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

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2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 5 **Cai Sirui | 21S06A**

Should we be concerned with the ethics of medical research when doing so will limit its effectiveness?

The Nuremberg Code, created at the Nuremberg trials in response to the Nazi's misadventures in human experimentation, was an unprecedented code outlining the ethical limits of research methods, and a nod to the necessity of paying heed to the ethical implications of scientific research. However, in the medical realm especially, where greater accuracy and expediency in the research process has the potential to bring about huge gains for the preservation of human health, ethical considerations may often be viewed as an unwanted hindrance, standing in the way of us being able to reap the benefits of medical research most effectively. In spite of this, I remain of the view that we should – and must – concern ourselves with the ethics of medical research, on the grounds that we have a moral imperative to safeguard the unalienable rights of man, and further, that keeping ethical concerns in the foreground is the only way to ensure that our medical research is effective towards desirable ends.

Detractors of the stand would likely seek to defend their view from a utilitarian standpoint: in the absence of ethical concerns as an impediment, medical research can be taken to greater heights, the benefits of which would bring about greater utility to a greater number of people by benefiting their health. Given that health issues are extremely time sensitive and directly affect one's well-being, being able to reach medical breakthroughs quickly would bring about far-reaching benefits to a great many people, and it seems counterproductive for ethical concerns to stand in the way of that. It is worth noting that many of the vaccines that we enjoy the protection of today were developed with the aid of ethically questionable practices, such as human experimentation. In comparison to more ethically acceptable testing methods, doing medical experimentation on humans has obvious benefits for the accuracy of the data obtained and thus the efficacy of the research procedure; one need not account for the great many physiological differences between the test subject and the intended benefactors of the research. The development of the Hepatitis B vaccine in 1980 did, indeed, benefit from this: researchers injected the virus into a group of students, then used their observations of the virus' effect to inform their development of the vaccine. Had ethical considerations come in the way of this practice, the vaccine might have taken much longer to develop. Seeing that many cases of the disease were prevented by the expedient development of the vaccine, it seems that there is a clear case to be made for the undesirability of ethical limitations when it comes to medical research.

However, I would contend that in spite of the apparent trade-off coming at the expense of its effectiveness, ensuring the ethics of medical research remains paramount because of our moral duty to protect certain unalienable rights belonging to all humans. From the starting point that all humans are beings of reason, Kant proffers his categorical imperative as a moral framework: that no person should be used as a means to an end, however desirable the "end" is. If we accept that all persons are deserving of certain fundamental rights and human dignity, as we rightly should, then Kant's moral theory is much more convincing that the utilitarian argument outlined earlier on, especially in the context of medical research. Even with the knowledge that we are benefactors of certain vaccines, it is difficult not to be deeply unsettled by the prospect that they were developed through ethically unsound methods. In the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, a number of Blacks in Alabama were unknowingly injected with the virus, and were deliberately withheld treatment after it became available so that scientists could observe the behaviour of the syphilis virus in humans. Granted, the observations may not have been as informative had the experiment been done on non-human test species, but compromising the health of real people without their consent is deeply problematic from a moral point of view, and a severe infringement of basic human rights. Furthermore, unethical practices in medical research like human experimentation tend to involve the already disadvantaged – such as the poor or people of colour – disproportionately, adding an exploitative layer to the practice and further highlighting the absolute need to counter such unethical practices.

I would further contend that the claim itself – that concerning ourselves with ethics would limit the effectiveness of medical research – is a problematic one in that it presents us with a false dichotomy. Ethical considerations may impede the reach and speed of medical research in some ways, but keeping them within our concerns actually helps to ensure that medical research is being pursued towards desirable ends, and is effective for the benefit of human health, rather than nefarious gains. The Thalidomide tragedy of the 1960s clearly highlights how failing to be guided by ethical concerns greatly compromised the effectiveness of medical research. While there had been a study claiming that the drug was safe for consumption during late pregnancy, it was later found that the publisher of the study had commercial links to the drug company and was motivated by monetary gains to present the findings as such. This breach of research ethics then led to up to ten thousand babies being born with birth defects as a result of their mothers consuming Thalidomide. It is thus clear that upholding ethical principles in the medical research process would commit researchers to publishing findings that are tried and accurate, which would boost, rather than limit, the effectiveness of their research. Another example can be found in the area of gene editing. Often heralded as a medical breakthrough, CRISPR technology has the potential to be greatly beneficial to human health – by preventing inherited diseases, for example – while simultaneously having the capability to bring about moral and social problems, such as through enabling the creation of designer babies. Thus, in the process of developing this technology, it is important that medical research is driven by ethical goals so that it yields results that are truly "effective" and beneficial.

To conclude, while I do acknowledge the purported benefits of conducting medical research without concerning oneself with ethics, I believe that it is incredibly dangerous to shun ethical considerations in the name of enhancing research effectiveness. Given the far reaching power of medical research, unethical practices can severely undermine individuals' basic rights, or cause nefarious research practices to be permissible, which would not only violate our basic moral duties, but also compromise the true effectiveness of medical research on the whole. Furthermore, as medical technologies continue to develop and mature, we are increasingly able to mitigate the trade-off between ethical considerations and the accuracy and expediency of research procedures, further highlighting the viability of being uncompromising on ethical standards. The Nuremberg Code was a promising start, and its underlying principles must continue to be upheld.

Comments

Such a great response which shows clear understanding of the dilemma for the most part. Apt, relevant examples that show that you were in your element. Good choice of question! Your analysis was on point and demonstrated impressive critical thinking skills. You could do slightly more to link to the question in your paragraph on Kantian ethics. Well handled with a lucid intro and conclusion. Coherent and effective in putting forth complex ideas.

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2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 6 **Chua Yu'en Chloe | 21S03D**

How far do you agree that good governance is key to the protection of the environment?

"Pollution should never be the price of prosperity." These words by former U.S. Vice President and environmental activist Al Gore are reflective of the competing priorities that governments all around the world grapple with. Yet, Gore's appeals to them that a good government should never allow our skies to be polluted or our rivers to be poisoned in the name of economic growth. Good governance is hallmarked by a principled, morally upright government that is farsighted and has the best interests of the people at heart. Due to the extensive capability and influence the government has over the trajectory of mankind, despite contradictions between government priorities, protection of the environment cannot do without a good government. In fact, the ecological crisis right at our doorstep is very much due to negligent governance.

Governments are often criticised to have failed to successfully tackle environmental problems and those more sympathetic to the challenges governments face might point out how, more often than not, competing government priorities such as economic growth render the state less important in our fight to protect the environment. The government may after all act in the best interest of the people, but at the expense of the environment. The inherent tension between what is considered good for the country – economic growth, lowering unemployment, solving health crises – and what is good for the environment renders good governance not only ineffective but counterproductive to protecting the environment. Economic interests are a key concern for the people, and it is indeed negligent for a government to ignore the immense economic revenue and jobs created for the people to protect the environment. For example, India, an emerging economy, grapples with environmental considerations and the need to meet urgent energy demands. Despite pledging to cut carbon emissions by 35% by 2030, India decided to continue to expand the Jharkland, a coal mining reserve and upscale coal production. This is to meet the burgeoning population and insatiable demand for energy. The short-term urgent nature of the need for energy renders investment in green technology and renewables unviable, given that they are costly and still less efficient (in terms of distribution) than coal. To expedite the process of providing energy and electricity to the people, the government, in the people's interest, allowed environmental considerations to take a backseat. It is harsh and almost unfair to criticise India's government as negligent, as the government had the standard of living and people's interest at heart, but sacrificed environmental protection to do so. This thus illustrates that good governance very often can be a detriment to environmental protection, and therefore cannot be key to averting our ecological crisis.

However, such a view, while understandable, is seemingly too kind on governments and neglects the overlap between the interest of the people (and economic growth) and environmental protection.

Good governance often entails far-sightedness and a consideration of the long-term. It is precisely this that is vital to environmental protection, especially since the impact of neglecting the environment on citizens is cumulative and not immediate. Good governance considers the interests of the people in the short-term and long-term and finds a way to balance the two. In that process, protection of the environment, which we as human beings are keenly dependent on for survival, naturally takes care of itself. Thus, it is actually negligent of the government to sacrifice environmental protection for unbridled economic growth as it reflects the lack of foresight on the government's part. Singapore illustrates this very well. Our government is known for efficiency, pragmatism, and far-sightedness. These traits of good governance have been absolutely integral to protecting the environment. Since our founding days, land allocation was planned 50 years ahead. The concentration of our waste and garbage on Semakau, an island far from the mainland shows that the government recognises the need to minimise the impact our trash has on the environment. Demarcation of land for parks and natural reserves is a recognition of the long-term benefits protecting these nature reserves have on the well-being of the people. For example, such carbon sinks greatly reduce the urban heat island effect that Singaporeans struggle with in the tropics. In India, New Delhi is enveloped in poisonous smog from the extensive coal production while Beijing is infamous for its hazardous air pollution from factories in Shenzhen. The extent of this is so great that a specific term "Airpocalypse" has been coined for it. The governments' obsession with unbridled economic growth reflects an incompetency to balance short term gains with long term sustainable growth, which has led to fatalities from air-borne related illnesses and heat strokes. The comparison between these countries illustrates the importance of good governance in protecting the environment, as the far-sightedness of a good government to serve the long-term interest of the people overlaps naturally with environmental protection. The convergence between these two goals is unique to governments and therefore, they play an integral role in solving our ecological crisis.

Another reason why governments are the key stakeholder in protecting the environment is that no other actor has the same degree of ability to influence a country's affairs on a large scale. Governments have the mandate to chart the course of the country and a good government with the interests of the people at heart has an extensive influence on whether we can avert our ecological disaster. Finland's government for example, tames the profit incentive of businesses by demarcating zones for environmental protection and prohibits any development in that area. Large subsidies for green technology and renewables for businesses have been paramount to greatly reducing reliance on non-renewables. Finland, as a result, has the majority of its energy needs taken care of by renewables, with 16% on nuclear and 20% on wind. Governments' influence over businesses mean that they are vital to environmental protection, as the main challenge faced is the conflict with profit-making incentives of businesses. On the contrary, negligence of the government has the ability to set back environmental progress to a significant extent. The U.S., a historical emitter that contributes a hefty one quarter of the world's emissions, has allowed fossil fuel businesses to thrive. During Trump's era, cutting funding from the Environmental Protection Agency and increasing subsidies for fossil fuel companies have made these companies ever more arrogant and entitled, allowing them to continue extracting and profiting off the depletion of our resources. Businesses, in particular, those whose fortunes are inextricably tied to resource extraction, are still after all beholden to governmental regulation. Fossil fuel taxes and regulation on emissions are just some examples of indispensable tools at the government's disposal if we were to successfully deal with the world's environmental problems.

