrop it may seem as though foreign talent have brought more problems than benefits, since after all, it is the prerogative of the government to care for its people, and this duty of care extends to employment. However, upon further dissection of the intricacies of the contention, one will realise that they are completely parallel concerns. Indeed the government is acting to safeguard our economy for the welfare of future generations to come, by ensuring the competitiveness of our workforce vis-à-vis the world. The problem of unemployment is not a consequence of this act; rather, it stems from the fact that these Singaporeans are not qualified to perform the duties that foreign talent have been tasked with. Many of the unemployed are those who are not well educated and are thus deemed to be incompetent to take on these higher-skilled jobs. While it may seem cruel to say so, it is the mechanism of the survival of the fittest in this epoch of exponential growth of knowledge that has rendered the less educated jobless, not the presence of foreign talent per se.

Following this argument, it seems only natural then to question the importance of foreign labour, which constitutes the other equally significant half of foreign workers, who have not the intellectual capacity nor prodigal skill to drive our economy to greater heights. Still, these foreign labourers are necessary, for they form the bulk of our construction workers, quite literally the people who help build our country. While it is easy to dismiss the significance of this position, many fail to realise that not many Singaporeans can rise to fill the gap of these unsung heroes if they are indeed to leave Singapore. Foreign labourers have more than just physical strength to do labour. One must realise that to carry through this arduous menial work, they have to possess great mental tenacity to withstand the physical challenges their job demands. It does not end at construction workers –

look at the cleaners on the streets, the people who clean the housing estate. These people have gamely taken on the jobs that educated Singaporeans condemn and shun. For as long as there exists an economic and class hierarchy in Singapore, these labourers are a necessity, integral to our development, because with our near 100% literacy rate and increased quality of education, many locals have shun these 'lowly jobs'. While it might seem cruel to say so, it has indeed persisted as a subtle yet incontrovertible truth in our society.

Many argue that foreign workers, labourers especially, exacerbate the problem of traffic congestion as they struggle for seats on public transport alongside us and that they place a burden on our national resources. To begin with, how is it fair that we deny their rightful place on public transport when it is them who helped build the roads and train tracks? If we can accept foreign talent who help to brace us for the caprices of the global economy, why can we not accept labourers who built the buildings that house the offices of the foreign talent? Others may argue that some foreign workers resort to crime, which jeopardise our internal peace and stability, but we must realise that many of these crimes are petty crimes that Singaporeans are just as susceptible of committing. In one sense, it becomes too contrived an argument to push the blame of crime on foreign workers.

We have foreign talent who bring with them a repository of field-specific knowledge and international business contacts, enabling us to expand our market and trade and consequently leading to an enhanced economy in Singapore. We also have foreign workers who literally build our country, without whom our construction and labour-intensive industries will cease to operate. While we move to become a nation that places much emphasis on tertiary and quaternary industries, let us not neglect the labourers, who are still vital for the sustainability of our architectural landscape. These foreigners hail from different countries with diverse backgrounds and practices. If we accept them and allow them to assimilate into our society instead of pelting them with discrimination, this cultural diversity will serve to further enhance the already existent multitudes of cultures and races in Singapore, adding to our cultural flavour, which has proven to be a factor driving our tourism industry. Foreign workers not only bring with them labour skills and intellectual competence, but also the culture they hail from. With this we are exposed to a plethora of culinary options, lifestyles, fashion options and languages, all housed in one small country. This enhanced culture will be evident when we open up to foreigners and accept their differences. Nationality, race and creed aside, they are ultimately also people working for a living, also citizens of the global economy. In fact, it is the prejudice that Singaporeans harbour towards foreigners that create the problems: worried for their survivability against tough competition, they resent foreign talent, neglecting the wide array of merits they bring; unwilling to share their resources with foreign workers, they condemn the significance they make in our society.

In conclusion, it is not fair to assume that foreign workers have brought with them more problems than benefits, because it is our prejudiced mindsets that have led us to deem foreign workers to be problematic. If we are able to set aside our xenophobia and embrace foreigners, we will be able to coexist in the same economy in harmony, harnessing not only the power and strength of foreigners but also pushing for a more peaceful and stable society.

Marker's comments:

Your essay features superior language considerations and very wide perspectives, even though it may come across as a tad ideal & pro-establishment.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 5

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.” Do you agree?

Seethor Jun Xian Bryan 12SC3G

“The world is just awesome” – so goes the latest tagline for Discovery Channel’s newest advertisements, accompanied by a cacophony of little clips showing Discovery stars trekking all around the globe in their pursuit to learn more about our magnificent and awe-inspiring world. The world we live in today is a sprawling hotpot of wellness, with a myriad of beliefs, traditions and cultures in countries ranging from Australia to Zimbabwe. Around this spherical planet that we call Earth, various cultures of mind-blowing diversity have sprung up in the 100,000 years or so that humans have lived and walked the Earth. Given its amazing and breathtaking nature, the benefits to be gleaned from travelling around the world are immediately apparent to the casual observer. Being exposed to such a plethora of cultures must surely bring about substantial benefits they say. And yet, on the other end of the spectrum, we have proponents who claim that given the interconnected nature of our world today – a world linked by telecommunication cables, fibre optics and satellite images, the need for travelling has diminished greatly since the bygone days of the Heroic Age of Exploration. The crux of the question ultimately boils down to this – if the world is said to be a book, do those who do not travel read only one page – or rather, do they profit less than their well-travelled peers? This essay will seek to dissect the key arguments the two schools of thought posit – arguments which undeniably are on opposite sides of the far-ranging gamut – simultaneously evaluating their merits and eventually proving that even in today’s age, travelling still allows one to benefit greatly, even more so by allowing one to read and appreciate the wonderful world of literature that our world is, as compared to their non-travelling companions, who are forced to be content with just a page – a sneak peek into the treasures the world has to offer.

Nevertheless, it is useful to consider the arguments of those who vigorously counter the claim that one needs to travel in order to gain the advantages the world provides. Proponents of such claims put forth the view that with the advent of the technological age, we as the human race for once have become fully connected and in many ways, interconnected. Ever since the invention of the trans-Atlantic radio telegraph by Marconi in the late 18th century to the invention of satellite television and Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP) in the 20th and 21st centuries, the world has inexorably been moving towards that of a seamless, integrated entity. Now, the question on people’s minds is not who they are able to communicate with, but who they are not able to communicate with. This shift in mindset from one whereby global communication was once deemed a rarity, a valuable entity, to one whereby a trans-Atlantic call from New York to London raises no eyebrows, reflects the increasingly prevalent and omnipresent role that technology has played in “linking us together”, as the catchphrase from the Facebook homepage goes. Proponents of the stand that one need not travel to reap the benefits the world provide feverishly bulwark their claims with the aforementioned truths, claiming that the interconnectivity enjoyed by the world today removes any benefits of travelling. They postulate that with globally occurring events being delivered to our door step, literally in whichever 192 countries of the world we reside, in the form of newspapers, journals and magazines, there is simply no need to travel to gain the benefits travelling the globe offers. News coverage on international news events such as the recent Fukushima nuclear plant disaster, Hurricane Irene and a plethora of other news events seems to feed the idea that even those who do not travel are now privy to the benefits of global news once in the domain of travellers. Adherents to the claim further buttress their arguments with the evidence of the glut of travelling shows on channels such as Discovery Travel and Living, with globetrotters Ian Wright and Kevin Brauch transcending the thousands of miles between the television and the actual site in question to offer viewers in-depth views and experiences of far-flung regions of the earth. Indeed, with global interconnectivity becoming the status quo in today’s dynamic society, it then comes as no surprise that these fervent believers feel that travelling has lost much of its benefits, with non-travellers too now being able to “get in on the action” by means of the television, the Internet and the telephone.



Another point put forth by adherents of these claims is that even if one moves to put forth the argument that travelling affords a hands-on experience that can never, and will never, be substituted by a long night in front of the goggle box munching on popcorn and watching travel shows in the comfort of one's own suburban abode, individuals still have the option of visiting sites and locations within one's own country, which many argue is replete with undiscovered gems waiting to be discovered by the keen-eyed individual. They point to examples such as America and Australia, which both possess vibrant indigenous cultures with long histories and traditions, and put forth the idea that simply travelling within a country already affords the local traveller a wide array of cultural and historical knowledge that, when backed up by the global news coverage they already possess, constitutes sufficient breadth and depth for the average individual. In fact, they feel that this amalgamation of global news and understanding of one's own local and national identities constitutes the perfect combination, thereby nullifying any advantages travelling might provide. In essence, they strongly believe that even if one decides not to travel around the globe, one does not read only one page – in fact one is able to read the whole book in the comfort of one's country.

However, while such dismissive and crude arguments, *prima facie*, may seem to stand the test of time, upon closer analysis we find a strong need to refine them by providing a certain degree of nuance to them. While these arguments do have their merits, it is undeniable – and sometimes nearly blasphemous – to discard travel as an antiquated tool reserved for nostalgic memories of bygone years. Man has, and will be travelling the globe for hundreds, even thousands of years, all for one reason – travelling provides just so much more, a certain 'je ne sais quoi' that wizened explorers often struggle to express in words. It provides a certain X-factor, if you will, that simply cannot be gleaned from the comfort of one's home. Travelling, undeniably exposes one firsthand to a plethora of cultures, providing one with memorable experiences that will be deeply ingrained in one's memory for time immemorial. While it is not claimed to be a *sine qua non*, it is inextricably linked to a broadening of horizons and insights, allowing travellers to eschew any parochial mindsets of old that might have been present while replacing it with open, accepting mindsets. History is replete with such examples, with Marco Polo being a true embodiment of how travel can shape one's mindset. Born to an insular Venetian community which was widely wary of foreigners, Marco Polo, together with his father Nicolo and uncle Paolo, travelled thousands of miles along the Silk Road to the oriental enigma that was China. In the Middle Kingdom, he was exposed to cultural norms that were alien and foreign to him. Embracing diversity, he adopted many of their practices and brought many back to Italy with him. A popular story states that Italian pasta was fashioned in the likeness of the quintessentially Chinese noodle, a delicacy Marco Polo so enjoyed during his brief *séjour* to the Far East. Other examples would be that of Malcolm X, a fervent Civil Rights supporter during the discriminatory 1960s of American history. Travelling to the various Arab states, Malcolm X gained insights and erudition in ways he would never have been exposed to in his xenophobic, then-discriminatory homeland of America. He returned home enlightened, furthering the Civil Rights cause with Martin Luther King Jr., who by no coincidence, was a well travelled person too. Indeed, these few examples are but stark reminders of the benefits of travelling the world – one need not look further than these great men to see how "reading the whole book" allowed them to achieve new heights and peaks they could never have previously fathomed.

Another key argument that supporters of this stand put forth is the claim that physically being in a different environment stimulates an individual in ways that remaining in one's hometown or country cannot possibly achieve. This benefit, a true embodiment of how travelling the world can amount to "read more than one page", is epitomised in the large influx of American literary greats to the City of Lights – the beautiful timeless beauty that is Paris, a shining jewel in the crown of Europe. 1920s Paris was the place to be for any aspiring poet or writer, with inspiration beckoning from every turn of a corner amongst the timeless Parisian boulevards. Literary greats such as Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein made Paris their adopted home, travelling from their hometowns in America to gain inspiration from *la vie Parisienne* – the Parisian way of life. In dark expresso bars and under the shade of trees in Paris' many gardens, these maestros wrote volumes of what has been considered as the apogee of American literature. These masters of their craft were able to do so, in many ways, due to the massive change in scene afforded to them by travelling the world. F. Scott Fitzgerald, legendary author of the American classic *The Great Gatsby*, temporarily lived in Paris

during the 1920s for precisely that reason, as did many masters of their field like Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali and Man Ray, who chose to ply their trade in this ville magnifique – a common nickname accorded to the beautiful city of Paris. Indeed, the benefits of travelling the globe, even when tampered with today's interconnectivity, are plain for all to see. Travelling undeniably allows us to go past “one page”, and devour the literary masterpiece that is the world.

A final point to hammer home the truth is the difference in mindsets encountered upon travelling the globe, contributing to one's experiences during one's formative years. It is a common to see a mass exodus of American teenagers to the Old World – Europe – occurring immediately after their high school graduation, due to their parents' acute recognition of the wide array of benefits afforded by an experience overseas. These adolescents throng the streets of Rome, Venice, Paris and London annually that it has now almost become the norm – a ritual to celebrate the “coming of age” if you will. These memorable experiential learning episodes that can be gleaned from overseas travel is one key factor why American parents place such importance on allowing their children – the future generation – to open their eyes to the magnificent world we live in, amongst a flurry of picture taking and posing for photos. Further evidence of the education overseas travel provides can be best encapsulated in the example of Dr Sun Yat Sen, the first leader of modern China. Having been educated in America during his youth, he brought back to China revolutionary concepts of modernity and democracy that were sorely needed by a people plagued by years of corrupt Qing rule. His fresh take on ideas proved to be just the spark China needed to break away from its repressive monarchy, with the last Qing emperor, the boy-king Pu-Yi, abdicating in 1912, to make way for a democratic government helmed by Dr Sun. Indeed, all these examples are telling of the benefits of travelling – benefits that are not privy to those who choose, for one reason or another, to stay in the comfort of their home country.

If we utilise the metaphor that the world is a magnificent literary work, then, at the end of this essay, have the main questions been answered? Yes. The undeniable benefits of travelling bring about far greater benefits than remaining in one's own country, allowing one to reap the benefits and pleasures the world provides by allowing them to appreciate the beauty of the world by allowing one to “read more than one page”, possibly even read it in its entirety. The advent of technology has not changed that, with the benefits to be gained by not travelling far more miniscule than the benefits of travelling. Indeed, in the grand scheme of things, travelling does allow us to read more than one page and possibly even the whole book, with those who are unable to travel only being able to have a sneak peek at a page of the entire manuscript. For me, the decision is clear. I'd like to have a copy of this book in its entirety please, maybe with a cup of iced tea.

Marker's comments:

I enjoyed reading your essay, which features wide knowledge and suitable examples across a timeline and culture. Excellent Work!

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 6

Discuss the view that science and technology give us hope for the future.

Lim Jia Ying 12A01A

The famously morose philosopher Thomas Hobbes is known for giving the following description of life on earth: “nasty, brutish and short.” In that context, this description may actually have an uncomfortable modicum of truth – in that age, without the advances civilisation embraces today, it could be quite valid to sound the death knell for human civilisation. But let us glance into the past, and notice all the inventions and innovations that have heralded a new age – the Gutenberg press, the wheel, modern medicine. I fervently believe that science and technology, and the promise they hold, give us hope for the future.

Science and technology in this essay, will refer to innovations or advances in our knowledge of the human body and life on earth. The ultimate purpose of science has always been human improvements, and coupled with technology, they guarantee the survival and prosperity of the human race. Of course, gazing into the crystal ball is futile and fruitless, so it is best we extrapolate what the future brings by examining the past and the present, and identifying trends.

Some detractors – sceptics, Luddites, ‘unenlightened beings’ – hold a very pessimistic view of science and technology, believing that it is possible for the hubris of scientists to cause us to cross the boundary. Science and technology, when in the hands of unscrupulous characters, are potent and can be manipulated to cause greater harm to human society, and this makes one apprehensive about their impact. A whole panoply of examples point towards this. Genetically modified food, for instance, brought about the Green Revolution, and many perceived it as a panacea for food shortages and the abject poverty of the Third World. It could have been that. But because the technology developed by multinational giant Monsanto was undertaken with the sole aim to increase its profits and gain, it has only led to ruin. They charged high prices for such high yield varieties, and these seeds were in fact specially engineered to only be planted once (i.e. seeds from the plant produced could not be replanted), sending farmers back to the market place to line the pockets of the MNC. Such exploitation does not bode well for the future of science. Science has also been used as an excuse to lead to inhumane cruelty. The Angel of Death, Nazi scientist Josef Mengele, is notorious for having carried out deviant experiments on twins, such as cutting off their arms and sewing them together. This fear of cruelty resulting from science has touched the hearts of the common man as seen from the spate of dystopian movies, such as *The Island*, which warns against a technology that harvests organs, that feeds on this fear.

However, to discount the promise of science and technology on that basis is myopic. These are exceptions, and the fact that we feel revulsion and condemn them, demonstrates that it has not been accepted. The scientific community is acutely aware of this fact, which explains its hesitations in carrying out stem cell transplants, or creating designer babies. Our understanding of cloning is already at a very advanced level, yet former President Bush of the United States of America issued a ban on human cloning. Our moral compasses have been trusty in restraining such excesses in the past, and we have no reason to fear a dystopian future created by ourselves. The logical solution, additionally, to such fears, is to tackle them by instituting stringent regulations and guidelines. The enforcement of such guidelines should assuage such fears, and allow us to focus on the positive side of science instead. It would be a pity to relinquish this tool (of science and technology) just to prevent its abuse.

One way in which science and technology grant us hope for the future is that they guarantee us a future in the first place, by ensuring our survival. Ever since the accidental discovery of antibiotics by Alexander Fleming in the 19th century, science has constantly developed to meet our needs. We now not only have access to over-the-counter medicines for the slightest discomfort, but to complex treatments such as chemotherapy and kidney dialysis. Humans today are enjoying longer

life spans. We are also constantly reacting to new threats. Malaria, for instance, is a virus that leads to large numbers of casualties, especially in areas with poor sanitation and room for its vector, the mosquito, to breed. To tackle this, scientists have discovered a technique to silence a gene of the mosquito, such that it does not transmit malaria. Ailments and diseases that cause suffering and devastation will likely be conquered sometime in the future. A real threat to our survival now is global warming, and in rapid response to it, innovations such as solar panels, alternative forms of energy, methods to monitor climate changes, have emerged. In this cruel evolutionary struggle, science and technology have aided us in the past, and continue to help us triumph.

Science and technology also give us hope as they are vehicles for human advancement. Not only do they fulfill our physiological requirements of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, they also allow us to achieve self-actualisation, allowing the prosperity of the human race. This has happened in the past with the Neolithic Revolution, which developed tools, freeing up time for the settlers to develop pottery, music and other forms of art, and also with the Industrial Revolution, when the invention of the steam locomotive, division of labour and travel had allowed a greater integration of societies. We can in fact see strains of that now with the increasing ubiquity of social media, a novel form of technology. Humans all over the world are connected to it, and are able to utilise it as a form of expression, and to rally communities together for common causes, such as the Arab Spring. We may never know if such systems and new ways of life benefit us and enrich our lives, or if they will achieve any form of permanence as Zhou Enlai famously commented about the impact of the French Revolution: "It's too early to tell." But the very fact that humans are able to adapt and build on past changes and advance with the aid of technology and science give us tremendous hope and anticipation for the future and what it may bring.

Another role that science and technology increasingly fulfill is that of an equaliser, to develop communities all around the globe. H.G. Wells, in an oft-quoted line, called education "a great equaliser" and the only thing that stands between us and "catastrophe". Science and technology allow us to act on that. Laptops donated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have been brought to subsistence-level communities in Africa, and have achieved phenomenal success as children there were able to access a dizzying array of information and in a much more interactive manner than with books. Science and technology have also been capitalised upon to develop new forms of nourishment for impoverished communities, including Plumpy'nut, a peanut and milk powder mixture that only requires water to become a nutritious meal for families. The fortunate thing is that these technologies are also brought to them and distributed by aid workers. Finally, it also leads to the fulfillment of rights of disenfranchised communities all over the world. Saudi Arabia, for instance, is often lambasted for its lack of civil liberties and its repression of women, and for hiding behind the veil of "culture" to satisfy their actions. The subjugated women had harboured a docile, compliant attitude in this hostile community. However, the advent of social networking and the Internet led to a growing awareness of their rights, and earlier this year, they organised their first protest by breaking the law and driving without a guardian. The king had recently capitulated to societal pressures and allowed women the right to vote from 2015 onwards as a concession. Inequality has long been a problem we have tried to solve, albeit unsuccessfully. But science and technology have shown us that they are in fact viable and we can take advantage of them to aid the disadvantaged.

Science has carved out its place in society, right from the establishment of the scientific method by a group of scientists led by Francis Bacon, and as a tool to advance human society, it has much promise. Of course, it is volatile, and while it explains the invention of household appliances, Twitter, and travel, it is also culpable for the invention of the atomic bomb, and poisons like Agent Orange. We can only trust that fellow humans will have the compunction of conscience to prevent such atrocities, and that a kind of moderated rationality will be our guide. Science and technology distinguish us from primates or creatures of the animal kingdom that make do with what they have and never look beyond that. So, because of the promise of science and technology, they instil in us a profound sense of hope and optimism for the future.

Marker's comments:

Fluently written – thoughtful, balanced and cogent arguments substantiated by relevant and up-to-date examples. You are also able to strike a balance between personal conviction and evidential substantiation. Just be careful that you do not slip into an informal tone in your use of contradictions.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 7

Discuss the view that science and technology gives us hope for the future.

Lee Wye 12S03K

Science, defined as the empirical study of Man's environment and technology, is an attempt by Man to understand and control his surroundings. Although it may be argued that the original and main aim of science is to benefit and advance the state of mankind as a whole, the way science and technology are marketed foreshadows a grim future where profitability is likely to be even more highly valued.

A superficial analysis of the impacts of science and technology would most definitely concur that they address the basic needs of humans and is what sets us apart from animals. Man has evolved to be able to use his intelligence to question and investigate his environment (science) and from what he has learnt, apply this knowledge to create tools (technology) that give him an advantage over his environment. This continues today, not in the form of flintstones or medieval knives, but in the area of medicine and healthcare. Medicine is made largely available to all on a global scale, and perhaps the most notable example of how medicine and healthcare have helped to achieve a better standard of living is how mankind has completely eradicated the smallpox disease that claimed so many lives in its heyday. The invention of vaccines for diseases such as smallpox is arguably one of the greatest benefits science and technology have brought about. Further development in the area of medicine and healthcare ensures that such successes are not short-lived, and serves as a reminder of how it has and will progress. Scientists have already found a vaccine for a certain type of cancer, once thought to be incurable, and billions of dollars worldwide are being pumped to further this endeavour.

What seems like hope for the future, in fact, is a misguided sentiment. To say the motivation of science and technology is to further the standards of living of mankind, is to be almost delusional. Man is hardly altruistic in his endeavours. Through the laws of Darwinism, everything Man does should only be to benefit himself selfishly and exclusively. Sadly, this is true.

Technology requires the establishment of institutions to further the progress of science in order to provide sufficient knowledge to create useful products out of the knowledge gleaned. It also requires companies to market it, for Thomas Edison may have invented the light bulb, but leading lighting manufacturer Osram, has its brand name labeled conspicuously on many light bulbs in the world. In a world where capitalism is the zeitgeist and where money does make the world go round, the profitability of technology is the main motivator for the further focus and development of it. The presence of technology in the lives of everyday people does not depend on the usefulness of the technology, but on one's ability to afford it. The differences in the various types of mobile phones in the market may be due to a variety of consumer preferences, but is also a result of competition between companies to market and profit from the sales of their products over the sales of another. To a large extent, the technology that can best benefit mankind if made freely and widely available is being marketed at a costly price and thus made available only to a select few. Even in Singapore, a First World nation that is at the forefront of healthcare and medicine, there is a segregation between "Private" and "Government" practices, with the former being the more costly and largely regarded as more effective. In essence, the profitability of technology results in a divide between those who can afford it and those who do not have the means to afford it. The latter, being at a disadvantage, will find it harder to progress and thus continue to be at a further disadvantage while those already at an advantage will only continue to progress. While villagers in rural areas of Kenya suffer from severe poverty and face starvation, the technology to produce more nutritious food is being marketed to healthy Americans at exorbitant prices.

To further expand on the fact that profitability is “the name of the game” when it comes to science and technology, even the men and women who are involved in the pursuit of science are marketed as commodities. These people, scientists, are valued for the profit their research reaps. Even the areas of research that these scientists are restricted to are those that are deemed profitable. Uncanny as it seems, it makes perfect sense when one considers that the products of these researchers are marketed to generate profit, and as with the case of demand and supply, the only way profits can be made is if the products are in demand and are profitable. Therefore the research undertaken by most scientists is focused on creating profitable products. The research deemed unprofitable is restricted, or even abandoned. Not only does this devalue the intrinsic value of science as a pursuit of all knowledge, where research could be done to answer more immediate needs such as global warming or global poverty, it is instead directed to less useful adverts. Such an example would be how billions of dollars and many brilliant minds are involved in the Large Hadron Collider experiment that does little to benefit anybody around the world, but exists because of the hype and profit the “pursuit of how the universe was born” provides. The scientists involved here have also been paid large sums of money to contribute. They are being bought and sold from company to company based on how profitable their talent is. This experiment also shows how those advantaged by science and technology have the freedom to further delve into it with little concern for others who do not have the same basic technologies that these people do. The “excess” is used to create more excess, while those who lack, further lack and suffer. These “excesses” will not cease; they will only continue proliferating. Like begets like and profit begets profit, as Man is intrinsically selfish. This can be seen from how little research is done on reducing starvation in the world while expensive health supplements are marketed in First World countries.

The profitability of science also creates an unnatural incentive to those who seek it. There is much at stake as it is profitable and with society becoming more and more concerned with money, there is much hype and attention given to those who push the boundaries of science. Fame and recognition are also dividends from the pursuit of science, if progress is achieved. This sometimes tempts scientists to fake results such as the Korean cloning researcher who falsified findings from a human cloning experiment for fame and recognition. The motivation of science and technology, as can be seen, is often not to benefit others but to benefit self.

Science and technology are means for mankind to extend their selfish ways. The greater the benefits, the more Man will manifest his selfish tendencies. With this increasing trend, science and technology hold little hope for the future.

Marker's comments:

A convincing attempt that employs a wide range of examples across temporal and spatial contexts.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 8

Discuss the view that science and technology give us hope for the future.

Yao Yuan 12S06K

The Age of Enlightenment is often remembered as the era of rationality. In this post-Renaissance period, science began to develop its systematic and rigorous nature as we know it today, and began to be applied extensively in our daily lives. The steam engine, electricity, the telegraph are just a few examples of the numerous inventions which first made their appearance then. It seemed, with scarcely a doubt, that continued development of science and technology is the way to go in securing a future with high standards of living, which is the “hope for the future”. However, in light of more recent developments in the fields of science, it is my view that science and technology at once bring hope and potential disaster to mankind’s future.

Proponents of the view that science and technology will bring us hope for the future often point to the immense successes that have been achieved through scientific and technological pursuits. In the last two centuries, much of the world has experienced significant improvements in standards of living, and there is convincing evidence that scientific methods in other fields of study such as economics prompted the Industrial Revolution, which greatly increased the productivity of Western economies and their wealth. Medical advancements in the Western world also greatly improved the lives and extended life expectancies of its inhabitants. These advancements no doubt improved the standards of living in countries where science and technology were pursued and gave the inhabitants hope for the future, in stark contrast with more technologically backward nations of the time such as those in Africa or most of Asia.

Because of these past successes, there is an oft-held belief that science and technology will continue to improve lives by solving problems that the world faces today. Two of the major issues that we face today include climate change and environmental degradation. Many of our industrial activities pollute the Earth’s atmosphere, land and seas, creating negative side-effects such as global warming. Many science and technology proponents thus argue that science can be one way to solve this problem. Advancements in technology for alternative energy sources such as solar panels and nuclear power plants, for example, can potentially avert climate change disasters by greatly reducing the pollution that our energy generation activities produce. Yet another impending global crisis science is claimed to be able to solve is the food crisis. Currently, there are 7 billion people in the world, and this number is projected to increase to about 9 billion by 2040. Already, a large proportion of our world today are living in abject poverty, and are starving. With a further 2.5 billion mouths to feed, most of them in the developing world, there is much doubt about the sustainability of our current food sources. Science, once again, is proposed as the way to avert such a Malthusian catastrophe. Genetically modified (GM) food has revolutionised the harvest of crops, allowing not only higher yields, but also earlier harvests, and is expected to be able to continue to do so. Should worse come to worst and our planet Earth becomes uninhabitable, there even exists the possibility of ‘terraforming’ other planets and changing our home planet! Thus, *prima facie*, it seems that science and technology can solve many problems that we face today, and continue to bring us hope for yet higher standards of living.

However, recent developments in science and technology have also proven that the opposite can be true. Instead of improving lives, science and technology can also create its own disasters. Perhaps the most tirelessly clichéd, yet ultimately pertinent, examples would be the two World Wars in the early half of the 20th century. The First World War saw the advent of chemical warfare. Phosgene, chlorine and mustard gas were employed on the battlefields as deadly weapons and so were novel weapons such as the heavy machine gun and trench warfare. The First World War eventually ended with over a million fatalities, an unprecedented number compared to earlier conflicts. The Second World War, of course, notoriously saw the development of the Atomic bomb, which incidentally killed almost a million Japanese civilians alone. The atomic bomb project,

Project Manhattan, was also singlehandedly run and seen through to success by brilliant scientists of the day such as Oppenheimer and Szilard. After the World Wars, the two major emergent superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, then stood on opposing ends of the Cold War, with the prospect of a nuclear Armageddon and mutual assured destruction hanging on a balance. How, then, have science and technology given hope for the future in these cases? To those embroiled in never ending wars that employ large-scale killing machines, and for us who come after, we must always remember that technology also has the potential to destroy lives on an unprecedented scale.

Thus, we see that technology has also had a history of destroying hopes of a better future, and it is my view that apprehensions of a repeat of such a history are not unfounded. Though there exist international conventions banning the use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, there is a chance that they will be used as long as they exist. For one, rogue nations like North Korea and Iran are notorious examples of states which defy these conventions and conduct unauthorised nuclear weaponry development programmes. The recent escalations in tensions between North and South Korea last year over the sinking of a South Korean ship in disputed waters ended with North Korea threatening to use its nuclear weapons – a grave reminder to the world that the horrors of nuclear weaponry can potentially resurface in today's world. For sure, terrorist organisations feel no obligation to be bound by such conventions, and the Sarin attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995 is again a reminder of the horrors of chemical warfare. Thus, I see a definite potential for science and technology to create disasters in the future, instead of creating hope.

It is also my answer to proponents of science and technology that while science and technology have the potential to resolve the world's problems, there are also many costs to such developments. While I agree wholeheartedly that further research should continue to be funded and supported in the hopes of finding the silver bullet to the world's imminent crises, I must also warn against the naïve view that these advances come at no cost, and with no further intentions other than to contribute to the betterment of society. It must be recognised that many scientific and technological pursuits today are driven by impetuses other than innocent goodwill. The Internet, for example, was first developed as a communications network for military use. Even the rocket that, literally, fuels space exploration was developed as a side-product of intercontinental ballistic missiles, hence, of course, its significance in the Cold War. Because of these other intentions, there are many costs involved in scientific and technological research other than monetary ones. For example, the proposed use of nuclear power plants to generate electricity so ardently supported by proponents of science and technology runs the risk of causing nuclear proliferation. In other words, since the technology of nuclear energy is similar to that of developing nuclear weapons, there is a possibility that it will exacerbate the destruction of hope caused by nuclear warfare. Iran, for instance, hid its nuclear weaponry development programme under the claim of developing nuclear energy. Also, there is a chance of accidents at nuclear plants such as the ones in Chernobyl and Fukushima, causing a nuclear fallout that can spread over a large area and affect the health of millions: not just their own health but also that of their unborn children. While I agree that such possibilities are low, the extremely devastating effects that they can bring about should it occur make it a significant risk to be considered. Also, there are also many potential devastating effects concerning Genetically Modified foods. Having ethical grey zones aside and simply considering practical results, we must consider the possibility of an ecological disaster. By creating new species of animals, for example, it is possible that they can overturn the food chain and the delicate ecological balance, creating far-reaching effects that are unable to be predicted even with our best technologies. Furthermore, the proliferation of herbicide-resistant crops, for example, only prompts farmers to spray more herbicide, knowing that their crops are resistant. This will only serve to worsen the land and pollution of underground water, at the same time creating the possibility of super weeds that are resistant to our best herbicides. Not surprisingly, of course, research into GM food is largely funded by agrochemical conglomerates such as Monsanto which also produces and markets herbicides. This similar concept of resistance can be carried over to the field of medicine, where there are signs of emerging strains of viruses and bacteria seemingly resistant to our current antibiotics and antiviral drugs. It is postulated that these "superbugs" developed as a result of the

overuse of such drugs. Thus we can see how there are costs in scientific and technological pursuit that may lead to its own host of problems for the world instead of hope for solving the world's problems.