Another hallmark of good governance is the trust and rapport that governments have with their people. This cooperation between government and citizenry has an often-understated importance in solving crises such as climate change or even in Covid-19. Environmental protection is a collective problem, requiring cooperation from all individuals and actors. If our efforts to tackle our environmental crises were to bear fruit, it requires a consolidation of efforts, channelled in the right direction. Therefore, the ability for the government to rally its people and find a consensus is important in getting citizens on board to take action and protect the environment. After all, government policies do not operate in a vacuum and requires buy-in and support from a trusting populace. A divisive country like the U.S. where polarisation between the Republican climate change deniers and the Democrats have posed a huge hindrance to solving the crisis. The government and the citizenry are still squabbling over the existence of the issue, let alone take meaningful action. The inability of the government to find a common ground and consensus therefore makes it unsurprising that the U.S. has so far made – rather shamefully – so little progress to tackle climate change. The poor governance in the U.S. means it is near impossible for the country to be united in its efforts to fight climate change or plastic pollution, which all require individual efforts to change our lifestyles, such as cutting down on our use of cars or going zero-waste. Therefore, a good government, one that is able to rally the citizenry together, is vital to protecting the environment. No other stakeholder is able to have that mandate and authority to do so. Therefore, good governance is key to protecting the environment.

"It is not too late to admit that we have failed." These biting words by Greta Thunberg to government officials at the IPCC climate conference is an urgent wakeup call that our governments, with their obsession with unbridled economic growth, has sorely neglected the environment. The effects of climate change are exponential. Therefore, our governments, given their extensive role in the environmental crisis, both in causing it and solving it, need to take action now.

Comments

This essay reveals good insight on the issue and consistently addresses the topic of good governance and raises several relevant and meaningful qualities of good governance in the argument. Examples are effectively used and analysed to further the points made. Could have taken a different approach with your balance/counter argument to achieve fuller relevance. Very mature use of language, showing sensitivity and complexity in the choice of vocabulary. Well-controlled expression and very effective introduction and conclusion.

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2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 8 **Andrew Tang Zhonghan | 21S06N**

Art is only worth what people will pay for it. Do you agree?

Mark Rothko's abstract paintings have long sparked intense debate in the art industry over the market value and true value of many contemporary art pieces. Many people are unable to see how just placing two shades of red on a canvas can justify the million dollar price tags frequently attached to these works, yet art critics rave about the sublime beauty of this new abstract movement and its impact on shaping modern art on a larger scale. Although some might argue that art which requires substantial financial support is only worth what people are willing to pay for it, I believe that art is worth so much more for its ability to lash out at injustice, for its ability to stand in solidarity with the world in times of crisis, and artworks' presence as important cultural icons.

To begin with, many artists are able to use their works to take a stand against unjust treatment and fight for a change. Art has long been a medium fuelled by passions and emotions, allowing artists to spread social messages through their art pieces. Thus, it would be myopic to diminish art to being merely worth its price tag. Jean-Michel Basquiat's "Defacement", for example, is one of the celebrated artist's most prominent pieces, for its socially charged tone that decries the systemic racism and police brutality that is all too common in America. Inspired by the death of Michael Stewart at the hands of violent police officers, Basquiat paints a sorrowful yet jarring picture of how African-Americans are treated by the law which was supposed to protect them. This draws remarkable similarities with the recent horrific killing of George Floyd in 2020, as Defacement's message rings true so many years since its creation, truly showcasing how little progress has been made in resolving racial discrimination in America. Similarly, Kent Monkman's "The Scream" is another scarring depiction of racial conflict, depicting the forced assimilation of Indigenous children in Canada by the Catholic Church and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The aggression of the priest, nuns and officers is captured so vividly together with the anguished faces of Indigenous families having their children ripped out of their arms, making this artwork so visceral in its way of expressing the grief of so many Indigenous families suffering at the hands of their oppressors. Truly enough, the atrocities in this historic painting resonate loudly today, as the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves in Canada's reform schools highlight the mortifying abuse that the Indigenous people have undergone since ages ago. Thus, as can be seen from how art can be powerful in delivering social commentary, it is worth way more than simply numbers behind a dollar sign.

However, some detractors might argue that art is only worth what monetary value the market places on it, especially when the art incurs a heavy financial burden on governments and countries. This comes as many people, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period, start to shift away from art that they consider to be highbrow and impractical to instead focus on bread-and-butter issues, thus only seeing art as a commodity that generates financial revenue. Some art pieces require years of work and dedication, consuming a large amount of resources for completion, and people argue that only the final price from market demand determines its worth as it must justify the opportunity cost of possible welfare programmes forgone. For example, the recent initiative in France to provide youth with money to consume art has garnered much support for the French government as they see art as an economic tool to boost a country's economy. By commercialising art, many countries can diversify their economy through more non-conventional sources of revenue, but this requires viewing art as merely the economic benefit it can bring. Governments especially will evaluate art based on what people are willing to pay for it, since maintaining museums such as the Louvre and the National Arts Museum of Singapore requires tax money and incurring a debt simply to finance the display of art is unfavourable if it cannot even recuperate significant financial returns from the people willing to pay for it. Thus, it might seem that art is worth only what economic price it has.

Nevertheless, I will argue that art has more value than simply its price due to art being a symbol of hope that stands together with people and communities in tough times. Art can be a medium through which artists express their grief and call for unity during difficult times and call for unity during difficult times. Banksy's "Game Changer", for example, depicts a young boy forsaking the traditional Batman and Spider-Man action figures to instead play with a caped nurse, a testament to the dedicated frontline workers doing their hardest to protect our communities from the COVID-19 pandemic. Banksy gifted the painting to a hospital as a symbol of support and love for the various heroes struggling in hospitals to protect and cure victims of the pandemic, and it was a truly touching gesture for many hospital workers in the United Kingdom. Thus, art can be worth the hopes and well-wishes that artist wish to convert through their work, and invigorates the people actively fighting the toughest battles as they obtain a source of strength from the unity of a country behind their backs. Picasso's magnum opus "Guernica" is another example of this, painted by the visionary in response to the 1937 Basque bombings that killed nearly a third of Guernica's population. The visually striking painting is a cry against indiscriminate slaughter, with its easily recognisable images inspiring many similar paintings in war-torn regions such as Africa where locals adapt the imagery of "Guernica" into their own versions as cries of anguish against cruelty and mass killings. Picasso made "Guernica" not as a painting simply to be sold and thus its worth stems way further, becoming a global icon that is a potent reminder of the horrors of warm and a symbol of mourning for victims of atrocities. Thus, art can rally people together in turbulent times and its worth much more than money.

Furthermore, art also has a significant cultural role as it anchors us to our roots and gives us a sense of belonging. By utilising historical images that call back to our heritage and traditions, art can serve to link us back to our memories and give us a sense of identity. Sonny Liew's *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* is a prominent example of this, as it poignantly captures the zeitgeist and cultural landscape during Singapore's Independence Era, showcasing the social fabric of our small country as it flourished from an uncertain, freshly independent nation into today's prosperous and secure city-state. For older audiences, the art draws them back to the nostalgia of days bygone and reminds them of the major events that they have tided through together, fostering a sense of social cohesion. For younger audiences, learning about how life in Singapore was like before they were born is vital in building strong roots and helping to cultivate greater appreciation for the racial and social unity that we enjoy today. In Japan as well, although globalisation has spurred many publishers to treat manga as more of a financial instrument rather than as a preservation of culture, many manga still draw heavily from Japanese traditions, folklore and heritage. For example, Vagabond is a critically acclaimed samurai manga that takes its inspiration from the legend of Shinmen Takezo and brings readers back to the feudal times of ancient Japan with its more classical art style. By preserving and showcasing a country's culture, art is a crucial medium through which much of our history can be stored and retold to many generations to come. Thus, art is worth way more than digits on a price tag since it can serve such an important cultural role.

In a nutshell, art has various values socially and culturally, from delivering impactful social commentary, to building solidarity during crises, to being a vessel for keeping heritage alive, and it would be short-sighted to dismiss it as merely worth a price that people put on it. Art has, and will always be, a lustrous medium for artist to tell stories, paint pictures of social realities and breathe life into dated traditions.

Comments

Relevance to the topic shown throughout the essay. Mastery of content shown and very good language skills. A highly engaging essay. Still, it would have been useful for examples to also highlight the price tags attached to the art pieces and then argue how these pieces' worth is beyond their price tags, rather than merely selecting art pieces which highlight issues not fully linked to the notion of price. But overall, the examples are appropriate, and the overall response does talk about how art is not only worth what people are willing to pay for it.

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2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 8 **Nabonita Sen | 21S06Q**

Art is only worth what people will pay for it. Do you agree?

In 2015, the National Arts Council estimated that the arts sector in Singapore was worth $1.7 billion. The commercialisation of art over the past century has indeed led to the burgeoning art industry we see today, where thousands of pieces of art are being created, bought and sold every day. As with most things materialistic, society today often judges the value of art based on its monetary worth. However, this essay will attempt to argue against the parochial notion that art is only worth what people will pay for it.

In our continuously more economically and socially pragmatic world, society increasingly posits that the value of all things produced ought to be judged materialistically. Art brings nothing to society if not monetary gains. The monetary value of art is also immediately reflective of how society receives and views such art. After all, it is always the most expensive pieces of art, such as the "Mona Lisa" or "Weeping Woman" that are the most appreciated. It is rare to see pieces of art worth anywhere below thousands of dollars being displayed at the world's most prominent museums, such as The Louvre in France – and for good reason too. The reality is that the more people are willing to pay for it, the more famous the art becomes, and fame is often what draws in curious customers to museums and art exhibitions all over the globe. In essence, the value of art is best judged by its monetary value, because from a pragmatic point of view, worth can only be judged by the revenue raked in. In addition, the direct corollary of art having a higher valuation is people realising and believing that this is a work of art worth viewing and celebrating, as compared to art pieces of little monetary value, which most people would probably not even stop to look at.

However, such a view is too myopic and fails to recognise that while it is true that when people are willing to pay more for an art piece, it receives far more recognition and is said to be "worth more" to society; price does not give or take away from an art piece's intrinsic value. Vincent Van Gogh died a poor man, with his art career never really taking off while he was alive. Today, his pieces such as "Sunflower" and "Starry Night" are worth millions of dollars. In truth, his art was always inherently valuable, whether people were willing to pay for it or not. His technical skill was always present, and it must have always had an impact on people, just that they never really stopped to look. To view art through such an economically pragmatic lens would be degrading to all artists through the ages, for art cannot be viewed as simply a commodity to grease the wheels of capitalism. Art is inherently worth far more than that, whether the market recognises it or not. In reality, it displays its worth in ways apart from monetarily, which this essay will cover in the following paragraphs.

Art's worth could be better judged by the impact it has on individuals. It serves as a medium of self-expression for the artist himself, and often evokes thought and proves a cathartic experience for those viewing the art. Such value that is brought to society cannot be measured monetarily. Even pieces that are not quite as famous or expensive can still have a great impact on individuals viewing it. In addition, some works of art simply cannot be purchased, so there is no monetary value attached to it. For example, Banksy's work often evokes emotion in those who gaze upon it. "Girl with Balloon" by Banksy sends a message to never lose hope because it is always within reach. Such pieces of art cannot be bought, as is the nature of street art and graffiti. Closer to home, graffiti artist Zul Othman's work, though also without any monetary value, is clearly valued in society, as proven by the Young Artist's Award presented to him by the National Arts Council. Often, people are also unable to pay to view art. It is not economically feasible for everyone to buy tickets to museums or travel the world to see art pieces. Although unable to pay for it, simply viewing pictures of the art is still enough to add some value to people's lives. Many virtual galleries exist today, including one by Singapore's National Gallery, allowing people to view art from the comfort of their homes. Although people are not paying for it, the art viewed online through pictures is still able to provide a large fraction of what seeing the real thing provides, which includes entertainment, self-reflection and catharsis, which is why such virtual galleries are thriving. There is clearly still value for individuals in art consumed without a price, contrary to the belief that art is only worth what people will pay for it.