Ultimately, the effects of science and technology depend on the user. Should a new kind of immense energy be discovered, it is up to the wielder whether he would want to create or destroy with this power. Science and technology can indeed give us hope for a better future and solve our problems, but the opposite is an equally possible prospect that we must also consider. Otherwise, we may end up being destroyed by our misplaced faith and crushed hopes.

Marker's comments:

This is one of the more mature and balanced essays on the topic. Coherent and persuasive arguments supported adequately by apt exemplification. Well done!

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 9

Is it always the responsibility of the state to help the poor?

Ang Sixian Jonathan 12S06C

Before considering the responsibility of the state in helping the poor, it is first important to understand the objectives of a state. A state, in essence, is a group of individuals united under a single identity, with their actions coordinated by a state government. It is through this government that state objectives are pursued – increasing the welfare of the citizens, meeting social goals such as equality, and securing its survival in the uncertain future of the 21st century. While these state objectives are certainly constructed with the state's best interest in mind, this also means that the state cannot be responsible for helping the poor all the time.

The first objective of the state, which is to increase the welfare of its citizens, is in alignment with the idea of the state's responsibility to help the poor, and hence should be carried out. Increasing the welfare of its citizens would mean better provision of healthcare, subsidised education, and lowering the cost of living for all the citizens within the state, the poor included. This would undeniably increase their welfare, and achieve the very goals the state sets out to achieve. According to English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, helping the poor that comprise a large section of society, would serve to increase the utility of society as a whole, and by extension lead to a net increase in the welfare of the citizens of the state. As such, it is in the state's best interests to bear the responsibility of helping the poor, so that the overall increase in society's welfare is maximised, in accordance to the state objectives.

The responsibility of the state to help the poor also coincides well with the government's second aim, which is to reduce inequality in such a society. The government tries to achieve equality of outcome, by taxing the rich and redistributing the wealth to the poor. This can be seen from the example of the welfare states that exist in the Scandinavian countries. Denmark, Norway and Sweden are welfare states, and their government policies have been formulated to combat poverty and to reduce the rich-poor gap. As such, their GINI coefficients are some of the lowest in the world, and their societies some of the most equal societies existing in the world today. Hence, it can be seen that helping the poor will help achieve social goals such as equality, and the state should bear the responsibility of helping the poor.

However, making the state responsible for helping help the poor under all circumstances would jeopardise the third aim of the state – survival. Helping the poor excessively by providing them with unnecessary benefits will encourage them to stop working as hard or stop working altogether, hence turning them into economic liabilities that drain more from the state economy than they can contribute to it. A good example of this phenomenon would be post-recession Great Britain. Due to comprehensive unemployment benefits and compensation provided by the government, the poor are disincentivised from working at minimum-wage establishments or similar organisations. This results in them voluntarily seeking unemployment so that they can reap the unemployment benefits that their state provides for no work. In this case, it can be seen that helping the poor will breed laziness and inaction amongst the poorer classes, and should be discouraged and hence omitted from the responsibilities of the state.

Besides the fulfillment of the objectives of the state, there are many other reasons why the state should not help the poor.

One reason critics give to discourage the government from helping the poor would be that doing so would divert government funding away from other projects. Helping the poor requires money, and most of this money is acquired through the taxation of the richer classes. Helping the poor would then involve taking a legislated proportion of the income of hard-working individuals. This

would disincentivise the richer classes from working, and only serve to decrease tax revenue even more, hurting both the state benefits system and the state treasury. This concept is best illustrated through the Laffer curve, which suggests that taxation past a certain point is sub-optimal, and will inflict more harm upon society than it will do good. As such, the rich should not be taxed more to serve the needs of the poor as it would jeopardise state revenue for other projects such as the improvement of infrastructure and the modernisation of the military. Hence, as helping the poor can possibly do more harm than good, the state should not always bear the responsibility of helping the poor.

Besides encouraging inaction and forcing the diversion of government funding from state projects, helping the poor might, in rare cases, be contradictory to the very principles of the state. A prime example of this would be Singapore. While the government does promise the equality of opportunity with subsidised education and scholarships to all who qualify, it does not guarantee equality of outcome, and does not attempt to compensate for the different “outcomes” that result from the Singaporean system by helping the poor excessively. Doing so would insult the very principle of meritocracy that the founding fathers of Singapore set up to achieve in the state, and go against state values. Hence, in the case where helping the poor contradicts state ideology, it is in the best interests of the state to not help the poor, and hence the state should not bear the responsibility of helping the poor.

In conclusion, the responsibility of the state to help the poor depends very much on the objectives that the state has set out to achieve. In some cases, helping the poor might result in greater social equality, but an unhappier upper class and the diversion of government funding. It is up to the state to weigh the various costs and benefits of such measures, consider the interests of the state, and determine whether it has the responsibility to help the poor.

Marker's comments:

You have written a well-articulated piece that show good understanding of politics, statehood and contemporary issues. Tone of writing is considered and wholly appropriate.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 10

Is it always the responsibility of the state to help the poor?

Rachel Ang Zhe Jun 12S07A

In recent times, issues such as income inequality and poverty seem to have been exacerbated by the stagnating global economy. High unemployment in the United States and even the rising middle class of India which seems to be driving a wedge between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', seem to be indicators of a future in which nations will have to grapple with the problems of a disgruntled lower-income population. While it is undeniable that every state has the responsibility to take care of the needs of its less fortunate citizens, it is also imperative that this does not come at the expense of the poor becoming over-dependent on state assistance. As such, the state has a significant role to play in alleviating the plight of the poor, as long as this does not result in them seeing state assistance as a "crutch".

While the inexplicable responsibility the government has towards its people is undeniable, it is vital that state provision does not come at the expense of the poor losing the motivation to become more self-sufficient. This is especially so for welfare states such as the United States, which still continue to provide its citizens with unemployment benefits. In order to be eligible for such benefits, citizens would have to prove that they are unemployed. For some, the prospect of remaining unemployed while still receiving an allowance for living expenses might seem to be more appealing than pounding the pavement to look for odd jobs. Given the current dismal state of the American economy now, the nation cannot afford for this to happen as a considerable portion of the state budget is already being channelled to these benefits programmes. As such, the scarce resources being used to support able persons who would eventually not attain financial independence would be better utilised in other state development programmes.

However, by virtue of the fact that the government is voted into power by its electorate based on the trust its people place in statesmen to be able to look after the welfare of their citizens, the state cannot shirk the heavy responsibility placed on it to fulfil the people's social and economic needs. It is undeniable that most upright governments have come to recognise this as a topmost priority, and as a result have implemented some form of social assistance schemes not necessarily targeted at the poor, but accessible to a vast majority of the population. For instance, Britain's National Health Service provides universal healthcare to everyone residing within its borders, regardless of their income and even nationality. This provision of affordable healthcare benefits the poor greatly, as a higher percentage of their income might have had to be spent on drugs and treatment as compared to higher-earning families. As such, the state has to make provisions for its impoverished population, as the welfare of their citizens forms the basis for their possession of ruling power in the first place.

Moreover, in view of the social problems associated with a growing impoverished population, the state should assist the poor in order to maintain some level of social stability. High levels of poverty within a country have the potential to bring with them issues such as increased crime and violence, which could destabilise society. For instance, the slums in Rio de Janeiro have become breeding grounds for drug traffickers, and there have even been multiple instances of gang fights breaking out due to warring drug lords. Desperate to make a living and escape from poverty, many slum dwellers have turned to the risky yet lucrative drug trade. Such a phenomenon is certainly detrimental to a country's development and would ideally be curtailed with assistance targeted at the root causes of poverty, such as a lack of educational and employment opportunities.

On the flip side, the frequent riots which erupt in Indonesia whenever the government attempts to cut back on subsidies for the poor are testament to the fact that state assistance, if wrongly administered, could ironically compound social instability. Hefty subsidies on items such as fuel and flour are extremely taxing on Indonesia's government, especially since a considerable portion

of its population lives below the poverty line. Continuing with such schemes is economically unsustainable, and also fosters over-dependence on state provision. As such, while it is a fine line to tread between meaningful assistance and excessive provision, the state should attempt to strike a balance that is sustainable and will serve it well in the future.

Finally, given that governments also have to pursue the state goal of national development, they simply cannot stand idly by while citizens who are lagging behind are struggling to make ends meet. A country's ability to attract foreign direct investment no longer solely depends on its reserves of natural resources or political willpower to ensure that firms receive all the funding and support they need. Rather, the paradigm shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based one calls for an educated workforce as well as good social infrastructure. Bearing in mind that the poor often have little access to higher and even basic education due to issues of affordability, it is crucial for governments to provide appropriate programmes to boost literacy rates among the poor. Economic development cannot be achieved satisfactorily in the presence of a large population of impoverished citizens. While national assets may have increased in monetary terms, the people may not have become better off. This is indeed the case for India, where the dismal state of public education means that only well-to-do families can afford to send their children to expensive private institutions to learn English in order to guarantee their ability to get respectable jobs in future. Those who cannot afford this privilege remain marginalised and trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. While globalisation has enabled India to create many better-paying jobs, the truth is that only citizens who are already well-off are in a position to fill these jobs.

To conclude, the rapid pace at which economic globalisation is occurring throughout the world means that people who are well-suited to meeting the demands of the global economy quickly see their salaries rising as corporations clamour to hire such individuals. On the other hand, this phenomenon also means that those who are unprepared could fall further and further behind. Unfortunately, this tends to apply to those living in poverty and they are often disadvantaged when it comes to access to education as well as other social programmes which could aid them in boosting their employability. Ultimately, the state has the duty to ensure that the poor receive the help they need to survive in today's competitive economy. This should ideally be done by tackling the root cause of poverty rather than its symptoms, while always being mindful of controlling assistance rendered so that it provides the poor with the motivation to help themselves improve their own lives, rather than being completely reliant on subsidies and benefits.

Marker's comments:

There is commendable wide-ranging coverage, supported by lucid examples and clear articulation of topic sentences.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 11

Do you agree that the mass media should pursue responsibility and not profit?

Verna Goh Shu Jie 12S03E

In 1993, in war-torn Sudan, photojournalist Kevin Carter took a picture of an emaciated Sudanese toddler, who was struggling towards a UN feeding centre, stopping to rest under the hungry eye of a vulture. This timely shot, published in the New York Times and other channels of mass media, then went on to become one of the most iconic images of starvation in the world. Thus, the overwhelming conclusion was that the mass media helped propagate reminders that the world should dig deeper into their hearts and pockets to help the poor, exercising a sense of responsibility that had never been seen before. While it is tempting to declare that the mass media should entirely pursue responsibility and rid itself of any commercial interests, it remains a premature assertion at best because we do have to acknowledge that the mass media is ultimately a conglomeration of various for-profit corporations. Thus, a balance has to be struck between pursuing profit and pursuing responsibility as both are equally important aspects that should be considered.

Increasingly, much of what we have come to acknowledge as true is determined by the information and images we get from the mass media. Because of this emerging trend, if responsibility and discretion are not fully exercised by the mass media, and the media focuses on their money-making goals, then each of us would have a fragmented sense of reality. A lot of emphasis is being placed on immediacy in recent years – people can access the world “live” from their homes; live television coverage of the scud missile attacks and of students demonstrating in the Tiananmen Square has enabled people real-time access to such events. As such, news comes to us in brief summaries and even shorter sound bites that may not, at all, provide us with an accurate picture of the world. The media, in order to attract viewership and hence gain greater profits, taps on this preoccupation with immediacy and places a disproportionate emphasis on certain elements of events, skewing our sense of reality even further. The spectacle of seeing soldiers donning gas masks in the Persian Gulf War overshadowed the reality that the Gulf never had a chemical attack. The “action news” formula adopted by many newspaper organisations is packing 30 to 40 news events into a short twenty-two-and-a-half minute news-hole. In such a way, it chooses profit over responsibility, because the need to generate viewership leads to a great reliance on sensationalism and portrayal of only the shocking aspects of news events. This leads to the news being a “pure construction”, as contended by many French modernists, since events are heavily mediated and in choosing what information to display, the media shapes our views of reality. In choosing profit over responsibility, we may be attracted to consume the mass media, but in effect, it actually fragments our sense of reality. We may find it hard to find the connection between issues or trace the development of an issue over time. Therefore, the increasing lack of responsibility by purely profit-seeking media giants has led to a sense of reality in us that is carefully distorted and shaped by the mass media.

Yet another criticism of the mass media is that it has become increasingly possible for large government corporations to manipulate the mass media and set the agenda for many issues. By paying such media outlets a heavy sum, they are able to control what is published. In seeking this profit, the media fails to recognise the ill effects that this may have on readers and viewers. For example, in choosing not to report on the genocide that happened in Rwanda over a hundred-day period in 1994 that killed over 800,000 people, Western governments ignored it, preferring not to acknowledge the killings until they ended. If the media had reported it, and governments mobilised to enter Rwanda and subdue the perpetrators, fewer people would have been killed, and the extent of the genocide could have been greatly lessened. Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google, stated in an interview that “we grew up where much of what we read was true or as close to true as we could figure out, but now, some of what we read is clearly false” due to the manipulation by organisations and the government. It is clearly important for the mass media to be responsible

for what it reports since it sets the agenda for many decisions and views. This is portrayed in the “CNN effect”, the media phenomenon where the media sets the agenda and creates the news by reporting it. Serving as a mobilising force, the validity of information it reports then becomes of undoubted importance. In the political arena, much of what people know about political campaigns is through the mass media, as candidates in recent years stand before the public through the mass media. Thus, the pledges, promises and ideas that are portrayed in the news stories, columns and editorials constitute the basis upon which a voting decision is made. In recent years, the media has been sensationalising politics. In attempting to attract viewers by reporting on interesting elements of the campaigns, the media can shape political reality as people attach importance to issues based on what information they get. FOX News Corporation chose to report on Barack Obama’s birth certification, and issues like whether Obama being elected was a Muslim conspiracy when Obama was elected as president. This disproportionate emphasis on perhaps less important aspects of the elections led some people to not take Obama seriously at all. Therefore, responsibility is important, and it should not be taken lightly by the media.