In addition, art's impact on society in terms of nation-building and acting as a cultural ballast is priceless in itself. Art's worth must also be judged by the role it plays within a society. Many governments recognise the role of art in creating a national identity and enforcing a historical narrative. The Singapore government has spent $274 million on revitalising our arts industry through funding our galleries and museums in terms of upkeep and putting up new exhibitions, in order to make it more accessible to the public. Similarly, the Finnish government spent $220 million in 2014 for the same reason. Although it must be acknowledged that these governments have technically been "paying" for the art, it has largely been to promote the consumption of it by society and improve accessibility, rather than to valuate pieces of art. The Singapore government has made it free for Singaporeans to visit art galleries, once again proving that they are well aware of the fact that consuming art rooted in the national context is beneficial for society. Examples of such art pieces are "National Language Class" by Cultural Medallion recipient Chua Mia Tee, which acts as a visual narrative for a part of our history, which helps to build a shared identity through common experiences. In addition, art has always been an invaluable part of cultures, from far before it was commercialised. Australian cave paintings by the first few civilisations that existed prove that art acted as a binding force for cultures, creating a common identity and experiences despite having no monetary value. Art has always played a pertinent role in societies, and governments continue to recognise this. Thus, we must judge the value of art based on its impact on society as well, as it proves a lot of its worth in this aspect.

Art has the potential to shape individuals and societies. A term coined by Joseph Beuys, 'social sculpture', embodies this very belief. To judge art simply by its monetary value gives us insight into the inner machinations of our society, wherein materialism comes above all. This very pursuit of monetary gains is what takes away value from art, rather than giving it value, as the commodification of it fails to acknowledge art's importance in society and allow art to enact its role in the community and on individuals.

Comments

General attempt to address the 'only' and the absolute nature of this question. Relevant and wide-ranging examples, though specific example/s of "pieces that are not quite as famous or expensive" (paragraph 4) would have been appreciated. Valid analysis of the contrast between the different types of worth captured in the arts. The range of types of worth was valid and well thought out. Thesis statement could have been stronger. Thoughtful and well-balanced piece of writing with good sentence structures, felicitous expressions. Conclusion was especially effective.

5

2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 8 **Mahima Srinidhi Hari | 21S06S**

Art is only worth what people will pay for it. Do you agree?

The value of art has been a long-contested debate spanning centuries. No doubt, art itself has definitely been a constant across cultures and countries, but its worth is still contentious. Is art truly like any other commodity with its value solely defined by money? I do not believe so. Such a definition gives rise to populist art that does not hold true to art's fundamental ability to question society, and implies that free art is worthless. Due to these reasons as well as the fact that the value of art is beyond monetary quantification and as the true value of art may not be known, I am of the opinion that art is not only worth what people will pay for it.

Some may say that due to the 'invisible hand' of market forces, the value of art is decided in a similar fashion to most other goods in the economy: through its monetary value. Indeed, the nebulousness of the true value of an art piece, coupled with the varying definitions of what truly constitutes 'good' or 'high-quality' art, gives rise to the sentiment that it is better to quantify art's value using the denominator that everyone is familiar with. Take for instance the controversial art piece "Comedian" by Maurizio Cattelan. In essence, it is a banana affixed with duct tape to a wall. The piece was sold for USD120,000, showing that people did see the value of the piece beyond what it looked like on the surface. Another example is the "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci. The artwork is reportedly insured for more than a couple of million dollars, and this exorbitant price tag just goes to show that the merit of such an artwork has been duly recognised and appreciated, and its value is quantified by its monetary worth. Therefore, some may say that art is truly worth only what people will pay for it.

However, such a view is incredibly myopic, to say the least. While it is tempting to be overly simplistic and declare that art's value should be decided by enthusiastic bidders with moneybags, it speaks of a perspective that ignores the true, intangible merits of art, which are harder to so easily quantify but no less important.

Firstly, art in itself is not created solely for monetary purposes. It has immense cultural and socio-political value that is simply beyond the definitions of money. Take, for example, "Liberty Leading the People", a painting done during the French rebellion period in the 1800s by Eugène Delacroix. The painting itself served as a wake-up call to the people subjugated under the rule of the tyrannical kings and military generals, with the personification of Liberty, breast bared and face determined, rallying the people to rise up. Such an artwork thus carries a cultural value in that it represents the spirit of the French people and is a snapshot of history in its portrayal of the sentiments at that time. Thus, its value is not only in its monetary worth. Another example is the minimalist art piece "Untitled (Perfect Lovers)" by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. It shows two analogue clocks ticking in perfect synchrony until one inevitably falls out of sync, representing how the artist had to live on without his lover who tragically died of AIDS. This artwork humanised the AIDS crisis that ravaged many in the LGBTQ communities particularly in the 1990s, showing that the people who were affected by their partners' deaths were no less different from straight people dealing with the loss of a loved one. Such a cultural background and message cannot be accorded a price tag that can encompass the enormity of the experiences and the intentions of the artists. The majority of artworks that have ever been produced fall into this category. Therefore, art is not only worth what people will pay for it due to its unquantifiable cultural and intangible value.

Secondly, the notion that art is worth only what people will pay for it implies that if art is not bought, then its value is negligible and insignificant as well. This notion is absurd as there are a wealth of examples that prove otherwise. Art that is viewed or enjoyed free of cost is not worthless at all, because some art is meant to be enjoyed free of charge. For example, there are many murals that decorate the walls of Singapore, particularly near Arab Street. Yes, these works of art were commissioned by the government, but a layman can view them for free. However, this does not imply that such artworks are considered worthless. The value of such murals lies in the way they brighten up the often drab and dreary concrete jungle that is Singapore. Street artist Sam Lo, once known as the infamous 'Sticker Lady', has drawn many of such murals and considers them as artworks worthy of appreciation and enjoyment, and takes pride in the fact that they bring a pop of colour to the grey. Many youngsters concur, seeing by how murals are incredibly popular photoshoot locations. Another example is the wealth of fan art – art that is created based on an existing work – that people willingly share online for free. These fan artists post drawings and paintings that take hours upon days to complete, mostly for free on social media sites such as Twitter and Pixiv. In doing so, they enrich and add on to the fan community they are part of. One popular artist is Viria13, whose artworks for the *Percy Jackson* series have been widely accepted as the canonical appearance of the characters. This value was accorded not by monetary means or by some auction process, but rather by the community that recognised the merit of her artworks. Therefore, it is unfair to say that art is only worth what people will pay for it, as free art, too, is valuable.

Thirdly, such a definition that art is only worth what people pay for it gives rise to art that is based on populism, incentivising artists to only pander to the masses by appealing to the lowest common denominator. Such a definition is an antithesis to the very nature of art, which is meant to prod and provoke people, making them question their beliefs and sensibilities. If art is only worth the money raked in, artists would be forced to give up messages that do not sit well with the majority of the population but may be needed to expose harsh truths about society. One example is "The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye" by Sonny Liew, a comic book that criticised the Singaporean government and ruling party. It was originally given a grant by the National Arts Council, but the grant was revoked due to the social critique. Had Sonny Liew been solely incentivised by the monetary gains from his artwork, it is unlikely that he would have produced such a book that portrayed the government in such a negative light, proving that art should not be solely defined by money as unpopular art is necessary and should be created as well. Today, art has evolved to become a vehicle for social justice. An example is the use of art by protestors in Myanmar as a non-confrontational way of fighting against the junta as a result of the military coup that happened in early 2021. Artist Kuecool has drawn several images protesting against the government, one of which is widely circulated as a symbol for the protest. The image is of a young lady brandishing a wok and a spatula against a red background, the colour of the party that was deposed. Artists like her were not motivated by money to create works that spoke of the unbeatable spirit of the people; rather, they were urged to create artworks that criticised the ruling parties on the basis of generating change within their country. This shows that art should not be quantified solely based on monetary value, as non-populist art, which generates societal change and may not necessarily be popular enough to be bought, is also very much needed.

Fourthly, who exactly decides what artworks are worth or how much to pay for them? A popular saying goes: 'One man's trash is another man's treasure.' The same goes for artworks. While art connoisseurs and experts may debate over the monetary value of artworks, it is undeniable that they do not, by any stretch of imagination, have perfect information about the cultural and intangible capital of artworks. What might be considered fine art in one part of the world may be deemed uninspired and worthless in another or even across time frames. Vincent van Gogh's paintings were, during his time, considered childish and immature with their use of bold brush strokes and thick applications of paint. He died without getting due recognition for his artworks, being paid only a meagre sum and subsisted mainly because of support from his brother Theo. However, that view is hardly the case today, with his artworks being valued at millions of dollars. It is true that contemporary audiences see his artworks for their true merit, but is it right to say that because his artworks were not accorded high price tags when he was alive, that they were of less value or worth? Such a conclusion would be erroneous. Indeed, time and place alter the lens through which people view artworks, and people are only people with limited information. Hence, it is incorrect to say that art is only worth what people will pay for it, as people may not know about the true value of the art in the first place to give an accurate gauge of its worth.

In conclusion, art has and will continue to be contentious and its value will be hotly debated. But it is certain that art's value does not solely lie in the money that people pay for it. Art's value is beyond the monetary realm. Free art is not worthless. Art based on market forces stifles creative spirit and societal commentary. Art's value may not even be known by people fully to price it correctly. For all these reasons, I strongly believe that it is not true that art is only worth what people will pay for it. It would do us good to recognise that and give art its due recognition, both monetary and otherwise.

Comments

There is clearly deep passion and knowledge of the subject matter. Excellent! There is consistent reference to the monetary value of the art as opposed to its intangible but far surpassing value to society and mankind. There is also good evaluation and insight throughout. Do not get carried away – para 6 veers off (focusing more on whether art should be valued only by what people are willing to pay for it – quite a different question) though the implication of such a view was insightfully developed. Fluent, strong personal voice with a wide range of sentence construction. Vocab could be more sophisticated and inter-paragraph transitions could show greater range, but overall, a pleasurable read!

Althea Tan Sze Rui | 21S06I

Is modern technology a benefit or threat to our safety?

In his 1995 acceptance speech for his Nobel Prize, Joseph Rotblat urged the scientific community to "remember your humanity". In this era of rapid technological advancement, the race to churn out better and faster technology has resulted in our safety becoming more of an afterthought. This raises the question: In the face of this animosity that new technology is bringing to the table, are any of us truly safe? I believe that while technology has safeguarded us in some areas, the introduction of political agendas into technology creation and the overly eager acceptance of technology in citizens' daily lives have resulted in increasing threats against the safety of the general populace.

Detractors postulate that modern technology has made us safer as it has voided humans of the need to engage in dangerous jobs. In the past, important tasks were undertaken at the expense of human safety due to their necessity. However, the invention of new technology has allowed for the safety of humans and completion of these tasks to be concurrent instead of being mutually exclusive. This can be seen in the jobs of firemen and policemen, which in the past required them to insert themselves into dangerous situations such as dealing with rampant wildfires or violent criminals. Modern technology such as drones has helped firefighters gauge the extent of wildfires and identify those in need, and the use of body-heat scanning devices has helped policemen gain an upper hand during high-risk situations. The use of these technologies has indisputably made these jobs a lot safer than in the past, where human operators had to jump headfirst into these dangerous and unpredictable situations, risking their lives as a result. Hence, the invention of modern technology has made their jobs much easier and safer than before, which has resulted in increased safety for some.

Undeniably, examples such as those above demonstrate the benefits that modern technology has brought into our everyday lives. It would be foolish to claim that modern technology has not safeguarded us at all whatsoever. However, to claim that technology has only increased our safety based on these few examples would reveal a parochial view of the impact of technology on our safety as a whole. Looking at the bigger picture, our safety is increasingly being put at stake in the face of political agendas between countries, as well as in the increased prevalence of technology in our everyday lives.

The heightened involvement of political agendas in technology development has resulted in the proliferation of an arms race which puts the average citizen's safety at risk. In our interconnected world, there have been more clashes between nations' leaders on many fronts, as well as government agendas against different groups of people. This has resulted in increased demand by states for technology that would help them carry out their agendas, which may very likely put citizens at risk. An example of this would be the development of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs), which are unmanned machines that use facial recognition and artificial intelligence to kill. The success of such technological software in the present has made LAWs less of a dystopian future and more of a nightmarish reality that is not too far ahead. They can be used by governments on the battlefields, as a warning to rival nations, or even for ethnic cleansing. While this can be interpreted as LAWs ostensibly being used to protect domestic citizens against foreign threats, in the aftermath of wars with the use of LAWs, scavengers are likely to pick up these machine parts and repurpose them for unintended aims, such as to terrorize locals and put their safety at risk, resulting in the increased danger to the civilians that these LAWs were created to protect. In light of increased terrorism globally, the likelihood of this seems far more prominent. Furthermore, these conclusions are based on the assumption that governments have their people's best interests at heart. In the face of ethnic cleansing, such as that by the Chinese government of the Uyghur people, officials have not hesitated to burn, rape, and murder these people in their homes. With the presence of LAWs, what is stopping them from using these machines to carry out their tasks more efficiently? Granted, while multiple engineers and software designers have refused to work on these machines, such as that in Google and Microsoft who adamantly refused to participate in their creation, it will not be long before someone will be properly incentivised enough to participate in its invention, which is likely to be successful, due to already existing and nearly perfected software required for its function. As Elon Musk said, "Artificial intelligence is likely the cause of World War III". Our safety has never been in as much danger as now, with the potential for existing technologies to culminate in weapons that can put billions of lives in danger, with the push of political and governmental agendas.

The eager acceptance of modern technology into our lives, with the purpose of increased convenience, has also heightened the danger that we are putting ourselves in. In our rapidly developing world, technology has become a more prominent part of our lives, and has aided us in the simplest of tasks. The increased obsession with making our lives as convenient as possible has given technology the power to dictate our safety, perhaps in the case of autofill passwords and information stored on the cloud, which have made data sharing and accessibility all the more convenient for anyone with a device. Yet, this has contributed to the rise in cyberterrorism, where important data can be hacked by malicious groups. This can be seen in the hacking of thousands of Singaporeans' health records a few years back, which included that of Prime Minister Lee's records. This sensitive information can be used against us, as our safety against illnesses is compromised. This can also be seen in the hacking of StarHub and Singtel users' data and passwords, which allows unintended personnel access to our sensitive and private information, such as addresses, which may be used for doxxing, hence compromising our physical safety. Besides cyberterrorism, the increased acceptance of artificial intelligence machines like self-driving cars from Tesla poses a threat to our safety. In the race to push out the fastest and most efficient technology, designers and engineers often treat safety as an afterthought. People forget that artificial intelligence, as the name suggests, is only an attempt to mimic real human intelligence, and is prone to error, as seen from the fact that software errors cost the world $1.1 trillion in 2016. In the event that AI technology such as cars malfunction on the road, accidents could spiral into deaths of hundreds, an irreversible consequence of our greed and obsession for more convenience in our everyday lives. Technology hence poses a huge threat to our safety, due to our overzealous eagerness to accept it as a panacea to all our inconveniences.

In conclusion, technology has undeniably provided us with unquantifiable benefits in our everyday lives, which has made some groups safer than before. However, taking a step back and looking at the long run, there is an overall heightened risk as there is an increasing threat to the average human due to political agendas and greed for convenience. Looking forward, we must be cautious on where the path of technology takes us, and the safety of the majority needs to be at the forefront of technological advancement, lest it happens at the expense of our safety.

Comments

Good attempt to address the question of safety, with consistent attempt to link the use of technology to different aspects of safety. Range/scope of discussion is adequate. Quality of support/illustration could be improved (e.g. in paragraph 2, more details are needed about how exactly "the use of body-heat scanning devices has helped policemen gain an upper hand during high-risk situations"). Fluent language, with a range of vocabulary and variety in sentence construction. Slips in grammar but overall, meaning is clear. Introduction could be stronger, with link between the first two sentences being unclear.

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2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 9 **Yang Dexin | 21S06Q**

Is modern technology a benefit or threat to our safety?

It is startling to see the rapid pace at which technology has been developing in the world. Just 30 years ago, the concept of a handheld telephone seemed unattainable, and yet today the phone is ubiquitous in our daily lives, serving a variety of functions ranging from entertainment to helping us socialise with friends. Modern technology, as we know it, has undoubtedly shaped the world today and helped define this epoch of our civilisation. But with regard to our safety, has modern technology really improved it? Or, exposed to the myriad of new inventions and discoveries made in the last few years, has our safety been compromised more than ever? This essay shall attempt to argue that modern technology is a threat to our safety, exposing us to new harms never before possible, as well as due to a lack of understanding and regulation on the use of such powerful tools of technology.

Detractors argue that those who fear modern technology are blind to the many benefits it has brought us. While having the common flu in the 1800s was a death sentence, the invention of antibiotics such as penicillin has protected us from a vast array of diseases, enabling us to recover from previously lethal infections. In the 2010s, the discovery of a method to make synthetic insulin, as compared to the traditional method of recombinant plasmids in bacteria, has allowed for insulin to be sold at a cheaper price, making it more accessible to lower income groups. New technological processes have benefitted and protected society on a global scale, helping to increase the average lifespan of individuals across the world. Modern technology has also made commuting much safer. Accidents are much rarer today, with the advent of new computing systems like autopilot and on a whole much more reliable parts that has resulted in a large decrease in the number of airplane fatalities in the last 10 years. Technology is not infallible, but has provided us with tools to mitigate the existing harms that we face. Does that not represent a benefit to our safety?

While it is perhaps unfair to argue that all technology is bad, it is important to make the distinction between the use of technology and technology itself. Yes, technology has been used to better our lives in so many different ways, but modern technology is but a tool that humans use for a multitude of purposes. Technology itself is neither benign nor malicious. Yet, modern technology has opened the grounds and allowed us to have our safety threatened, due to a lack of complete understanding of it and an absence of proper regulatory frameworks on its use. Techniques for manufacturing recombinant DNA, not unlike the process to make insulin, saw a breakthrough in the last 20 years that allowed researchers to alter individual genome sequences in the human body – to introduce or remove a trait at will. Due to how new this discovery has been, no international consensus has been reached on its use – and yet, the technology is out there, ready for use. In 2019, a Chinese researcher successfully altered the genome of an embryo using CRISPR-Cas9 –

removing a gene that would most certainly have resulted in the twins being born with HIV. Despite healthy, safe babies being delivered, the action of the researcher was met with international outcry from the scientific community. Widespread condemnation (and termination of the researcher from his parent institute) seems oddly harsh for potentially saving the life of a human being, but while it was clear his intentions were for good, the next use of the genome altering machine could be for far more selfish reasons. The mere existence of such modern technology has left this Pandora box in the hands of the user, giving them immense power that they could potentially use to the detriment of others – making a race of superhumans to oppress and replace non-genetically enhanced humans seem possible. Without proper understanding and regulation, modern technology threatens our safety by allowing for the exploitation of such technology. Another example is the usage and development of artificial intelligence (AI). Scientific consensus is that one day, the intelligence of strong AI, artificial intelligence made not to serve a specific purpose like drive a car or play chess, will supersede that of humans. When the event, termed "the Singularity" happens, no one knows what will happen – whether the AI will kill us all, or lead us into lives of abundance and prosperity as claimed by optimists. The undeniable fact that no one knows what is going to happen poses a serious security risk – after all, how can you safeguard against a threat that you do not understand? Yes, such AI has not yet been discovered, but breakthroughs in quantum computing have placed it firmly at the cusp of reality, a very real threat to the existence of our species.

Another reason why technology in modern years has threatened our safety is due to exposure to new harms. The invention of the internet has resulted in unparalleled connectivity across the world, allowing users to transcend geographical boundaries and all but shatters traditional barriers of time and space. Users are allowed to talk to each other, across continents, at the speed of light, and while this potential opens up many new possibilities such as remote learning and telecommunication, when put into the wrong hands, the tool that is social media and the internet poses a serious threat to our safety. Take the terror group the Islamic State (IS) for example. During the peak of their power in 2013, the recruitment branch of the IS reached out to people all across the globe through social media platforms like Twitter, using gory images and populist rhetoric to brainwash impressionable minds into fighting for them. Upwards of 30,000 foreign fighters heeded their call, and in fact when Shia militants near Mosul were interviewed, they mentioned how they were surprised that most fighters they killed were foreign fighters and not Iraqi; a testament to how effective and far reaching their propaganda is. By delocalising their ideology and permeating it into far corners of the globe, terror groups take advantage of and abuse the potential of the internet, enabled by different modern inventions like satellite systems, allowing it to pose great danger to everyone across the globe. Yet another example is the spread of fake news online. The agency that the internet provides has allowed for anyone to voice their opinions online, and spread fake news. Inspired by a 4chan post by conspiracy groups, an Illinois man drove hundreds of miles to the capital with a gun to liberate children he believed Democrats keep locked as sex slaves in Comet Ping-Pong. The Pizzagate incident highlights how misinformation online can translate into real life harm for others. Although no one was hurt in the incident, it illustrates how easy it is to mislead others into doing dangerous things, and that fake news is made especially potent by the reach and virality of the internet. Just 22 years ago, before Tim Bernard at IBM invented the World Wide Web in 1999, such pieces of news would have been confined to the locality of the spreader, but modern technology has taken this harm, amplified it and created a whole new danger that threatens society because frankly, people are unprepared to respond and properly nullify this danger.

To conclude, the very reason that modern technology is so useful is the same reason it is so dangerous: its potency. When such powerful tools are developed, allowing malicious or selfish actors to manipulate and control it results in danger on a larger scale than ever before. The hand that wields the scalpel decides whether it ends or saves a life, but gleaming steel strikes fear into our hearts all the same.

Comments

Consistent and explicit discussion of the impact of modern technology on safety. Examples are detailed and wide ranging. Your last two body paragraphs were especially analytical! You could have a more nuanced response to avoid being alarmist. Language is clear and apt; essay is well-written with some evidence of felicitous expressions.

PASSAGE

Susan David writes about overparenting and why we should teach children emotional agility instead.

Today's parents are probably the most knowledgeable and conscientious in the history of the planet. Maybe that's because we have fewer children than previous generations did. Perhaps the trend is reinforced by the same connoisseur's impulse to be meticulous in his choice that has popularised handcrafted beers and locally sourced and oh-so-thoroughly provenance vegetables.