However, while it may be true that responsibility is not exercised by the mass media when it should be, it is overly hasty to paint all of the mass media with this tainted brush. In recent years, there has also been a proliferation of independent media outlets that strive to provide an alternative view on world events. One of the most famous alternative media would be Al Jazeera, which was set up by the Emir of Qatar in 1996, and provided an influential antidote to the Western bias of the global news. Critics branded it “bin Laden’s favourite channel” after Al Qaeda leaders used the station as a vehicle for some of their occasional broadcasts, and others accused it of feeding its 50 million viewers with a regular diet of anti-American propaganda. However, what it portrayed was the truth, and in doing so, it was exercising a great sense of responsibility. It provided a counter-balance to the “Western tyranny” of international news, and according to Alan Fisher, the English senior correspondent of Al Jazeera International, “will take on a global view, rather than looking at things from a purely Western perspective.” Al Jazeera provides the world with an alternative view of world events that is increasingly necessary in a world dominated and monopolised by Western media corporations, and thus, taking Al Jazeera as an example, responsibility should be exercised by the mass media to some extent to give viewers a complete picture of the world.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the mass media is ultimately owned by giant corporations who place a great focus on profitable operations. Such mass media conglomerates have many goals to fulfill and many people to please, and so it may not be entirely possible to exercise full responsibility over reporting and the information disseminated. After all, as the age-old adage goes, “He who pays the piper calls the tune.” Those who pay the media will ultimately be able to control, to some extent, the information that the mass media feeds its viewers. Another stakeholder would be advertising companies, as the media also gains a large proportion of its profits from advertising, and would thus be compelled not to publish news stories that would be damaging to their partners. In a survey conducted in 2000, about seventeen per cent of journalists in the US have been criticised by their bosses for writing stories that “were seen as damaging to their company’s financial interests”. In order to gain profit, the news reported has “to sell”, and this has led to increasing reliance on sensationalism in order to outrun their competitors. After all, the media industry, especially in the US, has become increasingly competitive, media corporations have to be able to surpass their competitors in order to maintain their profit margins and survive. The New York Times has frequently been called “the newspaper of record”, its brand of trust inspired over many years of hard work, generating millions of profits in sales. Thus, it is observed that commercial interests are also important for many mass media outlets.

All in all, the claim that the mass media should pursue responsibility and not profit is only partially valid. Although it is undoubtedly true that responsibility is an essential factor as the media is a mobilising force that can influence multiple generations, we have to consider the fact that the mass media comprises for-profit organisations that involve many stakeholders. Thus, the media has to strike a balance between responsibility and profit.

Marker's comments:

Excellent output and organisation! The accuracy of quotes and facts, coupled with clear paragraphing and thesis, make your attempt at this question highly commendable.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 12

Are concerns about the need for us to conserve our environment exaggerated?

Zou Tangsheng 12S06K

Skeptics of environmental conservation repeatedly claim that the whole story of environmental degradation and the need for conservation is conjured up by the government of the United States, among other even more implausible conspiracy theories. Others may argue that the need for us to conserve the environment is exaggerated, but is this really the case? I believe that although there are some concerns that have been blown out of proportion, these concerns are nonetheless real and it would be extremely dangerous to ignore the detriment that our irresponsibility towards the environment brings us.

Proponents of the claim that the need for us to conserve our environment is exaggerated draw upon the scientifically backed argument that we are able to do nothing about Earth's natural environmental cycles and there is definitely no need for us to defy the forces of nature. Geological studies have shown that the temperature of the surface of the Earth varies by 3-5 degrees Celsius in a cycle lasting 15,000-20,000 years, a figure that correlates very strongly with that of today's rise in global surface temperature. Furthermore, the last Ice Age 30,000 years ago has shown that our planet is not immune to vast fluctuations of temperature. As such the natural heating and cooling of the Earth proceeds in a periodical fashion and modern civilisation has been caught in its midst. Therefore, since the fear of global warming is exaggerated and can be explained using natural causes, there seems to be no great need to conserve the environment where global warming is concerned, because it cannot be conclusively proven that the temperature fluctuations of our planet today are due to humankind's actions alone.

Another reason why it is felt that the need for us to conserve our environment is exaggerated is that it is completely impractical for all human beings to commit to the cause of environmental conservation and the need for such should only apply to the main culprits who contribute the greatest to the degradation and destruction of the environment. The average person produces a tiny fraction of carbon emissions compared to modern industry; even though a man in Britain would produce more greenhouse gases in a day than an entire destitute village in Africa combined in a month, the combined effect of each individual's commitment to reducing personal greenhouse emission would still be small. The main producers of greenhouse emissions which contribute significantly to global warming are factories in China and the US, and that of the former are growing at exponential rates in order to feed the developing industries of the rising economic giant. The amount of environmental damage caused by an ordinary human being is wholly insignificant compared to that of factories and industries, which consume fossil fuels and dispose of waste in rivers with impunity. Already, it is evident that even the chances of nations taking responsibility for environmental conservation are low, given that environmental talks in the OPEC summit in Copenhagen last year came to a deadlock and the push for environmental conservation has come to a standstill. Furthermore, many countries still have not ratified the 1997 Kyoto Protocol for the sake of their economies. Given that environmental conservation is clearly not a main priority for many countries, and the fact that individual contributions to environmental degradation are comparatively insignificant, it seems that the call for us to each play a part in environmental conservation is exaggerated.

However, the reality is that the detrimental effects of humankind's folly on the environment are widely visible in nature today, and the need for us to conserve the environment in this respect is not unjustifiable. Although one can push the blame for global temperature fluctuations on nature, this cannot apply for the freak weather phenomena that the world is experiencing today. The effects of El Nino and La Nina have been exacerbated by uneven and unnatural temperature changes, creating droughts while damaging fishing industries at the same time. The same effects can account for the unusually cold winters and searing heat waves in Europe over the past few years,

which have claimed many lives. These unnatural phenomena have their roots in the accelerated warming of the Earth's surface caused by greenhouse gas emissions. Another more prominent example would be the depletion of the Earth's ozone layer, caused by the indiscriminate use of CFCs a few decades ago. With decreased protection from the sun's damaging UV rays, the risk of skin cancer and other unpredictable mutations increases. Indeed, the combined effect of environmental destructions today on humankind is phenomenal. People have already suffered from the degradation of our environment and the need for us to reduce such occurrences for the well-being of mankind is real. As such, calls for us to conserve the environment are not exaggerated.

Furthermore, there is also a serious obligation for us to conserve the environment for the protection of humankind in the future. Our rampant destruction of the environment poses many potential threats to habitats and economies in the future and future generations should not have to pay the price for our sheer irresponsibility. Greenhouse gas emissions have contributed significantly to global warming and the melting of polar ice caps, which has raised sea levels and submerged many low-lying islands and coastlines. The people of the Maldives and part of Florida are already seeing some of the ramifications of this serious threat. Also, uncontrolled climate change has led to the desertification of many areas, threatening the livelihoods of many people as farmland is rendered infertile. This is already visible in Sub-Saharan Africa where previously thriving agricultural plantations have been reduced to desert. In addition, the wanton destruction of forests in Brazil and Indonesia has exacerbated the problems of climate change by the destruction of habitat, not only threatening the agricultural industries in the long run, but harming wildlife, flora and fauna as well. Therefore, our irresponsible and short-sighted actions have put the environment in jeopardy and the need for us to conserve the environment and save the planet for future generations is fully justified.

Lastly, the individual can definitely play a role in promoting environmental conservation. Critics who maintain that individuals are limited in their environmental conservation efforts have overlooked the potential for empowered individuals to bring environmental issues to the fore and encourage governments around the world to take action. In the 1980s, fervent Greenpeace movements in Europe went a long way in their government's action to slowly initiate environmental conservation, raising awareness of the ramifications of irresponsible environmental actions in the past decade. Hybrid cars and vehicles which run on more environmentally-friendly energy such as fuel cells have gained popularity, and more and more people have joined environmental watch groups and campaigns for more responsibility with regard to industrial pollution. The need for environmental conservation is not insignificant when it comes to the individual, as each of us play a major role in changing global paradigms and the way we view our planet.

In conclusion, the need for us to conserve our environment is definitely not exaggerated. Although global warming is an example of a problem which cannot be attributed solely to the actions of humankind, the concerns about their effect on us in the present and the future are definitely real and must not be neglected. As the saying goes, 'we do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children,' we must take the bull by its horns and address the most pressing concerns with mutual cooperation and extraordinary convergence of responsibility and sustainability, in order to create a better future.

Marker's comments:

A systematic well-discussed essay that focuses on the crux of the question and substantiates assertions made with relevant evidence. The topic is quite well analysed. Perhaps, one of the motivations behind exaggerating the need for us to conserve the environment is commercial or business consideration. For example, companies manufacturing the 'green' alternatives do stand to gain economically from this concern.

2011 Year 5 General Paper Promotion Examination

essay 13

Are concerns about the need for us to conserve our environment exaggerated?

Wang Ye 12S06K

Since the Industrial Revolution, increasing amounts of infrastructure have appeared on the surface of the Earth, leading inevitably to the clearing of nature to “better” utilise the scarce land available. This has led to increasing concerns about conserving the environment we have existed in since the time of nomadic hunters. Even though it may seem that small sacrifices have to be made for the greater good and there are other worldwide problems of equal if not greater importance such as poverty, I believe that the importance of environmental concerns is not exaggerated due to the potential damage that it may result in and the potential loss we may suffer from being unable to study the environment. In fact, I feel that there is not enough importance placed on this issue due to the intervention by large, powerful companies acting on their self-interests.

Many will have the view that the concerns about environmental conservation are exaggerated because sometimes small sacrifices have to be made for seemingly greater benefits. Most will not doubt the statement that the Industrial Revolution has brought extensive benefits to mankind. Even though this may have led to the clearing of forests for more land space, it is a necessary evil done for the greater benefit of mankind. Furthermore, we are still able to live and prosper without the forests in our way. This would mean that further clearing of nature for the sake of using the space for human development is justifiable and thus, the concerns are exaggerated.

However, the potential damage to mankind that can result due to the destruction of the environment gives ample reason for us to place much importance on environmental conservation. The whole Earth and its biodiversity is a closely linked system. A disturbance to this equilibrium can lead to unexpectedly disastrous results. Take the case of global warming. The increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, partly due to the decreases in negotiation to remove them from the air, has resulted in climatic disasters all over the world. The climatic changes have become more hectic while occurrences of droughts and hurricanes have increased to rates we could never have expected. It is evident that disturbance to the Earth's system can result in unpredictable damage to us and our future generations. Thus, there is legitimate reason for us to place so much importance on conserving the current state of the environment.

Some may also argue that there are more pertinent global issues to be focused on instead of placing excessive concerns on environmental conservation. Many developing countries are suffering from poverty, with more than forty percent of the people in Africa living on less than a US dollar a day. It is clear that these people's needs – basic physiological needs, as Maslow puts it in his Hierarchy of Needs – should be satisfied before we even talk about conserving the environment for future generations.

While this is arguably the case, we must also consider that the environment may hold the key to solving these problems, which gives environmental conservation even more importance. There are a lot more things we have not discovered about nature which can be the solution to many of the major problems the world faces. For instance, in Japan the Sekisui Kagaku Research Fund has supported many projects that learn from nature and apply the technologies so derived to mankind. This ranges from minimising chlorophyll to produce carbohydrates from carbon dioxide to adapting fungi's anti-bacterial mechanism to produce antibiotics that destroy bacteria while at the same time remove worries of drug resistance. With further progress, these research projects can potentially solve issues such as poverty and proliferation of diseases. However, if the environment is aggravated, there will be less biodiversity to learn from, thus reducing the chance of such breakthroughs significantly.

Furthermore, it is very likely that the concerns we have for the environment are actually less than optimal due to a lack of information. To ascertain that the environment is indeed deteriorating and that this is doing more harm than good, extensive research has to be carried out. This costs money, which means that the researchers will need funding from the government or even major companies. However, due to the fear that the increased evidence for environmental conservation may result in regulations that prevent them from expanding their plants, the profit-maximising companies will most likely refuse to fund such research. For example, the presence of global warming was refuted by major oil companies which were worried about reduction in profits, causing a decade to be wasted on pointless debate about the issue. Political parties are also pressured by these companies and may refuse to fund such research. Therefore, it is possible that there is not enough concern about the environment due to such political and economic factors.

In conclusion, the concerns for environmental conservation are justifiable as the degradation of the environment may cause unpredictable damage to the world and it may also destroy potential solutions to major world issues. We should never underestimate nature and its importance to us, as we are just a small part of nature itself. As many tribes in the African deserts believe, we are just custodians of nature, to ensure that our future generations receive as much, if not more, benefits from nature than we did from our ancestors.

Marker's comments:

A systematic discussion – consistent focus on the question. Well-structured paragraphs, good illustrations with relevant examples. Overall, a coherent argument that is consistently developed and sustained.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 14

'The prospect of a global village is a depressing one.' Discuss.

Chan Wen Ting Jessica 11S03M

The World Is Spiky is the title of a provocative essay by American urban studies scholar Richard Florida, in response to the renowned columnist Thomas Friedman's prominent promulgation that the "world is flat". Both statements chart different topographies of the effects of globalisation, and one might arrive at the palpable conclusion that the existence of an increasingly interconnected community, on cultural, social and economic levels, has in fact both positive and detrimental consequences. A world in which countries can exist as isolated states with minimal international interaction is unimaginable given the power of technology and social media. Instead, states now have to function as members of a single global community and accept the fact that the fates of nations are now intractably intertwined. Naturally, the blurring of tangible geographical, social and economic barriers is bound to result in a certain degree of discord and tension, inevitably causing some repercussions as well. However, amidst the hullabaloo and flux of activity, there are benefits to be reaped which deserve due recognition as well. It is the combined effect of these repercussions and benefits which leads us to infer that the vivid image of a global village is not so sombre after all.

To avoid arriving at premature conclusions on the notion of an increasingly interconnected world, it is imperative to thoroughly investigate the factors which instigated the formation of the present global community. The increasing levels of migration due to greater labour mobility have resulted in the exodus of people from developing to developed countries, a phenomenon which is well substantiated by the statistic that about 12% of the Philippines's Gross Domestic Product is attributed to remittances by its citizens working abroad. Equally noteworthy is the increased number of multinational corporations establishing operations in developing nations, which serves to reinforce the fact that increased mobility of capital and labour has indeed led to the establishment of a more tight-knit global community. Another primary driver of the formation of a global community would be the pervasive presence of new forms of social media and technology which enable individuals worldwide to rally around causes and increase cross-border interaction, thus effectively overcoming the imposing geographical boundaries which once inhibited interaction. Lastly, large volumes of trade, international business and financial transactions occurring on a daily basis have linked economies together on an unprecedented scale, further affirming the interdependency of nations in every possible way, though no literally, has both been a boon and a bane and is essential to examine these effects to deduce the nebulous future of the human race.

It is indeed an unimpeachable fact that the very features which have led to the formation of a global community have been the key perpetrators in causing tension and conflict. For instance, the increasing levels of migrants in each country have put strains on the framework of society, proving that an increasingly globalised and multicultural world can be both hazardous and volatile. The 2005 riots in France organised by disgruntled, second generation youth of North African origin are but a manifestation of that. Fuelled by their dissatisfaction at being treated like second-class citizens in their own country, they proceeded to pour out this bottled-up rage in violent acts which included setting fire to cars. It may be inferred that while greater ethnic diversity can be extremely contributive towards creating a more dynamic and cosmopolitan culture within a country, thus resulting in the creation of a more globalised world, the lack of a proper societal infrastructure and mindset change to cope with this influx of migrant labour could be a recipe for disaster. This fact is reinforced by the public appeal by Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Muslim citizens in Germany to refrain from constructing minarets which are taller than the steeples of the existing churches as that would drastically change the cultural skyline. Such incidents reveal the glum truth that though the notion of a highly globalised world where cultural amalgamation is prevalent seems theoretically sound, a divide between theory and reality persists, and the prospect of a global village is one which may not be fully accepted yet, hence conflict and strife.