Whatever the reasons, as capitalism has gone global and the world has become far more competitive, we no longer believe that our children's success can be left to chance. In an economy in which the top 1 per cent can afford luxury beyond belief, the bottom 20 per cent can barely afford to eat, and those in the middle have to scramble like crabs in a barrel willing to pull others down just to get ahead, modern parents have taken a more curatorial approach toward childhood, with each very deliberate decision directed toward getting their offspring into the best university they can, and the kind of career to guarantee them a decent life.

At the same time, our collective focus to be more accommodating has expanded. It's a well-meaning reaction to more authoritarian parenting styles of the past, which had plenty of psychologically damaging side effects. But in our attempts to raise our children to be more capable and confident, we're now more attuned to shielding them from any adverse experiences that we worry may shatter their psyches. Unfortunately, this can mean our children don't gain valuable experiences of failure and moving on from setbacks, building their resilience in the process. What's more, parents today tend to misinterpret theories that 'acknowledge the effort not the result', popularised by psychologist Carol Dweck; hence, children today are often rewarded for simply trying – receiving an 'A for effort' or a medal just for showing up.

Unfortunately, these efforts underestimate a child's ability to learn and grow from experience (and mistakes) and can have a host of unintended consequences, often the exact opposite of what we had hoped to achieve. For one thing, a focus on achievement promotes a very narrowly defined concept of success – that is, getting a certain kind of job that, presumably, will allow the child to earn a certain level of income. That narrow focus on specific preordained paths to achievement is even more dubious because it assumes a static world, when, according to projections, 65 per cent of today's primary school-aged kids may end up doing work that hasn't even been invented yet, and there's ample evidence of that trend already. Many of the jobs in which people are employed today didn't exist ten years ago and the pace of innovation is only increasing.

To make matters worse, there's a growing cohort of kids on today's university campuses who did everything 'right' at school, aced their exams, got into a fancy university and find academic work a breeze, but are completely baffled by life. They have no clue how to deal with a housemate who's a slob, or a romantic interest who just isn't that into them, or, for that matter, with their micromanaging 'helicopter' parents who show up for unplanned visits ('Surprise!'), and continually check in to see how things are going.

Another unintended consequence of over-parenting is that kids can grow up thinking that their parents' love is conditional on their behaving a certain way. This leads to contingent self-esteem, the belief that their worth must be earned. Contingent self-esteem can manifest itself in the young woman who has always been praised for her appearance and goes on to develop an eating disorder. But it can also be visible in the overachieving student who studies hard, earns top grades, becomes head girl – and maybe gets into a top university – but who falls apart when she underperforms on an exam. Or the athlete who trains every day and becomes a star footballer but then shuts down when he messes up at a key moment in the championship game.

No matter how hard you try to ensure that your kids are successful, happy, and safe, though, you can be sure that temptations will arise, and that change is inevitable. You can't predict – much less successfully navigate – a fender bender, a botched maths test, the party at which everyone is guzzling beer or the best pal who suddenly develops an interest in shoplifting. Nor can you ensure that enrolling a child in Mandarin Chinese lessons or whisking your child off to coding class will guarantee him or her acceptance into the university of their choice, or into a stable and fulfilling job down the line.

In our increasingly competitive and unpredictable age, one of the best things parents can do to help their children thrive is to teach them emotional agility, which is like a vaccine that helps inoculate kids against being overwhelmed by the moments of unpleasantness that life no doubt has in store for them. It won't give kids complete immunity, but it will help them develop the flexibility and resilience they need to flourish, even during hard times.

We all have moments, in which we think we might want to try something new but just can't get past our fear. For kids, however, facing nerve-racking experiences is especially challenging because they have limited experience in actually making such leaps. They haven't had time to build up a store of reinforcing outcomes – 'I've done this kind of thing before and it hasn't killed me' – so they're easily spooked by the autopilot response that holds them back.

Life is full of moments requiring us to make that leap, but making the leap is not about ignoring, fixing, fighting or controlling fear – or anything else you might be experiencing.

Rather, it's about accepting and noticing all your emotions and thoughts, viewing even the most powerful of them with curiosity, and then choosing courage over comfort in order to do whatever you've determined is most important to you. Courage, once again, is not the absence of fear. Courage is fear walking.

Of course, a child's fear often stirs up a parent's own fear of fear. We're afraid of what our children's reluctance to embrace an experience will mean for their development (or, god forbid, what it reflects about our own parenting skills). We worry about what this reluctance might cost our sons and daughters. We want our children to thrive, and since we can so often see the way forward for them, we try to push them in that direction, assuming that, by doing so, our children will realise that whatever they were reluctant about really wasn't so bad. But as we know by now, emotional agility is not about doing things because you feel you should or because someone else wants you to. Rather, it's about being able to make your own intentional choices about how to behave. And that goes for kids too.

When we guide children towards emotional agility, we give them a lifelong tool. Every time we allow them to take a leap – not of blind faith, but of eyes-wide-open volition in spite of fear – they practise 'fear walking', a skill that will help them face many other, much more significant emotional challenges later in life.

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2021 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ **Mahima Srinidhi Hari | 21S06S**

Susan David raises some concerns about overparenting and argues why we should teach children emotional agility instead. How far do you agree with her observations, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?

David's perspective is that children these days are being too coddled and shielded by parents from life experiences, and that it is important to teach them emotional agility instead.

David says that children today are often rewarded for simply trying – receiving an 'A for effort or a medal just for showing up' (paragraph 3). Put another way, David says that parents praise their children even if they do not achieve anything and reward them just for putting in effort. I feel that this is not applicable to my society, Singapore. Singapore still has the uber-competitive "kiasu" spirit that drives many a parent to question their child on why the child has not scored the full range of marks. Parents are still focused on results and expect to see 'A's on their children's report cards. It is true that a small number of parents are moving away from this mindset and are recognising the child's efforts, which have been bolstered by initiatives from schools and the Ministry of Education to de-emphasise the importance of grades. However, this still remains as a tiny minority of the larger population. This can be attributed to the Confucian values of hard work and industry which have permeated the fabric of Singaporean society for the longest time, and are continually inculcated in children by their parents and grandparents from a young age. Moreover, parents themselves face pressure from their peers as many parents often compare their children's academic performances, leading parents to in turn push their children to achieve good marks in order to keep their good name up and remain respectable in front of their peers. Hence, I feel that the view that children are being recognised merely for their efforts is not applicable to Singapore society.

David mentions that 'modern parents have taken a more curatorial approach toward childhood' (paragraph 2). In other words, parents today are tailoring their children's childhood in order to guarantee them as good a life as possible. I feel that this view is applicable to Singapore. Parents, especially those belonging to the middle-to-upper class social strata, are increasingly putting their kids in specialised classes and enrichment activities to gain a head-start. In my school, the majority of the student population has gone to either formal music classes or attended tuition or both, despite being in a school for high-performing students. Indeed, parents enrol their children in such classes so that they can gain an edge over their competitors – that is, their fellow students – especially in the realm of academics and extracurricular pursuits, so as to improve their prospects for getting into a good university. As such, instead of having a rather carefree childhood with unstructured time to play after school, children are ferried to numerous classes. This is definitely due to the notion that children need to be better than the best, or rather, the "crème de la crème", in order to survive, let alone succeed in this world where the demands are becoming increasingly unpredictable. Thus, I agree that modern parenting is more curatorial to select the best courses – in the parents' opinion – for the children to get them into good schools.

David also mentions that 'kids can grow up thinking that their parents' love is conditional on their behaving a certain way' (paragraph 6). She is saying that modern parenting has caused children to believe that only if they adhere to their parents' definitions of success will the parents love them, and I believe this view is applicable to Singapore. Many children are still fearful of pursuing non-traditional career choices, such as being an artist or singer-songwriter, or living alternative lifestyles, such as coming out as gay, due to fear of rejection from their parents. They desire to live their life freely but do not do so as they feel their parents would not accept or love them. This could be attributed to the rather jarring clash between old and young generations who have different ideas of success and achievement. The old school of thought is contingent on securing stability and living in a manner that conforms to societal expectations, while the younger generation, inspired, in no small part, by the access to technology and Western ideals of individualism and freedom of expression, value being their true self. This clash in ideology leads to friction on the part of the youngsters who are torn between living up to their parents' expectations for them and expressing themselves as they truly wish to be. This definitely has resulted in more issues of mental health amongst the youth, who make up a not-insignificant portion of the suicides that happen every year that are symptomatic of the larger issues at hand, of which parental expectation is one. Thus, I agree that children believing their parents' love is contingent on their behaviour is a phenomenon seen in my society.

Overall, I believe David's views are largely applicable to my society, Singapore.

Comments

Response is clearly detailed and analysed to support perspectives raised. Consistently argued and evaluated. Has the potential to raise more insightful views on the subject matter and the local context.

'I can claim to know something as long as it was produced by a reliable process.' Discuss.

In many fields of knowledge, when a knowledge claim is made, the methods by which this claim is derived are brought under scrutiny. If our methods are merely ad hoc, they will not provide us sufficient justification to claim to know anything. However, would this imply that simply having a reliable process by which we construct knowledge is sufficient to claim to have knowledge? This is not always the case. First, reliable methods are inherently flawed due to how they are defined. Second, they are alone insufficient in informing us of the truth. Finally, there are many fields of knowledge where a reliable process not only does not exist in a significant manner, but is also unhelpful towards the inquiry of the field.

First, the definition of a reliable method is problematic. One might claim that a reliable method is one that can give us certain knowledge consistently, and therefore the knowledge it produces is necessarily justified. However, this claim is circular. If the reliability of a method is justified via the strength of the claims it produces, and the strength of the claim is justified using the reliability of the method, we have no way to prove the cogency of either the knowledge claim or the method without reference to each other. One process of knowledge construction oft thought to be infallible would be Mathematics, which uses a system of axioms and theorems to make knowledge claims. Because all knowledge in mathematics is deductively justified with reference to axioms, all of our claims are contingent on the self-evident nature of these axioms. However, as shown by Godel's Incompleteness Theorem, it is impossible for us to justify our axioms using our mathematical systems alone (they are inevitably incomplete). Hence, it is impossible to know if a method is truly reliable or not based on this definition.

Second, reliable methods alone are insufficient in informing us about the truth of our claims. Even if we are able to claim that reliable methods would be able to justify our knowledge claims, the truth condition is equally essential to claiming that we know. Not only is truth necessary to prove the reliability of our methods, it also allows us to verify or falsify our knowledge claims. However, as mentioned earlier, reliable methods cannot prove their own reliability. As such, it would be insufficient to use the method alone to verify the truth of our claims. Take for example a method widely regarded as the gold standard for objective knowledge: the scientific method. Through a process of observation, hypothesis formulation, empirical testing and concluding on the truth of this hypothesis, science claims to give us objective knowledge about the world. However, simply adhering to this method alone is insufficient to give us knowledge that we regard as scientific truth. According to Thomas Kuhn, science progresses in paradigms, the shifts of which are determined by scientific crises in which the existing paradigm is no longer able to sufficiently explain observations. If our scientific theories generated through reliable methods are overwritten by a contradiction in our empirical correspondence to truth, this demonstrates that even a reliable method cannot guarantee that we can verify the truth of our claims. After all, our ability to correspond to truth in the scientific method is compromised by many factors: our observation is restricted to the phenomenal world and can easily be limited or erred by illusions, our hypotheses are bound to our theories and this inextricability causes us to be bound to these frameworks of thoughts when evaluating our evidence, and so on. This is why there are many other aspects of scientific study such as peer review which exist to verify the reproducibility of claims made so as to verify the truth of these claims, before something is considered scientific knowledge. As seen, truth is essential to a claim being considered knowledge, and reliable methods alone cannot always assure us the ability to verify this truth. Hence, we cannot immediately claim to know something just because a reliable process is used.

Third, there are fields of knowledge in which either no universally accepted "reliable method" exists or many such methods exist. In both cases, the method alone would lead to underdeterminism between two opposing claims and we cannot claim to know something because of solely the method used. One example of this would be a field such as History. In such a field, there are many differing methods used to construct knowledge. For example, we can use scientific methods such as carbon dating to investigate the age of an object, qualitative methods such as comparisons between two sources, or deconstructionist methods such as the analysis of the language used in a historical account. All of these methods are able to construct vastly different types of claims, but they alone are insufficient in claiming to give us historical knowledge. It is impossible for us to fully access a historical reality with certainty since we only have the present to correspond to. As such, it is impossible to determine which among these varying methods is able to bring us "the most reliable knowledge". In such a field, the reliability of a single method alone is not sufficient to justify that one claim is more reliable than another. Instead, historical claims are justified using a wealth of different methods to corroborate the aspects of knowledge produced into a more complete picture. Hence, the "reliability" of a single method is sometimes insufficient to justify our claims.

Finally, there are fields of knowledge in which the presence of a "reliable" method would not be significant to the inquiry. If our goal of inquiry is not to obtain an objective or reproducible result that corresponds to a physical reality, then our method aiming to be "reliable" and infallible would be meaningless. Examples of such fields would be aesthetics and ethics. Not only are there no universally-agreed standards by which we can claim to be using a reliable method, such methods would not be useful to inquiry. In ethics, one way in which claims are justified is based on their semantics. If ethical claims are seen as truth-apt, we would have different standards by which we judge the truth of claims such as by the form of "good" or a social contract. However, none of these methods are infallible or considered superior to each other. Furthermore, if morality is seen as not truth-apt, such methods would be meaningless, since it is impossible to justify such a moral claim. Take for example a position such as Emotivism, which postulates that our moral claims are merely expressions of our preferences. To employ a "reliable" method to justify quantitatively and with certainty that we feel a certain way towards an action would be meaningless. Furthermore, there is no agreed-upon or objective way to gauge sentiment using "reliable" methods. This is also prominent in aesthetics. Even if we use a framework such as mimesis to make a claim that a work of art is beautiful, it is meaningless to state that such a claim is true simply because a reliable method is used, since the goal of aesthetic inquiry is not a universal result or knowledge claim. As such, the reliability of a method is not always relevant to our knowledge claims. As Kant once said, no amount of concepts can ever prove that something is beautiful.

Ultimately, the methods we rely on for inquiry are dependent on the type of knowledge we aim for. In fields where we strive for objectivity and universality, methods we consider reliable may be prized over others, but are not alone sufficient in constructing knowledge. In fields where a multiplicity of claims is valued, it would ultimately be pointless to construct claims using a single reliable method. Thus, just because a reliable process is used does not mean that we can make knowledge claims.

Comments

Excellent response that explores the sufficiency of reliable methods of justification for knowledge in a comprehensive manner. Argument is relevant and coherent, although some points can be better expressed to more directly address the question. Good understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge, with examples that are relevant and accurate. Good job overall!

11

2021 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 6 — Guan En Yong, Justinian | 21S03F

'Knowledge construction is inevitably limited by the inquirer.'
Discuss with reference to any two areas of knowledge.

There is no knowledge that is not first produced by an inquirer, and, this being the case, what the inquirer perceives, what he believes, and how he interprets the intersection between the two can become inescapably intertwined with the process of knowledge construction and consequently the knowledge produced. A prima facie account of these beliefs, biases, and perceptions provides some grounding therefore for the case that, overall, knowledge construction must inevitably be limited by the inquirer. Yet with reference to the facts that the limitations imposed by the inquirer's beliefs and biases can usually be transcended by an intersubjective process – as in science – and that even if the inquirer may be inseparable from the process of knowledge construction, this need not necessarily be a limitation – as in aesthetics – I contend that, overall, knowledge construction is not inevitably limited by the inquirer.

The idea that knowledge construction may be inevitably limited by the inquirer is one seemingly supported by the fact that the inquirer's beliefs, biases, and perceptions often contaminate the process of knowledge construction and thus the knowledge produced. Such contamination is well evinced by the process of knowledge construction about beauty and the arts: in seeking to examine the nature of beauty and whether objects of art, music, or literature are beautiful, it is the inquirer's own prior conceptions of what is beautiful, or what elements of an object may contribute to its beauty that come to the fore. These conceptions are subjective; they are, after all, a matter of personal taste, and different inquirers raised in different cultural backgrounds – hence equipped with different conceptions of beauty – presenting different preferences may appraise the same artwork and construct different knowledge claims as to its beauty. The process of knowledge construction in the aesthetic realm, relying as such on the inquirer's subjective conceptions which vary from person to person, is there contaminated: it cannot make the claim to universality nor to objectivity, even though these may be desiderata for our knowledge claims. In preventing knowledge construction from reaching these standards, the inquirer hence seems to inevitably limit the process of knowledge construction.

It may be argued that such limitations of the inquirer only limit knowledge construction in fields like the aesthetics that depend more evidently on subjective perceptions and conceptions. Might it not be true that other areas of knowledge, such as the sciences, that prize objectivity and reliability in knowledge construction, do not face such inevitable inquirer-based limitations?

Alas, even in the sciences, the inquirer's biases, beliefs, and perceptions suffuse the process of knowledge construction, which may be still more damning because of the objectivity that science holds itself up to. In constructing knowledge about any scientific phenomenon, the inquirer must rely, more often than not, on his own perceptions and theory-laden interpretations of what he perceives. This sort of interpretation invites bias, especially in cases where the nature of the scientific evidence is that it is ambiguous, as in the case of morphological evidence regarding the shapes of living species and fossils that are used to construct knowledge of evolutionary history and evolution in general. Faced with a multitude of such subjective evidence, the process of knowledge construction requires the inquirer to make his own judgments of meaning and significance. Even where the evidence requires less interpretation in this sense, as may be the case in the physical sciences, the scientist must still make a judgment as to which of the many underdetermined theories equally well supported by the evidence are most coherent, parsimonious, and explanatorily powerful to choose between these hypotheses. Even the choice of these values on which choices between theories are made and their relative priority is subjective. All such subjective elements necessary for knowledge construction require the scientist to bring in his own intuitions, biases, and beliefs – yet where science desires value-free, objective knowledge approaching a view from nowhere, these inevitably lead to limitations both for the knowledge construction process and knowledge constructed – being unable to meet the stringent standards of the sciences.

It has been established that, in one sense or another, the inquirer's own biases, beliefs, and perceptions will be invoked in the process of knowledge construction. However, while this may show that knowledge construction must inevitably bear the imprint of the inquirer, I do not think that the mere involvement of the inquirer's own biases can show that knowledge construction is inevitably limited by the inquirer.

If knowledge construction were to be inevitably limited by the inquirer, then any limitations imposed by the inquirer would be inescapable – hence, inevitable. But, in verity, the limitations that may be imposed by the inquirer's own perceptions and biases can usually be transcended by a social, intersubjective process involving a community of inquirers. The case of science is most illustrative of this: be it as it may that a single person's biases and judgments may impinge upon the construction of knowledge in science, a single person's conclusions do not scientific knowledge make. Instead, knowledge construction in science is really a social process: findings must be openly reproduced, and methods are continually scrutinized with respect to an objective set of commonly held standards to check against biases and subjective judgments. Only once multiple investigators have replicated a finding and shown its process of construction to be as free as possible of personal interferences will the finding be considered as scientific knowledge. Evidently, these multiple scientists' beliefs, perceptions, and biases may individually still leave their imprints on the process of knowledge construction: yet by openly scrutinizing each other's biases, the net result of the social, community-based process of knowledge construction in science is to remove these biases overall, and replace what is subjectively and personally judged with what is commonly agreed upon. The inquirer only seems to limit knowledge construction if we imagine him constructing knowledge in silo. Placed instead in a community of inquirers who are conscious of the possibility of subjectivity contamination and work actively to remove it, the limitations that originally seemed inevitably imposed by the inquirer seem relieved, indeed transcended by the community's scrutiny and common agreement.

In this sense already, we may establish that knowledge construction is not inevitably limited by the inquirer, since any limitations that appear can be eliminated intersubjectively. But let us entertain the scenario that – as seems probable in the aesthetic realm – such common agreement is implausible and cannot be reached, and knowledge construction must still fall back on the personal, reliant on personal beliefs, biases, and judgments. If this is the case, should we conclude that knowledge construction will be limited forever by the inquirer?

It seems that, in evaluating the process of knowledge construction, the subjectivity and personality of knowledge construction only constitute limitations if we construe them as such; that is, if we hold standards that see the personal nature of knowledge construction as inherently detrimental. Standards as these, however, need not always apply; where they do not apply, and where the personal nature of knowledge construction instead is accepted, then even if knowledge construction bears the imprint of the inquirer, it is not thereby limited by the inquirer.

Consider the case of aesthetics. Aesthetic knowledge, reliant as it is on subjective and personal feelings, cannot aspire to objectivity and universality in all of its claims. But this is not a limitation, because aesthetic knowledge and its construction does not aspire to, and need not aspire to such standards. It is inherent in the judgment of beauty that one's own beliefs and personal standards be involved in knowledge construction: for Hume, after all, aesthetic judgments were no more than a matter of taste, and for Kant, such judgments required the interplay of our own aesthetic faculties with our own subjective feelings and beliefs about beauty, without which no knowledge can be constructed. Since knowledge construction is inevitably subjective and person-oriented in the aesthetics, though, the standards of justification and of truth that we may apply to aesthetic knowledge construction concomitantly make no requirement as to objectivity and universality, to which such subjectivity is orthogonal. Instead, the subjectivity of knowledge construction in aesthetics features in its standards of justification, which are adapted to its unique processes of knowledge construction and do not consider subjectivity a limitation. In such a case, knowledge construction, far from being limited by the inquirer, is really reified and made possible through the inquirer, without whose subjectivity no knowledge can be constructed.

Overall, while knowledge construction must often bear the imprint of its inquirer, as borne out by the contrasting fields of the sciences and aesthetics, this does not mean that it is inevitably limited by the inquirer. Any limitations that may first exist can be transcended by social, intersubjective norms, and even where that is not the case, subjectivity and personality need not be read as limitations depending on the unique standards of justification and truth that, in truth, thrive on the personal beliefs of the inquirer.

Comments

This might easily be one of your best essays, especially written under exam pressure. This is an excellent response that systematically and comprehensively discusses the role of the inquirer in the knowledge construction process, and maturely considers if his involvement inevitably limits knowledge construction. While a couple of points could have been more detailed or better explained, there is a lot of coverage of key premises that demonstrates good understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge. Well done!

2021 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2

PASSAGE

Humans have eaten meat for centuries, but that tide is changing. Millions of people in wealthier countries are already cutting back on animal products, since it is the healthier and more sustainable way to go. People who consume enormous amounts of red meat suffer more severe diseases and health complications than those who do not.