Furthermore, as with every functioning and viable village, each member of the community must be assigned a role to play. Hence, the division of responsibilities and work differs from member to member. Such a proposition appears to be rational and reasonable in theory; however it neglects the fundamental realities of how countries wield differing degrees of authority and possess varying amounts of capital. In reality, the scenario in which all members of this global society co-exist peacefully and dutifully carry out their roles and responsibilities is naive and chimerical. Instead, the Machiavellian nature of international politics would dictate that more powerful countries would simply exploit the weaker members of this global community to satisfy their own macroeconomic goals. This is evident in the outsourcing of labour-intensive jobs from developed to developing countries, resulting in repugnant working conditions and minimal wages for these workers in developing countries. One such example would be the multitude of sweatshops established in many developing Asian nations. In China, women reportedly work up to sixteen hours a day for seven days a week under unbearably stifling temperatures for the giant toy company, Mattel. Such abominable conditions severely reduce their quality of life and demonstrate a lack of respect for their basic human rights. In the face of such manipulation and blatant exploitation, it is incontrovertible that while economic progress might be boosted by such outsourcing schemes, the complete regression in the ethics of such corporations wholly negates the positives, thus pointing to a bleak future for the weaker members of this globalised society.

Yet some may argue that, left to fend for their own, these weaker members of the global community might experience slower economic growth and little development. Proponents of this view might then rebut the argument of the moralist by pointing out the remarkable effects that globalisation has had on developing nations. For one, India has experienced a dramatic rise in economic progress mainly accruing to the prevalence of multinational corporations outsourcing their operations, such as telecommunications, to that country. Other defendants would state emphatically that the millions of people lifted out of poverty in China are a clear vindication that globalisation has had positive effects on many economies. Indeed, these are convincing arguments based on tangible results, yet one must concede that the means by which these achievements have been realised come at a high price. Simply put, sweatshops were not part of some preordained step in the evolutionary cycle towards economic development; they were a deliberately constructed mechanism through which developed nations could use more vulnerable and success-thirsty nations to their advantage. Thus, from a deontological viewpoint, such explicit exploitation of fledgling economies spells a grave future for the weaker members of this global community.

The last effect, which is prevalent in the workings of a global village, is the extent of cultural assimilation which might occur in the increasingly globalised state of the world. There is a spectrum of views on such a subject, with some critics stating the possibility of a complete obliteration of cultures as we know them, while others argue that cultural assimilation will occur but not result in complete homogenisation. It is irrefutable that in a global village, different cultures are bound to be brought closer together and interaction is inevitable. However, the view that there will be a unilateral, top-down domination of world culture by a single culture, often referred to as Americanisation or “McDonaldisation”, is needlessly prejudicial and myopic. Certainly, it is astounding that a whopping 17,000 and 33,000 Starbucks and McDonald’s outlets respectively exist across the world, but failure to consider that these outlets do cater to local tastes and preferences would simply provide an unbalanced viewpoint on the issue. One needs no further evidence than the “Tandoori Chicken Burger” marketed across India as proof that globalisation is taking place in equal parts too.

Therefore, while the prospect of a global village does have negative consequences on both the micro and macro level, a complete and thorough analysis of the many facets which comprise a global village – cultural, social and economic – would reveal that the world is neither “spiky” nor “flat”; instead it presents a future which can be both bright or depressing depending on how the human race chooses to deal with it.

Marker's comments:

Relevant, supported, clear and an enjoyable read. You handle complex ideas very well. However, you need to be more conscious of addressing the question. A wide variety of support could be provided to strengthen your arguments. Excellent command of the language. Be careful of overlaps.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 15

"The prospect of a global village is a depressing one." Discuss.

Stephen | 11S06L

It was Marshall McLuhan, the patriarch of media studies and the author of the term "global village", who first predicted that the rapid advancement of technology and the proliferation of globalisation would usher all humanity together in an unprecedented era of interconnectedness characterised by the lowering of barriers separating foreigners from each other. While the formation of the global village has engendered many beneficial consequences for mankind in terms of the institution of global cooperation indispensable to tackling various problems that are plaguing humanity nowadays and the spread of wealth to countries all over the world, that interconnectedness and interdependency has also been the root cause of the spread of environmental damage throughout the world and erosion of local cultures in many countries. However, despite the potential harms that may be brought by the formation of the global village, I believe that globalisation, if managed in a prudent and judicious way by mankind, will ultimately benefit humanity as a whole and thus the claim that "the prospect of a global village is a depressing one" is largely unfounded.

Firstly, the prospect of a global village is promising because it has engendered many instances of global cooperation which help to tackle a multitude of issues that are endangering the survival of mankind. With the formation of supranational organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation (WTO) etc, countries around the world are able to pool their resources and make a more concerted effort to mitigate or even eliminate various threats to humanity. For example, during the outbreak of pandemics such as SARS and Avian Flu, the World Health Organisation urgently issued health warnings to countries all over the world and these had empowered them to take immediate measures, such as requiring health screening at airports to curb the further spread of such pandemics. In a more recent case, we witness how such international organisations have helped to foster peace and promote democracy throughout the world through the assistance rendered by NATO in initiating peaceful discussions between the Libyan rebels and the Gaddafi regime to ensure a smooth transition of power in Libya. Without the many interventions and efforts of international organisations, perhaps the survival of mankind would have been imperiled as disasters or catastrophic events that happen in a location would not have been able to be mitigated by the outpouring of aid and assistance from the rest of the world. Hence, the formation of a global village, which subsequently engenders international cooperation, empowers us to remedy various problems plaguing humanity both in the present and the future, and thus the prospect of the global village, rather than being gloomy, is indeed vital.

However, detractors have often claimed that such efforts at international cooperation are often crippled by the spectre of self-interests of each nation, ultimately resulting in a widening disparity between the rich and poor nations and hence the prospect of a global village is often seen as depressing. Indeed, drawing a parallel to the Hobbesian nature of man, countries around the world are likely to prioritise their self-interests first before the interests of other nations and hence, expecting them to embark on efforts solely driven by altruistic motives seems to be delusional and unrealistic. For example, nowadays many developed countries are still unwilling to share their prosperity and affluence with less developed countries, as evidenced by the imposition of protectionist measures in the form of trade barriers and heavy tariffs against imported products from developing countries. While the developed countries often claim that they have tried their best to alleviate poverty in impoverished countries through the provision of aid, indeed such protectionism against imports from developing countries has more often than not offset the benefits of various aid rendered. (Protectionism against developing countries cost them \$800 billion in 2010, about six times that received by them in terms of aid.) Indeed, in order to further bolster their wealth and affluence, developed countries often resort to dumping cheap products on developing countries, undercutting the price of locally produced goods, and eventually driving local firms out of business. For example, due to the dumping of rice by America on Ghana in 2005, Ghana became

a net rice importer instead of exporter. Hence, we can witness how the spectre of self-interests, which is the overarching concerns of countries nowadays, may have the potential to further exacerbate the inequity between the affluent and impoverished countries. While politicians of developed countries often defend the policies of protectionism by claiming that they are answerable to their electorates, it is precisely these parochial and selfish pursuits that have curtailed the efficacy of global cooperation, and hence the prospect of the global village, should countries persist in prioritising their national interests unquestioningly over those of other nations, is indeed alarming and depressing.

Furthermore, the inexorable advancement of technology which connected the world has led to the proliferation of many multinational corporations (MNCs) eager to expand their business and reap larger profits. As many a time the burgeoning of such MNCs has led to absolute inequity and the exploitation of workers as well as natural resources in the developing countries, the prospect of a global village may be alarming, highlighting the widening gulf between the rich and the poor across the world. Driven by financial imperatives, MNCs often foray into the impoverished labour markets of less developed countries and exploit the workers by subjecting them to abject working conditions and paying them egregiously meagre wages insufficient for their survival. For example, in 2005, Nike sweatshops in China demanded children to work 10 to 14 hours a day under gruelling conditions. However, I would contend that the prospect of a global village characterised by the proliferation of MNCs is not entirely depressing. With the advent of new media, for example, nowadays we witness the reporting of cases in which MNCs unfairly exploit workers or wreak havoc on the natural environment of less developed countries and these reports have generated immense media pressure to the extent that many MNCs are forced to halt their inhumane practices. This is best manifested in Royal Dutch Shell's exploitation of the Ogoni people and Niger Delta in 2006, which received heavy media coverage to the extent that Shell agreed to recompense the people and embark on a billion-dollar project to clean up the Niger Delta. Along with the fact that such MNCs often bring expertise and advanced technology pivotal to the development of less developed countries in the future, it is manifest that the prospect of the global village, instead of being alarming, is one which must be embraced with hope.

Moreover, critics often claim that the formation of a global village erodes the cultures around the world, especially with the main tenet that the global village will unify mankind into a single community. Indeed, it was Thomas Friedman, a columnist with the New York Times, who claimed that globalisation is the "globalisation of America and the American culture". For example, with the emergence of English as the lingua franca of the world and American cultural hegemony, it is said that at least one language dies every 14 days and as language is a medium through which local cultures and traditions are often transmitted, it is palpable how the formation of a global village, which encourages the dissemination of cultures and information throughout the world, may have eroded and weakened cultural fabric throughout the world and consequently made the world a less vibrant place. However, one must be cognisant of the fact that instead of being static, cultural identity is constantly evolving and a culture that is truly representative of its people is the one that responds to change and consequently plays a role in bringing its people to scale new heights. In this respect, many cultures have evolved in response to the threat of American cultural imperialism by producing a stronger, more global-friendly, even newer version of their cultures that is more conducive to social progress. For example, the traditional Confucian values which dictate the subservience of individuals to the state and precedence of social welfare over personal prosperity have been evolving to become more accommodating to the values of individual liberty that are widely embraced by many countries around the world today. It would be quixotic and parochial to assume that cultural identity is a stagnant entity because indeed a culture must be constantly evolving in response to change in order to propel its people towards greater progress. As the formation of the global village has engendered the evolution of cultures, which indubitably advances civilisations around the world, it is palpable that the prospect of the global village is indeed bright and promising.

Friedman famously said that globalisation is an inevitable force. We cannot and should not stop it, but we can regulate it to make it a force that is beneficial to humanity as a whole. While noting the various adverse effects that may be wrought by globalisation, we can see that it is the power of globalisation itself that has brought solutions to all these problems. Hence, instead of being alarming and depressing, the prospect of a global village should be cherished with hope and confidence.

Marker's comments:

Excellent effort. Cohesive, organised, supported and relevant. An enjoyable read! However 2nd last paragraph could do with more details and coherence. 2nd and 3rd last paragraphs could address 'village' a bit more clearly. Excellent command of the language and organisation.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 16

"An unhappy marriage is best resolved with a divorce." Comment.

Yuli Steffina 11S06Q

Throughout the passage of time, it has been difficult to deny the significance of marriage in society. The sacred union between two individuals has long been revered as one of the most basic building blocks of a civilised society, a kickstart towards creating financial stability, community support and more importantly, emotional maturity. Yet, it has become a commonplace that as time progressed, the rate of divorce was on the rise and broken marriages became more of a norm than the exception. It has thus become a pertinent issue of discussion whether this trend is justified, and whether indeed a divorce is the best way to resolve an unhappy marriage. I, for one, feel that to agree with such a strong statement would be a dangerous proposition, one that may have shocking and possibly damaging consequences on both society and the future of marriage as a whole.

Firstly, it may be wise to explore the issue of the extent of unhappiness in marriage that may justify a divorce. Perhaps we may call out the fact that in most societies, marriage is indeed looked upon as a sacred commitment, approved by the laws and thus must not be treated lightly. Whether we are talking about aggravation by financial woes or trouble with managing children, it is difficult to deny that every marriage will have its ups and downs, and thus unhappiness at some point in time is inevitable, if not healthy. So firstly, we must call off the idea that unhappiness, if caused by trivial matters or the kind that occurs at a natural rate, may justify divorce. Indeed, a better solution for resolving minor spats may simply be better communication and sensitivity to the other. However, what detractors mostly focus on is the case of serious unhappiness – the sort that may significantly impact one's quality of life and leave emotional scars to last a lifetime. Most often brought up is the case of domestic violence, in which one partner inflicts physical and/or emotional abuse on the other. They argue this is indeed a serious problem that afflicts many women (and some men) today, and that continuing to let this go on would be a violation of individual rights. Some may argue that domestic violence stems from deep psychological flaws that cannot be easily changed through mere counselling and "undying love". And this idea we must concede. Empirical studies from all over the world have described the plight of such abused women, many of whom are too terrified to speak up and are unwavering in their stand that "if I love him enough, he will change." Yet, further studies published in America show that wife-beaters often do not change; many often find themselves in prison instead. In such cases of cruelty, it is difficult to deny that divorce may be the best way to resolve the source of unhappiness. Distance must be put between the parties so that the abused can heal and move on.

Yet some may feel that this is still too easy a concession to make. What about those who also face extreme unhappiness but not in the form of domestic violence? Is divorce not the best way to solve their problems?

To answer this, it may be wise to look into the sources of unhappiness in marriage and make the distinctions on which one may or may not justify divorce. Of course, it is difficult at best (and impossible at worst) to mark out all the ways in which married couples find themselves unhappy. Common to the list of problems are arguments about money, in-laws, business, children and the increasingly prevalent problem of infidelity. If a husband or wife is unfaithful, is divorce the only way out? It is easy to get swept up in a fit of anger, pick up our pitchforks and scream a resounding "Yes". After all, being cheated on undoubtedly leaves the wronged partner with feelings of shame, betrayal and perhaps even darker emotional repercussions. Examples from Hollywood in the likes of Tiger Woods and Jennifer Garner further compound the sentiment that if one has been cheated on, the only way out is divorce. Who knows, if one were lucky, the settlement may even further increase one's happiness.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 17

To what extent has new media changed the face of human interaction?

Ryan Tan Yu-Chien : 11S03P

New media, or the new forms of media that have emerged through technological development, is said by many to have changed the world and the way we do things forever by revolutionising them. One of the things we engage in in our daily lives and is crucial to us is the interaction between individuals and groups for it satisfies our deep-seated need for social interaction that arises from our nature as social creatures. For a society to exist and sustain itself, human interactions are crucial and it is also these very same interactions that have evolved over time with the advent of new media, such as communication over the Internet. Indeed, it is true that the way we interact with each other has been changed by new media in various ways. That said, new media cannot and is unable to completely change the face of human interaction because it is but media, and the fundamentals of human interaction are ageless.

It can be said that new media has revolutionised the manner of human interactions by greatly facilitating them and this has led to their ease, as well as a phenomenal growth in the scale of such interactions across the world. In the past, the only method of interaction was either face-to-face communication or by letters through the post, “snail mail” as we call it. Such methods were limited and often had a great impediment in the form of geographical barriers between people that we could not then surmount. Today, having surmounted them, we have: The rise of communication over the Internet through media such as Skype and the ever indispensable e-mail has made distances infinitely shorter with communication achieved at the click of a button, just as real-time communication has been transformed by video-calling technology. New media has undoubtedly changed the face of human interaction, not just by making it more convenient to do so but by making it possible at all times, not to mention the expansion of human interactions from a predominantly local to global scale by removing the barriers between people across the world. As human interactions are being made more feasible and the “circle” of interactions that one may have is now virtually unlimited, new media has indeed changed the face of them.

Additionally, new media has acted as the bridging platform between authority, or government, and the subjects it controls, common man. Interaction through new media includes input from not just one end, but both ends of the bridge of communication; in recent trends politicians across the world have used social networking sites to communicate with the people and establish stronger ties between the leadership and the populace. For instance, in the recent General Elections held in Singapore, the various contesting parties and their candidates made good use of new media such as Facebook and Twitter to organise rallies and receive feedback from the citizens. It was also a channel through which citizens expressed their support – for example, young candidate Nicole Seah’s receipt of over 50 000 ‘likes’ on her Facebook page – or their criticism and dissent – such as how another candidate, Tin Pei Ling, received numerous negative comments and flak over her now-infamous blunder, “I don’t know what to say.” Instead of a top-down approach to communication that was previously adopted by governments, new media has seen the evolution of political interaction into a two-way state of affairs in which the people have just as much say as the politicians, perhaps even more, as they are able to express their unbridled thoughts with less consequence than a politician would. Hence the presence and use of new media has definitely seen great changes in the way figures of authority in society interact with the people and we can say that this face of interaction between people has also been changed.