Morally speaking, it is simply wrong and cruel to subject animals to the living hell that is factory farming – where animals are stuffed in a small, confined space that causes painful physiological and psychological problems – and take their lives just so we can enjoy fresh meat. Animals have rights too. Also, if we live by an ethics that states that we should avoid causing suffering or death if it can be avoided, veganism very much falls in line. The reason why veganism can *seem* unusual is that we are not accustomed to examining these topics, and the impact of our choices are hidden and distant from us.

There are also environmental arguments for veganism. It is well known that livestock farming is one of the biggest contributors to global warming, since the methane that livestock produce severely impacts the ozone layer. Land is also being cleared at a rapid rate to allow more room for livestock farming, but this results in biodiversity loss, and air and water pollution. Throw in free-range farming, and animal agriculture becomes very hard to defend. If we are truly genuine about conserving the planet for future generations and campaign for reduced carbon emissions across the globe, we should be consistent and switch to a vegan diet.

Lastly, the affordability of food is an issue of social justice. Not only does meat cost many times more than tubers, beans, and leafy greens, it is also a symbol of the rich and powerful who flaunt their wealth by ordering buffet spreads of meat only to be unable to consume them all. It is a blatant waste of food and a massive injustice in the face of the many poor, starving, and homeless people around us.

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2021 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2 | **Ong Ni Qi, Nicole | 21A13A**

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

The author argues that people should not consume animal products, listing four main reasons for this: health implications, the ethicality of consuming meat, environmental impacts, and the issue of social justice. I argue that his argument is weak, because some of the reasons stated do not support his conclusion that people should not eat meat, and even when they do, they only support the claim that people should cut down on meat, but not necessarily that people should avoid meat entirely and go vegan.

The author first argues that people who consume "enormous" amounts of red meat suffer more severe diseases and health complications than those who do not, and therefore going vegan is healthier and more sustainable. While it is true that those who eat massive amounts of red meat suffer more health implications, as proven by numerous scientific studies, this does not necessarily show that we should go vegan. The author undermines his own argument in stating that it is those that consume enormous amounts that suffer health-wise – what about those that consume moderate amounts? It is unclear if they would suffer from the same health effects, and his argument fails to show the necessity of stopping consumption of meat altogether as opposed to cutting down.

The author next argues that eating meat is wrong from a moral standpoint – factory farming is simply wrong and cruel and we should avoid causing suffering or death if it can be avoided. The author's example of factory farming also fails to show the necessity of going vegan – while we may be incentivised to avoid meat from factory farming, there are also free-range options that do not subject animals to the same cruelty – in this case, would it then be acceptable to eat meat? The author does not show the necessity of going vegan, only arguing for avoiding factory farmed meat.

The author also points out the environmental effects of livestock farming, stating that veganism will help conserve the planet and reduce carbon emissions. This premise is true and strongly supports veganism – research has shown that the carbon footprint of producing meat, particularly for beef and mutton, is much higher than vegetables. Vegetable farming also takes up a lot less space, especially with the advent of vertical farming. I can concede the author's premise because it supports the argument for going vegan – the less meat consumed, the lower the environmental impact, and hence going vegan would most effectively decrease the extent of environmental impact.

Lastly, the author brings up the affordability of food and social justice. This premise does not link to the conclusion at all and fails to support the claim that people should go vegan

– it simply shows that the rich consume more meat and cause food waste while people are starving, and this is an injustice. Therefore, as a whole, the author's argument is weak in supporting his conclusion that humans should stop eating meat and go vegan.

Comments

Good coverage of the author's argument, with thorough evaluation of his main premises and overall argument.

14

2021 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2 | **Richelle Jiayi Prakashan | 21S03F**

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

The author argues that veganism should be adopted over consumption of meat as eating meat in excess is unhealthy, and factory farming for meat is morally condemnable. Veganism is also stated to be better for the environment, and the consumption of meat is the direct manifestation of social injustice – where the rich and powerful order buffet spreads of meat and are unable to finish it, resulting in food wastage. As I disagree with the author's reasoning for these premises, I do not accept his conclusion.

Firstly, that factory farming is morally objectionable due to the harsh conditions the animals are placed in, and the violation of animal rights, is contingent on the acceptance of the premises that animals can truly feel pain the way we do, and that even if they do, they have rights equal to those of human beings – to not be harmed or killed. The issue of animal rights can be contested as some argue that these animals, if they have rights, have lesser rights than humans, or that the violation of such rights may not be objectionable if it is a necessary means to a greater good: producing meat for human consumption. Additionally, advocacy against factory farming may not equate to an argument against eating meat, as meat can be farmed in sustainable, humane ways – such as in the case of the Inuit tribes, which hunt and kill animals to a reasonable extent in order to feed themselves. This would prove more morally permissible than factory farming, as it is a necessary act to prevent starvation of the tribe, and more humane as these animals are not kept in confined spaces, nor are they psychologically harmed. Given the contingent nature of the author's hidden assumptions, and the argument against 'factory farming' as opposed to 'eating meat', I do not fully accept this premise.

I concede that veganism could reduce the impact of our carbon emissions, benefiting the environment. However, I disagree that we must switch to a vegan diet in order to be truly genuine about conserving the planet. There exist other ways to reduce carbon emissions that are more feasible – such as recycling – than advocating a complete shift to a meat-less diet, that are nonetheless products of our genuineness in saving the earth.

Additionally, the idea that eating meat is an issue of social injustice appears to be misguided. The rich and powerful are assumed to order meat in excess and to waste food, which is presented as an injustice to the poor and starving. Yet, the injustice lies in the act of gluttony and wastage of food itself, independent of what type of food it is (in this case, meat), for there are many other kinds of other food that the rich and powerful eat in excess and waste. Moreover, the rich constitute precious few in comparison to the vast majority of average people that do eat meat. The argument against consumption of meat by the former does not in any way justify veganism for the whole population.

Due to these reasons, I believe that the author is not fully justified in advocating veganism absolutely, over meat consumption. I do not accept the author's conclusion.

Comments

Clear engagement of the author's premises and assumptions of the argument. Good observations and evaluative points made. Well done!

‘Technology is the key to reducing inequality.’
How far do you agree?

In recent years, 21st Century technology – the likes of cryptocurrency, EdTech and satellite internet – have been touted by many experts as “democratising forces” which reduce inequality throughout the world. These experts claim that such technology would allow unprecedented access to information and social mobility regardless of one’s current wealth or nationality. Hence, it might be tempting to just zoom into technology’s benefits and hail it as the key to reducing domestic, even cross-border inequalities. However, I am of the view that technology is not the key to reducing inequality due to its limited accessibility for those at the bottom, and its disproportionate benefits for the rich and digitally savvy. Instead, I argue that technology sometimes even widens inequality.

Proponents of the view that technology is indeed the key to reducing inequality would be quick to claim that many modern-day technologies and products help to level the playing field for all, by empowering those at the bottom of society. One most prominent example which never escapes such discussions would be the advent of EdTech or education technology. Such inventions help to digitise learning by providing free online courses, research papers and textbooks. Through platforms like edX or Coursera, just about anybody with internet access is able to learn a new skill or even get an online degree at a fraction of the price. With all the information in the world available on the internet, the barriers of entry to education are greatly lowered for most people with an internet connection. Thus, education – something that is traditionally seen as a solution to inequality – is available at a low cost or even no cost to most, hence promoting the idea that such technologies would empower those at the bottom to learn skills and gain qualifications to progress up the social mobility ladder, when previously cost and accessibility have been barriers. Another example on the minds of tech advocates would be cryptocurrency, which cuts down the barriers of entry to digital banking and obtaining loans. In the developing world, many rural and even urban dwellers are currently underserved by banks due to failure to meet certain income barriers. A rules-based financial system brought about by cryptocurrency would widen such access to almost everyone with a smartphone. All these seem to point to technology as a key in reducing inequality, as it empowers and serves those at the bottom.

However, proponents of this view fail to consider the full picture of technology, and fail to recognise the limitations of technology in benefiting the poor and low-skilled due to the existing barriers to such technology preventing widespread access. As mentioned by tech advocates, an internet connection and device is still needed to access the internet and the many powerful tools it has to offer. However, even an internet connection or device might be out of reach of the neediest. People who are digitally illiterate, or those who face language barriers might also find it hard to use technology to upskill and empower themselves. According to Statistica, about 3.3billion people worldwide are non-active users of the internet – most of whom due to cost or geographical issues. Despite new technology that bypasses the barriers of geography, such as SpaceX's Starlink system, which provides satellite internet across the globe from its 1,600 existing satellites in orbit, this problem remains widely unsolved. Currently only 90,000 are subscribed to this service due to the hefty price of purchasing it. It takes approximately US$500 to set up the router and US$99 per month in maintaining a subscription. Amidst promises to lower the cost as technology improves, many people still remain underserved due to a clear lack in affordability of such technology. Hence, for all the 3-odd billion people without broadband, all other facets of the internet remain sealed off from them, hence heavily impeding their access to tools of education or banking. Even when some technology is affordable enough, the gaps in digital skills and knowledge still is a barrier for those who do not have frequent access to such technology. For example, setting up a crypto wallet on the many DeFi (Decentralised Finance) protocols still take a large amount of technical know-how and are far out of reach of even the average internet user today. Hence, due to the limitations of current technology in ensuring equitable access, technology fails to be a key to reducing inequality.

Instead, technology actually widens the inequalities in the world by unfairly benefiting the wealthy or skilled, while disadvantaging the poor and low-skilled. Technology, while seemingly accessible and prolific, almost always benefits the rich or highly skilled disproportionately even at the expense of those at the bottom. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), autonomous vehicles, chatbots and even mechanical working robots have become a reality. This would likely displace many low-skilled workers in the years to come, or at least severely lower demand for low-skilled workers. While many rich investors or tech geeks were cheering on Elon Musk at Tesla's 2019 reveal of the autonomous driving cybertruck, the over 4 million drivers of taxis, lorries or transport vehicles in America were looking in despair at their jobs being placed at risk. Already, it is predicted by governments and experts that autonomous vehicles would largely take over manual driving in the next decade. Globally, the jobs of taxi drivers, logistics truck drivers are very much at risk of being obsolete. Already, it has been proven that Tesla's AI driving treasure is two to five times as safe as a regular human driver. Autonomous driving fleets such as Pony.as are already serving millions. Surely, in the next decade, these typically low-skilled, low-income workers would be left without a job. Despite the creation of some new jobs in its place, such as AI engineers and data analysts, the reality is that they are widely out of reach of these people with limited skills and knowledge. Think about a 60-year-old cabbie who gets replaced by autonomous taxis: would he be able to attend enough courses to get himself a job as an AI engineer? While posing threats to low-income jobs and low-skilled workers, technology also unfairly benefits the rich and digitally savvy. Meanwhile, those with an abundance of capital can leverage this trend by investing in tech companies, which in the last 10 years, have promised unmatched returns. Business owners get to exploit cheap AI to replace their own workers and save costs, benefiting themselves at the expense of their employees. Technologies far out of reach of the poor like SpaceX's commercial space flight, costing over $500,000 per ticket only serves to benefit the whims and fancies of the rich, while CRISPR gene-editing technology would also only be available for those who can afford to spend tens of thousands to give their children or themselves unfair genetic advantages. Hence, technology is far from being the key to reducing inequality.