Be that as it may, new media can only act as a platform to bridge the gap between leaders and their followers if it were allowed to. In the end, new media is just that – a platform – and if such platforms are inaccessible due to “road-blocks” or are torn down altogether, the face of human interaction cannot be changed by it. Take, for example, the infamous Great Firewall of China where a large team of censors is employed to trawl the Internet for what the government deems to be

However, we must be critical and question: Does divorce really solve the unhappiness caused by such problems in marriage? If the source of the problem were emotional betrayal and a lack of proper communication, then perhaps a divorce may not be the best solution. Although my experience may be limited (at best), perhaps it would be reasonable to suggest that marriage counselling or even taking a vacation together may be a better way to resolve such deeply ingrained issues. Perhaps the innate flaw that causes this unhappiness is the lack of understanding that above all, marriage is a commitment. It is not just about feelings, or carnal desires, or whatever Hollywood has twisted it up to be. In its inner core, marriage must be looked upon as a sacred and cherished union, one that takes mutual effort to nurture, and that requires emotional maturity to really appreciate. It is a companionship. A lack of this crucial understanding of the nature of marriage may be what is causing this unhappiness, and the infidelities or other major problems may simply be the ways in which it manifests itself. Thus, what may be a better solution may be to embrace more fully this fundamental understanding, through proper communication and education. For example, in Singapore, effective 1st September this year [2011], underage couples will have to undergo marriage counselling. Such measures must be taken to instill the value of marriage in couples; otherwise running away from the problem through divorce may simply cause them to make the same mistakes again later on – something that would cause further unhappiness rather than contentment.

In conclusion, marriage must be taken as a sacred commitment that should not be broken by simple displeasures or disagreements. Divorce must be taken as the very last resort, rather than a quick-fix solution. It must be considered seriously and carefully, with proper thought given to the repercussions it may have on one's children or family. Even then, it may not resolve one's unhappiness if one's view of marriage is skewed. Divorce, too, has heavy costs that stretch from the tangible (settlements, losing property etc) to the intangible (trauma, emotional weariness, discrimination). Ultimately, it is difficult to sweep all marriage problems under one umbrella and judge whether divorce is the best way to go. Thus, it is important that we as individuals take stock of our own values and decide whether divorce is indeed the best solution, or whether it can be likened to cracking a walnut with a sledgehammer. Only when we are honest with ourselves and make the effort to find the sources of unhappiness in marriage can we then judge whether divorce is the best solution after all.

Marker's comments:

You have done very well in tackling the issues and truly explaining what unhappiness could mean and what could have caused it. Your analysis of whether divorce is the best option was therefore deep and very relevant. Well done!

objectionable content and erase it or the even more extreme example of North Korea where the Internet penetration rate is virtually zero and the government holds an iron grip over any form of media. In such cases, new media and its potential to effect change are tied down and interactions between citizens and their leaders have been cut off because of the latter's desire to maintain power by quelling dissent. In the event that interaction with the outside world is limited by such measures, as in North Korea, the scale of human interaction cannot progress much beyond local communication and remains very much at a parochial level. Whether the potential of new media to act as a harbinger of change to the way humans interact is fulfilled or not is limited by the iron fist of the government, and new media sometimes cannot change the face of human interaction because it is disallowed to.

Also, not all the changes that new media can effect on the way human interactions are carried out are inherently positive as they may lead to a breakdown of human communication. As mentioned, the scale and ease with which human interactions are being carried out has been expanded and made possible with new media. However, such a growth in scale would be made negative when "inflation" sets in, when the real value of relationships and human interactions is diminished because of such a growth in scale. Social networking has made it possible for each and every one of us to have hundreds, even thousands of friends in the worlds of Facebook, MySpace and Friendster, multiplying exponentially the number of interactions we have with other humans across the world. Herein lies the real question: Are interactions on such a grand scale feasible? A study carried out by the sociologist Robin Dunbar on various species of primates that exist and interact in "societies" gave rise to Dunbar's Number. This number, 150, is the estimation of how many other individuals an ordinary human will be able to maintain viable societal interactions with. Although follow-up studies have postulated this number to be about 300, it is still far less than the number of "friends" a person has today on a social networking platform, which according to estimates stands at 600. Instead of wholesome human interactions, the sort of interactions that one has with such friends has been criticised as largely superficial and non-committal. Hence, new media has also catalysed a negative sort of change in human interactions – through the pursuit of a grander scale of interactions that we are not able to sustain; at times the real value of human-to-human interaction has been lost and turned into ersatz interactions.

At face value, new media has effected change in the way humans interact but it is also worth mentioning that such changes have been largely unequal in the world. While some parts of the global population, specifically those in more affluent countries, have been able to ride on new media to change the way they interact with others, the story is not the same for those living in undeveloped countries with no access to new media. In Ethiopia, for example, where the majority of the population lies below the poverty line and survives on less than a dollar a day, the priority of the people is ensuring survival and not the pursuit of new media. New media, with all its new technology and gadgets, does require a substantial amount of financial capital to sustain as well as appreciate it. At times, new media is unable to penetrate the lives of people and revolutionise the way they interact because it has not been pursued in preference over more pressing needs such as food and water.

It can seem, then, that new media is able to change the face of human interaction in various ways where it has touched people's lives. However, the fact remains that new media is but another medium of communication, just as face-to-face interaction and snail mail have been over the ages. The fundamentals of interaction between human beings remain the same as they have been since before the dawn of new media: human beings interact with one another through the use of language, words, body language and body contact, and eye contact. These basics have not changed and it is universal to all interactions between humans. A smile, when seen face-to-face, carries the same meaning as it would over a video call, or even if sent in an e-mail or text message. Hence, although new media has changed the face of human interaction with regard to its scale and ability to connect different members of global and local society, the inherent ways in which humans interact remain the same and this is a face of human interaction that cannot be changed, not by new media nor anything else, because the media is just a platform for facilitating interaction.

To conclude, I believe that human interaction has been changed by new media. The interactive methods it has brought have catalysed the rise in the scale of interactions as well as the revolutionary changes in the direction of communication flows. That said, new media cannot effect such changes in cases where there is a tight rein on the media or where new media is sacrificed for other goals. In essence, new media effects changes to human interactions only where it is able to touch the lives of people. It remains true, though, that new media is just a medium for interaction and though revolutionising it, will never be able to fully change the fundamentals of human interaction which are our universal common languages.

Marker's comments:

Coherent, cogent, relevant and well-supported answer. Good coverage of issues. Excellent command of the language. A pleasure to read!

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 18

Can national nuclear programmes ever be justified?

Huang Jinghao Jarret 11A01A

The famous German statesman Helmuth von Moltke once imperiously proclaimed that 'it is the right and duty of the state to do all in its power to ensure that its people are never yoked to the vacillating whims of a foreign power', echoing the strident jingoism of then Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Transposing von Moltke's realist ideology to the present era, it appears that national nuclear programmes can be justified insofar as they ensure a nation's energy independence and are an integral expression of a nation's sovereignty. If a civilian nuclear programme were to be weaponised, it would pose a massive deterrent to prospective aggressors, thereby securing a country's existence. While these arguments may be relevant in a decidedly realist conception of the world, they sidestep the clear and tangible ills of a national nuclear programme – the sheer propensity for disaster, the presence of international norms which nuclear proliferation contravenes and the threat of nuclear terrorism. As a whole, this essay will posit that national nuclear programmes can be justified in an overwhelming minority of cases because of the plethora of safer alternatives available.

Advocates of national nuclear programmes such as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have often bandied 'energy security' as a key justification of national nuclear programmes. Vehemently asserting that their national nuclear programmes are solely for 'peaceful ends', they claim that nuclear programmes allow them to generate electricity for development. This claim has some credence if one considers the success of France in using nuclear energy to power its industrial growth, particularly in southern cities like Bordeaux or Marseilles, where nuclear plants provide 40% of daily energy needs. Francois Mitterrand, whom some consider the father of the French nuclear programme, pointed out that burgeoning population growth and the corollary gargantuan increase in the energy needs were enough to justify the national nuclear programme, which he envisaged as 'safeguarding the energy needs of the French people in an eco-friendly, socially-responsible manner.' Given the wild fluctuations in the price of oil, limitations inherent to other alternative energy sources and the undeniable power of the atom to fulfill seemingly insurmountable demands for energy, it appears that Mitterrand's words and his pursuit of nuclear energy may be justified.

Moreover, nations like North Korea have been swift to point out that their nuclear programmes are entirely justified because it is their sovereign right as a state to do so. Extrapolating the Westphalian notion of sovereignty to a world stage, the North Korean argument appears to suggest that every state in the world, by virtue of its sovereignty, is entirely entitled to the pursuit of the national nuclear programme, be it peaceful or military. To the extent that the principle of state sovereignty is enshrined and institutionalised in international relations as a monolithic entity, this suggests that states are fully justified in pursuing national nuclear programmes.

Echoing the North Korean sentiments, leaders such as David Ben-Gurion and Ariel Sharon have argued that 'for a small nation inundated in a sea of foes, what better deterrent would there be?' While maintaining Israel's official stance of nuclear ambiguity, Ben-Gurion and Sharon have essentially encapsulated the fundamental purpose of a militarised nuclear programme – to pose a credible threat to any potential aggressor. In Israel's case, some have argued that Syria's reluctance to commit more units to attack Haifa in 1973 was in part due to the fear of Israeli nuclear retaliation on its key population centres like Damascus or Homs. To the extent that Syria's reluctance to push through the Golan Heights into Haifa can be attributed to Israel's credible threat, this vindicates Israel's national nuclear programme. On a broader scale, the notion of 'credible threat' has been enshrined in the doctrine of 'mutually assured destruction'. This doctrine came to preeminence during the Cuban Missile Crisis and while it has heightened tensions and fears, some foreign policy experts like Mearsheimer have argued that it prevented tension from spilling over

into conventional war and its corollary wanton bloodletting. Insofar as Mearsheimer's doctrine and Israel's experience are relevant in the modern epoch, national nuclear programmes, particularly weapon development programmes, can be justified.

However, to blithely accept the aforementioned arguments does inimical violence to the nuances and complexities innate to international relations in the modern day. The notion of 'energy independence' can be secured through other means and does not predicate itself on a national nuclear programme. For instance, the use of hydroelectric energy in the Aswan Dam provides 50% of Egypt's energy needs when the Nile is undergoing seasonal flooding. Similarly, the development of second-generation biofuels which use only inedible plant matter offers new hope for a much-maligned source of alternative energy. Former Brazilian President Lula da Silva's sponsorship of geothermal energy has helped thousands in favelas all over Brazil to gain access to energy while simultaneously allowing Brazil to cut back on oil imports from OPEC. Clearly, there are alternatives to nuclear energy which can serve to provide energy security as well. Somewhat more contentiously, Paul Kennedy argued in his seminal work 'The Parliament of Man' that the 'dogmatic adherence to notions of energy security are increasingly anachronistic in a world where a greater flow of trade and an increase in oil-exporting nations since 1975 practically ensures that energy is readily available'. While Kennedy's perspective is far from mainstream, it does raise questions of whether energy security can only be ensured through internal programmes.

The justification offered for the notion of sovereignty is similarly spurious because the world has come to accept that sovereignty is by no means a monolithic and sacrosanct concept. For instance, Israel's airstrike on the Osirak nuclear development facility in Iraq was roundly condemned by the Arab League, but most of the world gave a fairly muted response, preferring a criticised Israel to a nuclear-armed Saddam. This suggests that the prevalent sentiment in modern international relations is one which rejects any all-encompassing and wholly-permissive use of sovereignty as a justification.

In the same vein, the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction has recently come under flak for being fundamentally antiquated in today's increasingly interconnected epoch. In order for the theory to hold, states need a credible second-strike capability – they need to ensure that they have a means of nuclear retaliation if they are attacked. However, the move by some nations like the UK, which has eliminated its airborne nuclear capability or France, which has de-commissioned its nuclear submarine fleet, suggests that states are taking steps to eliminate second-strike capability, for reasons often to do with cost. Without this fundamental assumption, the theory of MAD cannot hold. Moreover, individuals like Robert McNamara have questioned whether 'maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent in the absence of the Cold War is necessary' given the gargantuan drain on resources and the spectre of fear that nuclear weapons and technology constrain people to living under. To the extent that the demise of the hostile USSR has ushered in an unprecedented era of 'extraordinary convergence' in the history of the world, this undermines the efficacy and need for a nuclear deterrent.

Furthermore, historical precedent suggests that nuclear programmes pose a significant and unmitigated propensity for disaster. From the debacle at Chernobyl to the tragedy at Fukushima, history suggests that nuclear energy poses a significant risk to people in the world. Even the former IAEA Director General Mohamed El-Baradei acknowledged that the 'strictest guidelines can be imperfect, the most stringent checks can fail and the sturdiest reactors cannot eliminate the propensity of nuclear catastrophe'. While the threat of an accident happening can be immeasurably minute, the immediate devastation wrecked and the long-term irradiation of the area are costs which some have argued are too massive to bear. Granted, the propensity of a nuclear accident happening is small, but the scale of the disaster should the unthinkable happen undermines any justification for a national nuclear programme. The continued desolation of Chernobyl in Ukraine even to this day stands as a stark testament of the propensity of humans, machines and checks to fail in the most abject and abhorrent of ways.

Moreover, the threat of nuclear terrorism is an increasingly dangerous one in the present day. Terrorist groups from Aslan Maskhadov's Chechen International Brigades to the nefarious Al-Qaeda have been cited as prowling the black market for centrifuges or parts to construct nuclear weapons. Often, these parts come from national nuclear programmes, which was the case in 1998 when the Indian army captured parts of a Pakistani Ghauri ballistic missile from Hizbul Mujahideen militants in the Kargil area. The threat posed by an incomplete terrorist 'dirty bomb' is buttressed by the often lax or even compliant security elements tasked with guarding nuclear programme sites. While Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor in the Negev may be immaculately guarded, sites in the former

USSR like the Balakovo nuclear power plant are far from secure. Given how terrorists are non-state actors unfettered by convention and international norms and how even nuclear waste can be used for a nuclear weapon, one must question whether national nuclear programmes can be justified, particularly for states without the means or desire to prevent fissile material from falling into terrorist hands. While some have argued that the spectre of nuclear terror only hangs over states with weapon-grade uranium, the advent of the dirty bomb and the rise of non-state actors unbridled by the norms of common decency cast doubt on such an argument.

Robert Oppenheimer, the pioneer of atomic technology, remarked in realisation of his creation that 'I am death, destroyer of worlds.' While the present epoch does not reflect Oppenheimer's apocalyptic conception of a nuclear holocaust, that does not deny the fundamental principle that national nuclear programmes provide outcomes (like energy security) which can be achieved through other safer methods and ends (like mutually assured destruction) which can be seen as antiquated and deeply anachronistic with the collapse of the Soviet Union. While there has been discussion of an international nuclear programme under the auspices of the IAEA, state reluctance and international asymmetries in the development of nuclear technologies condemned any such suggestions of premature demise. Ultimately, a national nuclear programme offers benefits which are irrelevant or can be obtained through other means, while simultaneously opening a Pandora's Box of potential devastation, possible apocalypse and probable danger. As Albert Einstein once famously quipped that with the advent of nuclear programmes and their proliferation worldwide, 'I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones'.

Marker's comments:

Jarret, an excellent piece yet again – highly fluent, comprehensive and with evidence of extensive reading. But surely there are better ways to support your arguments than by using questionable quotes. Don't undermine the credibility of your arguments with such quotes.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 19

Can national nuclear programmes ever be justified?

Acil Hakeem B Mohamad Rafee 11S03L

The nuclear meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi has already compelled the German government to phase out all nuclear reactors in its country by 2022, even as the Japanese victims themselves engage in deep soul-searching over the viability of civilian nuclear energy. Another nation across the Sea of Japan has also made headlines over its rather more volatile brand of national nuclear programme – the North Korean military effort has allowed its mercurial dictator to repeatedly extort aid from its neighbour to the south in exchange for empty promises of disarmament. In Iran, meanwhile, the distinction between the two different classes of nuclear programmes is steadily being blurred. The future of national nuclear programmes looks bleak – yet despite all that, such programmes can be justified in countries with adequate safety mechanisms and, most importantly, strong democratic institutions to prevent further nuclear disasters arising from negligence or malice. This is because, contrary to popular opinion, nuclear programmes in such countries are essential for national security and the stability of the global political scene.

It is worthwhile to first examine the supposed detriments of civilian nuclear energy, namely its safety concerns. The impact of such safety issues is the product of both magnitude and risk, and it seems that nuclear programmes are deficient in safeguards against both elements. In terms of the former, the examples of the Ukrainian Chernobyl disaster in 1986 is enough to grip the entire people with fear – the radioactive fallout was blown by the wind to large parts of Eastern Europe, causing genetic mutations which were inheritable by the subsequent generations. The disaster claimed tens of thousands of lives for an extended period of time and such a worst-case scenario would be replicable should future nuclear disasters reach advanced stages of development. As for risk, they point to the fact that there have been 99 noteworthy nuclear accidents in the past 50 years, each putatively with the same potential to destroy as Chernobyl. Such risks are exacerbated by systemic corruption and incompetence even in reputedly clean and efficient administrations like that of Japan. In that instance, Prime Minister Naoto Kan delayed evacuation of citizens from the Fukushima region because he knew nothing of an otherwise perfectly effective radioactivity detective system and therefore did not realise he had to act quickly. In fact, illicit financial transactions between the government regulators and officials from TEPCO, the company running the nuclear plant also resulted in delaying the decision-making of Fukushima Daiichi's outdated infrastructure by two years. In short, disasters seem poised to happen on a large scale, given governments' inherent inadequacies in mitigating risks, and the intrinsic dangers of nuclear energy.

Even if we ignore the issue of shaky checks and balances, a more universal issue presents itself – that of how to dispose of radioactive nuclear waste which is a by-product of the energy-generating reaction. Previous methods of disposal like burying nuclear waste deep beneath the soil, raised concerns over the possible pollution of groundwater, a significant water source for communities like what happened in Fukushima – even before the meltdown, the tsunami-induced disruption of containment systems caused radioactivity from nuclear waste to leak into the sea. Thus we see harm on two levels as a result of civilian nuclear energy.

Many of these arguments, however, can be further rebutted sufficiently to obviate any reason for concern over nuclear energy. The international community need not sanction every nation having nuclear plants, merely those which are relatively free of natural disasters, have the updated technological expertise and financial muscle to maintain plants, and which have safety regulations enforced by a strong government accountable to the people in free and fair elections. By this yardstick, much of Western Europe and North America still qualify, with Germany and France in particular having no previous nuclear incidents. Angela Merkel's pledge to abolish nuclear energy in Germany is, at best, irrational populism as will be shown subsequently, especially since the safety of nuclear plants can always be inspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global nuclear watchdog.

Firstly, the magnitude of harm from nuclear disasters is grossly overstated, even after analysing the examples of the three most infamous incidents – Fukushima, Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, the latter of which galvanised the American public to force a cessation of the expansion of the nuclear industry. Fukushima and Three Mile Island have caused between them less than five deaths, and the extra radiation leaks from the former, in the optimism of the IAEA, is equivalent to exposure to an extra microwave for a year – hardly life-threatening. Modern technology systems will also prevent the sort of disaster Chernobyl suffered, as proven by how Fukushima's five other reactors did not melt down because the technology utilised there was ten years newer than that of Daiichi's infrastructure. Furthermore, the risk of nuclear accidents is minimal in the present day, because it took the world's second largest earthquake and tsunami, and an extremely corrupt administration to cause the limited harm Fukushima experienced (at least the harm caused by the nuclear meltdown per se) – circumstances which are exceptional.

The issue of nuclear waste, on the other hand, is slightly harder to resolve given the precedents of shipping toxic metals to impoverished unregulated African nations like the long coast around Somalia, and the possibility of a parallel scenario occurring for nuclear waste. Encouraging results have been seen, however, in the containment of nuclear waste in remote desert areas like Alabama in the US, and in any case, the by-products like thorium emit limited amounts of radioactivity compared to the more potent uranium source.

All of these limited drawbacks are also offset by the massive opportunity cost of not switching to nuclear energy, in terms of safety, energy security, and damage to the environment. Traditional fuel sources like oil and coal are firstly unsafe to extract, given the hazardous conditions miners and rig operators work in, especially in the developing countries where deposits of such fuels are abundant. Coal mine cave-ins in ill-regulated China claim four thousand lives yearly, with many more dying of respiratory diseases from inhaling soot in the mines. Oil rigs can explode, like the Deepwater Horizon incident in the Gulf of Mexico, even though a reputed company like British Petroleum operated it. Such incidents are regular and deplorable yet they are given less significance than the overblown dangers of nuclear energy precisely because the public consciousness is fed by regular news. Nuclear energy is safer than it seems, even compared to other fuel sources.

In fact, nuclear fuels like uranium are found in politically stable countries like Australia and Canada, which on the one hand, guarantee energy security for importing nations, and on the other hand, reduce incentives for conflicts over deposits like those happening between North and South Sudan, or overdoing threats to energy developers like the revolution in Libya which disrupted the supply of its oil refineries. Lastly, nuclear energy is clean – the few tonnes of waste it generates are significantly less than the millions of tonnes of heat-trapping greenhouse gases that fossil fuels release each year, which precipitate the weather alterations that harm agricultural products and deny subsistence farmers of much needed food supply. Even alternative sources are not immune to side effects, as the trapping of water by the Three Gorges Dam floods villages and displaces a million Chinese citizens. Nuclear energy is the most viable fuel, in short, as compared to fossil fuels, hydroelectric power, or infantile energy sources like wind and solar which are two inefficient, inconsistent, especially in landlocked countries with no sea breeze. As such, national nuclear energy programmes are safe, beneficial and necessary, making them justified.

Arguably, even military nuclear programmes are justified; though admittedly there are huge dangers when rogue nations gain access to nuclear weapons; North Korea's sheer pressure, backed by nuclear warheads, frightens its regional counterparts who fear a sudden nuclear strike. Even emerging democracies like India and Pakistan merely exacerbate tensions when, for example, they goad each other into conducting nuclear tests and spewing destabilising rhetoric.

Not only are nuclear weapons harmful to international peace and stability, the sheer destructive potential of nuclear weapons is an affront to human rights because these weapons cause greater unnecessary, drawn out, excruciating suffering through radiation than conventional weapons – for

that reason, we have already banned most chemical and biological weapons through a United Nations resolution in 1972, at least in principle.

Juxtaposed against those doomsday scenarios, however, are the effects of other nuclear powers like the US to provide a check and balance against rogue powers. The threat of mutually assured destruction through the intercontinental nuclear missiles of the US, capable of reaching any state, are sufficient deterrence to rogue states actually using their stockpile of nuclear weapons. On a principle level, a government does have the right to employ whatever means necessary to protect its citizens from other nuclear powers, including having its own nuclear programme, since its foremost duty through the social contract of elections is to its own people. Therefore under certain circumstances, nuclear programmes of both kinds can be justified, and indeed necessary, for self-defence and international stability.

Marker's comments:

A good job in exploring the case for national nuclear programmes – indeed, you have clear knowledge in this area and are able to argue your case sufficiently well. More effort could have been put in to actually directly address the question, however, so as to seal the argument in. On the whole, though, well done!

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 20

Can national nuclear programmes ever be justified?

Zhang Junyu 11S06L

A few decades after the destructive wrath of nuclear weapons was unleashed upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki, laying to waste large tracts of land and killing more than two hundred thousand, the first Earthrise photograph was taken by the astronauts aboard the Apollo 9 mission to the moon – a photograph that instantly touched the hearts of many with its poignant depiction of the beautiful and yet fragile Earth we live in. Cloaked in green and blue, our planet is home to a miraculous diversity of life that could all be crushed with one nuclear war, or nuclear fallout with possibly calamitous consequences. It is no wonder then that the tide of public opinion has largely turned against national nuclear programmes. Indeed, with science proving helpless in the face of the risks involved in such programmes, and politicians – even those from the countries ostensibly most responsible – unable to put in place global institutions to police the use of nuclear technology reliably, national nuclear programmes can rarely be justified.

As evidenced by the great human suffering caused by the two atomic weapons deployed in the Second World War, the rise of nuclear warheads will undoubtedly bring untold consequences to the already-suffering planet we live on. Albert Einstein, whose equation of mass-energy equivalence was the basis of the Manhattan Project that eventually birthed the tragedy in Japan, also realised the devastating power of nuclear weapons and became an ardent anti-nuclear activist in his later years, proclaiming that he would never have formulated his equation had he known the use it would be put to. Considering the unthinkable consequences that can arise from any nuclear programme with its sights set on developing nuclear weapons, it is imperative that countries follow the lead of US President Barack Obama in conducting negotiations to disarm themselves of nuclear weapons. If not, we may find ourselves, in the words of Einstein, fighting World War Four with “sticks and stones”.

A deeply cynical view held by military analysts in favour of retaining nuclear war capacity is that informed by the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), in which nuclear war capacity may paradoxically lead to greater stability as neither opposing force would dare to launch a war for fear of reprisal which could instantly annihilate both sides. Such theorists point to the Cold War, during which even though both sides had nuclear weapons, the fervent arms race between the two equally powerful military forces led to surprising stability in the world for many years. However, this view fails to take into account the plurality of political powers in the modern world. Indeed, in the past, with only a limited number of reasonably responsible world powers, such an argument may have held water, but the world we live in today is filled with many rogue states and dictatorships vying for international attention, whose power lies in their largely unregulated national nuclear programmes. North Korea, for example, has kept the world on its toes as it frequently launches test missiles in a display of its military strength, which particularly antagonises its non-nuclear neighbours such as South Korea and Japan. Also, strained bilateral relations between nuclear states such as India and Pakistan severely threaten global security, as their long history of war and conflict gives no reassurance of responsible behaviour now. As a result, the presence of nuclear powers aggravates political tensions in the world, resulting in, as expected, greater instability.

Another point to note at this moment is that with the rise of non-state players such as terrorist organisations, any nuclear material generated through national nuclear programmes can easily fall into the hands of these extremist forces. Against these ideologies, the fear of reprisal no longer holds, as not only are they a constantly shifting target that is difficult if not impossible to strike, many may indeed welcome death and martyrdom. Given that nuclear programmes in places such as Iran and North Korea sorely lack regulation, it is not difficult to see where illegal radioactive materials may come from. Even developed countries fare no better; a recent exercise held in the US to assess the level of security at nuclear plants throughout the states, in which armed “militants”

stormed the facilities, has shown that the level of security at a large majority of these plants is disappointingly inadequate. Thus, it becomes clear that national nuclear programmes are no more safe than ticking time bombs, and should never be justified especially when they are created for military purposes.

What, then, of nuclear energy programmes? As the world faces increased global warming and declining oil and natural gas stocks, nuclear energy emerges as a viable and largely sustainable alternative source of energy. In an age of peak oil prices and rising pollution in industrialised cities which depend on highly pollutive coal to fuel their economic growth (examples include cities such as Linfen and Datong in China), and especially considering that procuring what little oil left in the world would require dealing with unsavoury regimes such as Libya (before Gaddafi was overthrown) and Syria, it is not surprising that efficient and clean nuclear energy becomes a top choice for producing electrical power. Indeed, its high efficiency and relatively low cost places it as even better than renewable energy sources such as wind and solar energy. Little surprise then, that nuclear power has fuelled the rapid economic expansion of economies such as Germany and Japan, both of which made great leaps and bounds of progress from the time of the world wars when they were laid waste, to reach their current status as some of the world's largest economic powerhouses. Indeed, in response to the Japanese people who have recently been campaigning for their country to wean itself off nuclear power, many politicians and economists have risen up in defiance with a slew of dire predictions for the future of the Japanese economy should the end of Japan's nuclear energy programmes come to pass. Thus, it would seem that national nuclear programmes can drive economic expansion especially in an age of global economic uncertainty.

However, to take such a view of nuclear energy as being unequivocally good for the country would be to foolishly ignore the myriad risks associated with it, which are arguably no more innocuous than the dangers brought by nuclear weapons. The tide of public opinion in Japan has turned against nuclear power in no small part due to the catastrophic earthquake-cum-tsunami-cum-nuclear crisis that occurred earlier this year in Japan. The nuclear fallout at the Fukushima Daiichi plant sent shockwaves throughout Japanese society and the world, echoing earlier tragedies at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island which have yet to fade from the public's consciousness. A best-selling book in Japan entitled *The Lie of Nuclear Power*, details the many reassurances with regard to safety by nuclear professionals and politicians alike, and contrast them with the dramatic failure of the back-up systems in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan's north-eastern coast. At the present moment, with insufficient technology to ensure the safety of nuclear power plants, it would be foolhardy for national governments to pursue nuclear energy programmes despite its attractiveness as a clean and efficient energy source.

It is interesting to note that the world will likely become an increasingly harsh place for nuclear power in the coming decades. Technological advances in the renewable energy sector will greatly reduce the cost and increase the efficiency of green energy sources, reducing the edge nuclear plant retains over its competitors. The people of the world, now convinced of the dangers of nuclear technology, are already beginning to turn against it. Global warming is leading to erratic climatic patterns that, with drastic weather changes and frequent hurricanes, will leave nuclear power plants even more vulnerable to nuclear fallout. In such a world, it seems only prudent that governments should look beyond nuclear power.

A thorough investigation of the benefits and risks of national nuclear programmes can lead to only one conclusion: such programmes are never justified when used for military purposes, and are becoming increasingly unjustified as a source of energy to power the economy, given the lack of failsafe safety systems and responsible regulators. To ignore such grave warnings of the dangers of nuclear technology is to set ourselves up for an eventual nuclear disaster, when we, with the benefit of hindsight, will repeat the line uttered by the pilot of Enola Gay at the close of the Second World War upon witnessing the destruction wreaked by the atomic bomb he had dropped. "My God, what have we done?"

Marker's comments:

Excellent effort, coherent, organised, well supported and insightful. An enjoyable and engaging read. Excellent command and organisation. Check expressions for clarity.

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essay 21

Discuss the view that the environment can only be saved through the efforts of developed nations.

Fong Hui Min Cheryl 11S03L

As climate change rears its ugly head, there has been a rise in talks surrounding the issue of environmental conservation. From speeches of world leaders to earnest youths protesting against failed climate change talks at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, questions and discussions on how to save the environment and who should be putting in the effort for environmental conservation have surfaced. Many have taken the stand that the environment can only be saved through the efforts of developed nations as they have the technology, expertise and the resources essential for environmental conservation. However, I am of the view that developing nations also have a part to play in environmental conservation because they are not totally exempt from the responsibility of environmental conservation and have ample manpower to make a substantial effort towards saving the Earth. Hence, I will seek to debunk the assumption that the environment can only be saved through the efforts of developed nations and advocate for multilateral cooperation between both developed and developing nations.

It would be useful to first acknowledge why, as the question implies, the environment should be saved by developed nations. From the nineteenth to the twentieth century, developed nations have built their prosperity upon industrialisation, which has given rise to carbon emissions and environmental pollution. Their actions have been noted and cautioned against by eminent scientists such as French polymath Joseph Fourier and Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius, who in their scientific writings warned of the dangers that excessive carbon emissions could bring to the environment. Nevertheless, such advice was blatantly ignored by profit-driven industrialists. Such evidence strongly shows that developed nations were already polluting the environment way before developing nations; hence they would be the main culprits of environmental degradation. Furthermore, exploitation of natural resources has also largely been the fault of developed nations as seen by the British pursuit of South Africa's gold. Since a basic tenet of our judicial system is that the guilty must compensate the victims for their losses, developed nations should be the ones to step up to conserve the environment.

Let us look further into the issue that the environment can only be saved by developed nations. Many, especially those in developing nations, would firmly agree that developed nations have the technology and expertise relevant to environmental conservation; hence the environment can be better saved through their efforts. For example, Toyota in Japan produces energy-efficient hybrid cars that run on alternative energy sources such as biofuel and an entire city in Germany, known as the Freiburg City, is running extensively on solar power and other renewable sources. From these examples, we can see how developed nations, with their energy-efficient technology, can help in environmental conservation efforts. In addition, if we compare the financial capabilities of the one billion people in developing countries living under the World Bank's poverty line with the people in developed nations who are relatively more financially secure, people in developed nations can easily direct some money towards buying chlorofluorocarbon-free refrigerators and donating to environmental conservation efforts such as those helmed by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), without reaching too deep into their pockets. Hence, it may seem that only people in developed nations can save the environment with their technology and resources.

Moreover, developing nations have their own bread-and-butter issues to tackle and would hardly place environmental conservation on their list of priorities. People in developing nations are clamouring for jobs in industries in a bid to break out of the poverty cycle, so care for the environment would likely take a back seat. A pertinent example would be China's First Raise Our Growth (FROG) campaign, which facilitated the employment of thousands of workers in industries. Though these industries may be polluting in the short run, these workers are more concerned

about their rice bowls, which can provide them with more tangible benefits than environmental conservation. Thus, developed nations seem to be the sole warriors fighting against climate change with their environmental conservation efforts.

However, I beg to differ as developing nations clearly have a part to play in environmental conservation as they too are potential polluters and thus should not pass the full burden to developed nations. To say that the environment can only be saved through the efforts of developed nations would be to place full responsibility of environmental conservation on their shoulders. This is highly to be discouraged as it is as good as passing a mandate to allow developing nations to pollute as much as they want, which may lead to a Pandora's Box of dire consequences. Currently, without such a mandate, developing nations are already polluting the environment severely. In Lake Taihu, China, a furore has emerged in recent times over toxic chemicals being found in its waters. This was due to the wanton dumping by industries in China that has cost the surrounding region a valuable source of clean drinking water. These toxic chemicals have taken the lives of many women and children who used the water to bathe and drink. In another developing nation, Brazil, the world's largest carbon sink is being depleted through illegal deforestation. These examples show that the responsibility of environmental conservation should not solely be undertaken by developed countries as it might lead to even worse situations. In addition, we have seen the 'tragedy of the commons' through the eyes of Garret Hardin in 1968, in which shared resources are depleted very quickly if one party is allowed to be irresponsible. Since developing nations are also culprits in pollution, they should contribute to environmental conservation efforts.

Furthermore, we have seen from other instances that developing nations have the manpower and the ability to achieve environmental conservation. From the successful massive cleanup of the capital of China, Beijing, in the lead-up to the 2008 Olympic Games, we can see that developing nations have the advantage of manpower to plough into environmental conservation efforts. Besides, developing nations are also better suited to solving environmental problems in their own backyard, as their efforts are more likely to be welcomed by their own people. Imagine if engineers and scientists from America attempt to fix China's environmental problems with their environmentally-friendly technology. They probably would not succeed given the language barriers, bureaucracy and lack of authority. A more likely outcome would be China accusing the West of attempting to make them once again dependent on Western products. Hence, developing nations' efforts to save the environment can be effective in solving problems of their own, thus debunking the view that the environment can only be saved through developed nations' efforts.

Having established that both developed and developing countries have a part to play in environmental conservation and that efforts from both parties are required to help save the environment, I would state that multilateral cooperation between developed and developing nations is a plausible solution. From the example of the Global North in funding Brazil's efforts to curb illegal deforestation, we can see that cooperation between these two parties is essential. Developed nations can provide the technology and expertise in this area while developing nations have the benefit of hindsight from developed nations as well as the advantage of manpower. Hence through the efforts of multilateral cooperation between them, the environment can be saved.

Finally, it is time to realise that we all live in a world that is increasingly interconnected and thus we will either flourish or go extinct together. As John F. Kennedy once said, "I am sorry to say that there is too much point to the wisecrack that life is extinct on other planets because their scientists were more advanced than ours." To allow ourselves to continue enjoying the present standard of living that we have today, we need to combat climate change as a global community. For one, natural disasters and the consequences of climate change are blind to the sins and moralities of the various nations. Though the United States and China have been the main contributors to the interminably rising levels of carbon dioxide and climate change that is hot on our heels today, it is the Maldives that are about to sink below sea level if climate change is not corrected. Hence, both developed and developing nations should make an effort to conserve the environment.

In conclusion, the environment can be saved through the efforts of both developed and developing nations due to the fact that they have the advantages of technology and manpower respectively. In order to save the environment, effort from both parties must be put in. The world is in peril and it is time for us to act.

Marker's comments:

Very well done, Cheryl. Carefully and clearly argued points, which are valid. Issues are tackled with insight into local issues as well. Examples relevant and argument is forceful.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 22

Discuss the view that the environment can only be saved through the efforts of developed nations.

Yuen Wing Yan 11S06S

In the recent Copenhagen environmental summit in 2009, the tension between the developed and developing world bubbled over when members of the African delegation walked out on the discussions, temporarily putting a standstill to the talks. Developing countries were increasingly frustrated with a lack of commitment on the part of developed nations, which had put greater pressure on developing countries to cut their carbon emissions. As the grim statistics warn of an impending environmental crisis, world governments are grappling with who should, and best can, undertake efforts to save the environment. One should realise that it is not enough to solely depend on the efforts of developed nations, developing countries play a deciding role as well.

Nonetheless, the sheer scale and cost of efforts needed to effect change on the environment suggest that only developed nations have the necessary financial resources to deal with this problem. Developed nations, having attained a reasonable standard of living, are able to allocate funds into the research and development of technology to minimise the damage done to the environment. On the other hand, it is simply not logical for developing countries to prioritise environmental issues over economic growth when they are struggling to solve hunger and poverty issues in their own backyards. This disparity can be seen from how developed nations such as France can turn to nuclear technology to supply 76% of its energy needs, and Norway can invest billions to develop carbon capture and storage technology, while countries like Ghana can only allocate a \$1000 budget yearly for research in green technology. India's senior negotiator at the above summit also pointed out that it would cost India billions to invest in green infrastructure, which is not prudent considering it is home to 42% of the world's undernourished children. Evidently, the stark contrasts between the situations in developing and developed nations seem to point to the fact that developed nations are usually the ones who implement viable measures, and hence a tendency to believe that only they can save the world.

Another reason to believe that only developed nations can make an impact to save the environment is due to the large extent of damage such countries are inflicting on the environment. Corporations from these countries have long been, and still are, damaging the environment in exchange for profits which have propelled them into such a high standard of living in the first place. According to a United Nations report, it is estimated that the world's largest corporations caused \$2.2 trillion worth of damage to the environment in 2008. According to Greenpeace, companies such as Nike and Gucci have been linked to illegal deforestation by cattle ranchers in the Amazon to supply materials for their much coveted consumer goods. Therefore, since developed nations are the main culprits in environmental damage, it is only when they enforce stricter regulations and cut down on emissions, that it is possible to save the environment. This would be equivalent to tackling the largest cause of the problem.

In addition, the developed world has created an unsustainable model of living which the developing world is aspiring to achieve, and so it is reasonable to believe that it is only by changing the habits of people in developed nations, that the environment can be saved because the excessive demand for resources will be eliminated. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that five times worth of the current Earth's resources would be required to sustain the population if everyone adopts the average American's lifestyle. This culture of excessive consumerism has led to an excessive use of plastic bags, for example, in the United Kingdom. Therefore by stopping such blatant misuse of our resources which is so prominent in developed nations, the environment can be spared from extensive damage.

However, despite the crucial role that developed nations play, to depend solely on efforts of

developed nations would be equivalent to taking a step forward and two steps back, since developing nations are increasingly contributing to environmental damage. China is the second largest emitter of greenhouse gases and is poised to overtake the US in a few decades' time. The growing middle class in China and India have also led to an increase in demand for luxury goods, such as cars and air-conditioning, which are energy-intensive, and goods symbolising status and wealth, as Chanel has seen its sales in these regions increase by up to 45%. Therefore it is impossible to neglect the significant damage that developing nations are causing and so it may be futile to expect environmental problems to be solved only by developed nations.

Hence it is evident that saving the environment is a global issue that requires cooperation from various countries, developing or developed. It is only if the world makes a concerted effort on all fronts that there can be some progress in this matter. While some may question the efficacy of international summits, they have been able to achieve milestones such as the banning of chlorofluorocarbon products internationally, and even the Copenhagen Accord, which many describe as lacking 'political teeth', has initiated the setting up of a fund for developed nations to aid developing countries in building green infrastructure. Therefore, developed nations are required to take the lead and provide necessary assistance to solve the environmental problem, and developing nations to accept the assistance and bite the bullet in making their countries more environmentally friendly, even if it is at a cost to their economic growth. Hence, a unilateral effort by developed nations is certainly not enough.

It is also worthwhile to note that developing nations are actually best suited to pave the way for a sustainable model, hence their efforts may have a greater significance than developed nations. While developed nations may have achieved economic growth, their methods are unsustainable and will eventually come to a stop with rising oil prices and depleting gas reserves. Hence the onus is on developing nations to recognise and learn from such mistakes and avoid going down the same path. This trend is picking up in China where up to 40 cities have been ear-marked as 'eco-cities', the most prominent ones being the Sino-Tianjin Eco-city and the one at Dongguan, which rely entirely on resources within the region and recycled waste resources. Therefore, it can be said that with the pressing need to save the environment, it is more difficult to change current behavior and implement remedial action in developed nations, as compared to a radical shift towards sustainable behaviour, especially in developing countries.

In conclusion, while the efforts by developed nations are significant in solving the environmental problem, it is unwise to depend on them alone. Developing countries should also step up to implement their own changes so that the Earth can remain a sustainable living environment for more generations to come. Therefore, it is more useful to conclude that the environment can only be saved through the efforts of the entire world.

Marker's comments:

Excellent essay. Relevant, supported and well structured. An enjoyable read. Coherently and cogently written. Excellent command of the language and well-organised.

2011 Year 6 General Paper Preliminary Examination

essay 23

"Advertisements truly reflect what a society desires." Do you agree?

Lee Jing Yi 11S03K

A beautiful model, perched on a leather sofa, clothed in an oversized camel-coloured blazer no doubt made of the finest fabric, stared up from the pages of a glossy magazine. In her arms lies the bag of the season. Just one word is printed across the page – PRADA. To some, the advertisement is frivolous, or even boring. To others, it tells a story of perfection. Either way, advertisements speak to society, supposedly reminding its members constantly of their needs and wants. But how much of this is truly what society desires? I believe advertisements are the media's way of constructing society's wants and creating demand where there was previously none.

What does society desire? On a superficial level, advertisements in the newspapers, and commercials on television will tell you that we want to attain prestige, pleasure and beauty. It seems so – print ads use words like "class" and "elegance" to lure customers into purchasing large, expensive cars on the promise of superior quality; slimming centres advertise endlessly with before and after pictures of women, once deemed far from "perfect", now slender and fitting society's description of beautiful. However, we have to ask ourselves how much of this vision of and yearning for perfection exists naturally in society, and how much has been manufactured and surreptitiously injected into our social system by the media with years of celebrity coverage and lifestyle television programmes?

While one can argue that advertisements show us what we want, I think it is more accurate to say that they tell us what to want. This is influenced largely by popular culture, which is largely influenced by the media, which – lo and behold – controls advertisements. It is true, who does not desire a comfortable life? Society wants to live in abundance and pleasure, to enjoy life within their means. After all, life is now, with the progress of technology, less about survival than it is about the pursuit of happiness, glory or achievement. But an advertisement's role is to tell consumers that their current standard of living is not good enough, and it does so by forcing the audience to compare their lifestyles and appearance to something almost impossible to attain – a clever strategy that the media adopts by adorning celebrities with the "best" products and then making them the image of the "good" life. In this way, society is made to believe that only when such products are consumed and when they enjoy the same luxuries as their pop idols can they truly enjoy life. Advertisements then simply come in to point consumers in the direction of the right store.

Advertisements therefore play the important role of informing the customer, because if the customer has no knowledge of the product, he will have no desire for it. A child is much less likely to be obese if his parents do not introduce him to junk food at a young age, as he will not have any reason to crave for them if he has not tasted them. In the same way, a company selling a product must let its customers know exactly what it has to offer in order for its products to become an object of desire. What is curious, though, is that due to the limited scope in which advertisements can reach their audience – mostly through visual or audio media – advertisers sometimes have to adopt means of selling their product that have nothing to do with the product's function. An example of this is the perfume industry. Although the scent is what differentiates one perfume from the other, firms hire models, world-class fashion photographers and use excellent lighting to produce beautiful campaign stills for their new fragrances. They feed society the idea of sophistication or seduction that the advertisement tags to the product, rather than the actual product. In fact, the most ludicrous forms of advertising involving sex appeal seem to be the most effective strategy employed by firms across all industries in the most absurd ways. Eva Longoria, the voluptuous actress from 'Desperate Housewives', features most famously in an ice cream commercial for Magnum. One would wonder how such a tenuous link between sexual desire and a desire for delicious food could be formed. Yet Magnum sales reportedly spiked after the campaign. Why do we fall prey? Is ice cream really sexy? It almost seems as if society unthinkingly laps up what the media and advertisers tell them.

The key purpose of advertising is to create false value. Most things have to be assigned a value; if not, market forces do not know how much to produce and consumers do not know how much to demand. The luxury goods market thrives on its ability to set ridiculously high prices for its goods, be they watches or handbags or even furniture, because of the value that they have gained in the eyes of society. In this way, their value is what certain consumers desire, and in this sense advertisements really do reflect exactly what these particular consumers are yearning for. It is understood that there is a divide in society – those who spend on luxury goods, and those who do not. Not everybody in society desires the same thing. After all, every individual values certain products more than others. A diehard fan of cigars will willingly spend up to hundreds of dollars for a Cuban, while the rest of society who smoke would rather buy a pack of cigarettes. A woman may choose to buy a Chanel bag over a cheaper one of the same material, colour and even design because she values the brand much more than any other. This is where advertising can only try to con its audience into believing that the product should be valued more by them than it currently is. To this market of undecided customers, advertisements may reflect what they desire – status and beauty – and try to add value to their products through fancy photo shoots and gorgeous models, such that the customer may align their desire for a “good” life with their desire for the products. To those already willing to prize the products at a high value, advertisements correctly reflect their desires.

In conclusion, advertising shows us what we, as an economy functioning on the exchange of products and services, want others to want, and are in the process influenced to believe that the constructed desire is what we want as well. Once the social fabric has become entrenched in ideals of perfection and pleasure, advertisements can then fully serve their function of reinforcing this manufactured desire, lest society forgets and becomes content once again.

Marker's comments:

Very well-written, Jing Yi. You have very nicely (and concisely) summed up the nature of the advertising industry and the interplay that exists between society and the media. Some very good observations made about products and how desires can be different for different groups of people as well. Do remember that advertisements are not limited to consumerism and materialism. An enjoyable read nonetheless. Good job!

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