All in all, technology still has much room for improvement before being able to play an instrumental role in reducing inequality. A recurring theme throughout this essay is accessibility, which remains a big barrier to technology being able to reduce global inequality. While some powerful tools like EdTech and cryptography already exist, promising much potential in offering a levelled playing field, we must ensure private public partnerships and even greater promotion to those who need it most to ensure that this tech is implemented fairly. At the same time, preventing the rich from disproportionately reaping the benefits of technological advances, the poor must be taught digital literacy at a young age, across the globe.

Comments

Well-argued and supported. Written with interest and engagement. Clear line of discussion. Still, to give the response greater scope, other forms of inequality could have been discussed.

16

2021 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 1 | Question 6 **Phang Wei Shuen Gerald | 22S06R**

'City living is no longer attractive.' How true is this?

Cities are the living and breathing hub for societies. In today's interconnected and technologically advanced world, cities are hubs where people and technology gather to gain access to a wider audience and opportunities. Cities provide a myriad of benefits to its inhabitants, providing them with ease of access to communities, facilities and international goods, all in the comfort of an easily transferable distance. However in recent years, there has been a revival in the movement to reject city lifestyle, and return to a more simplistic countryside living. While many share this sentiment, I beg to differ. I believe city living today is beneficial and increasingly becoming a more attractive option for people today.

Some detractors will claim that city living is disastrous for one's health, where it is both physically and mentally draining. There is some truth to that sentiment. In the 20th century, with increasing focus on industrialization, cities had turned into industrial hubs for manufacturing and production. Factories were set up in easily accessible areas and people flooded into these settlements seeking higher paying jobs. This became the city of the 20th century. Pollution from such production made cities toxic with air, water and sound pollution. While such practices have largely dissipated today, a newer problem of car emitted pollution emerged. The most common engine used in cars today, the internal combustion engine, is singlehandedly responsible for a large percentage of carbon emissions on the planet today. Such carbon dioxide emissions are bad for one's health and overexposure can lead to long term health consequences such as cancer. Thus when cities such as Beijing and New Delhi hold a significant percentage of a country's car population, it makes one wonder if living in a city is detrimental to one's physical health. Furthermore, city living has been seen to take a toll on the mental well-being of people. Fast-paced city living where inhabitants are swamped with constant work commitments and the hub-bub of city life. This can be seen in Singapore, which has been declared the most fatigued city in the world by a UK report. This is due to Singaporeans working the longest hours and getting the littlest rest, as a result of the fast paced and high stress lifestyle of Singapore, where it is constantly expected to be easily contactable and committed to work to be seen as a reliable employee. Thus, the fast paced lifestyle of city living has also taken a mental toll on city dwellers. When combined with the poor health effect of living in a city, it seems that living in cities is disastrous for one's health, both physically and mentally. So how is city living attractive?

While many cities have historically been disadvantageous for a healthy lifestyle, there are also many other cities making a change to become more liveable and sustainable for the welfare of its inhabitants. Sustainability in cities, a term which has sprouted in recent years, is to design cities that incorporate sustainable practices that often include inclusion of nature for aesthetical and practical reasons to make a more liveable city. The incorporation of nature systems into these cities make the cities more enjoyable to live in, providing avenues for inhabitants to enjoy nature away from the concrete jungle. Greenery and nature has shown to provide a calming effect for people, thus parks and incorporated greenery stand to relieve stress of city inhabitants. Efforts to make these changes are apparent. This can be seen in Singapore, where we strive to become a "garden in a city", moving on from a "city in a garden". Projects such as the Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park which converted an old dam into a thriving river ecosystem and park shows the government's dedication. The river acts as both a natural drainage system during rains and as a park for city inhabitants to access, relieving the stress of city life, making city living sustainable and attractive. Cities have also taken action against the pollution problem, with many already recognising car carbon dioxide emissions as the source of the issue. Countries such as Singapore have also made the move to restrict cars on the road and even promote the use of electric cars through subsidies to the price of electric cars. Such actions aim to reduce the sound and air pollution caused by cars to make city living healthier. Other sustainable cities in the Nordic countries such as Helsinki have strived to remove cars altogether, incorporating bike paths into a city's main transport infrastructure, not only eliminating pollution from cars but also encouraging people to exercise daily, which has shown to improve mental wellbeing. Thus city living today is healthy and sustainable, making city living an attractive option.

Cities also provide various benefits to its inhabitants, one being the ease of access to technologically advanced facilities. Cities are a place of congregation for people; thus it is a huge market for aspiring firms to set up in, giving them easy access to a wide range of consumers. This allows for more technologically advanced solutions to be found in cities around the world. Furthermore, governments are incentivised to invest in city infrastructure, due to the high population density of a city, as it holds a large percentage of a country's inhabitants. This is apparent in medicine and healthcare, where a country's most advanced medical institutions are often in a city. It is not financially feasible to heavily fund a healthcare centre that is located in the countryside of a country. Due to its low population density, much equipment will go unused, thus it is an inefficient allocation of resources. This can be seen in Singapore, where due to its high population density, much investments have been made into designing a healthcare system capable of supporting the population. Thus we have one of the region's most well-designed healthcare systems, attracting even foreigners from rural parts of neighbouring countries to seek treatment here. The benefits of cities can also be seen in education, where many schools are located in cities. Due to a need to provide for the large population, significantly more investments are made into education bodies in cities. This allows students in cities to receive better education and opportunities. This is apparent from the large number of the world's elite education institutions located in cities. It goes without saying that facilities in cities receive better financial support, raising the quality of facilities in cities. City dwellers are likely to benefit far more greatly from facilities in a city than one in rural areas, presenting city living as an attractive option.

Moreover, it is financially beneficial for one to live in a city. Cities serve as a financial hub in an area of a country, with some even being a financial hub of the region. With globalisation in recent years, cities play an important role and serve as many firm's footholds into new markets in faraway regions. It can be seen that a city acting as a hub for a region attracts many foreign firms to set up, increasing job opportunities for individuals in cities. This can be seen in port cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong, which gather much attention from international firms from other countries. Such cities can serve as a regional base of operations allowing easy access to the region's markets. Thus it is easier for one to seek a higher paying job in a city. Cities also serve as hubs for certain industries, allowing people of certain talents to more easily seek employment for their particular set of skills. This can be seen in Shenzhen China which has been set up as the technological hub for China. Many tech start-up firms flock to Shenzhen for the many resources available to technological firms there. It has since been touted as the Silicon Valley of China. Thus one seeking employment in the technological sector is able to easily find employment within Shenzhen, as with the great magnitude of technological firms there, there is great demand for his skills. Hence with cities acting as regional hubs for industry and economy, people are more likely to obtain higher paying job opportunities within cities which are often not found in rural areas. City living becomes a door to many opportunities that one can access. With inhabitants standing to benefit financially from city living, it seems that city living is a very attractive option.

In conclusion, while some cities have been historically physically and mentally detrimental to its inhabitants, much is changing today. With globalisation and increasing awareness of climate and health issues, cities are striving to make city living sustainable and enjoyable. Cities provide many incentives to live in them, including financial benefits and increased accessibility. This leads me to believe that city living is beneficial and an increasingly attractive option today.

Comments

An effective response with good understanding of issues. Arguments are apt, well explained, and on the whole well developed. While illustration is attempted, it could be more effective and wide ranging (there is a tendency to use Singapore examples). Language is fluent and well controlled.

17

2021 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 1 | Question 9 | **Loretta Lye Mun Yan | 22A01B**

How far should scientific research be driven by commercial interests?

Science – the set of tools which we harness to uncover objective truths and lay claim to the factual character of our fascinating universe – has served humanity well for centuries, and enjoyed the enduring respect and faith of the bulk of society. Practical concerns, however, formulate an inextricable link between science and profit, such that one may argue that at the heart of the scientific institutions it is actually a business, rather than the lauded panacea for our greatest and most pressing woes. There is, consequently, growing concern that scientific research is being driven by commercial interests. While some may defend the profit motive for its contribution to scientific discovery, I opine that due to the negative impacts commercial interests have on research quality, public welfare, and public faith, scientific research should ideally be detached from commercial interests, much less driven by it.

Of course, it is undeniable and presumably universally agreed upon that monetary incentives are the strongest among their counterparts, and humans are intrinsically driven by a thirst for profit, which explains how scientific study may naturally gravitate towards the same motivations. The commercial interests undergirding scientific research are defended on the account that it is precisely the profit incentive that has brought us amazing breakthrough after breakthrough, spurring and accelerating research like never before. Take the Gorilla Glass case for example – what originated as an experimental failure in the Corning Glass Works lab was revived due to Steve Jobs extending the offer of commercial partnership to the firm. Jobs wanted an ultra-thin, ultra-strong glass with seamless design and functionality combined, so the glassworks company, driven by their commercial interests, launched a huge research project. Performing repeated experiments and taking up more than 10% of their yearly revenue, all the company wanted was to provide Jobs with his demanded material. And so the "miracle" glass was invented, making Corning Glass Works an overnight billionaire. Had it not been an intense desire for profit that propelled scientific research, we would not hear of Gorilla Glass today, and our phone screens would not be so thin and strong. Commercial interests, in this sense, have served public interest too in bestowing humanity the gift of an exceptional manufacturing material. Therefore, it can be understandable how one can strongly argue that scientific research should be driven by commercial interests to the extent that other interests and demands are simultaneously satisfied.

Apart from what good commercial interests in research can do for us, we must not ignore that the part-and-parcel role commercial interests play in the daily functioning and operations of scientific labs and institutions have allowed for the survival of research. In the US, public funding for research at universities has dipped below pre-2008 recession levels, while the number of institutions needing funding has invariably increased. Commercial interests are often the gateway for large amounts of funding essential to the livelihood of continued scientific research. So, from a pragmatic angle, such interests are not only inevitable in research but also what makes research even possible in the first place. From this perspective, we can have no qualms about the extent to which scientific research is driven by commercial interest.

Nonetheless, there are also a multitude of reasons why commercial interests in research should be limited and, if possible, wholly separated from the realm of science. Commercial interests have the potential to compromise the quality of data accrual, analysis, findings, and the dissemination of results, thereby distorting the research process in whole. It is not uncommon for corporate businesses to see the realm of science as an avenue for self-profit, and actively attempt to remould the discipline, discard its fundamental principles, and align it to their own interests. In the industry of food nutrition, we see several instances where ravenous, profit-hungry companies have jumped on the opportunity to exploit the ambiguities of food science (due to the difficulty in isolating solely dietary intake and holding all other variables constant in an experiment). In 2015, Global Energy Network, a research institute that was originally examining how different diets can contribute to obesity, released a report that solely focused on how the lack of exercise was liable for causing obesity. Their myopic focus on lack of exercise while blatantly discounting other factors flew in the face of what health professionals and netizens alike believed. The incredulous public did some digging and discovered, disappointingly (though not surprisingly), that Coca-Cola was secretly funding the Network throughout the course of the research. Though there was inherently nothing false about Global Energy Network's report, it was widely decided that their harmful omission of the full truth was a foul lack of scientific integrity and a manifestation of overshadowing commercial interests in scientific research that have not positively impacted the community. A similar and even more outrageous example was when "Eating candy causes children to weigh less" was reported on CBS news under the headline "Does candy keep kids from getting fat?", sparking a flurry of confusion followed by anger. A trade association of candy manufacturers like Hershey and Wrigley had sponsored the research, undoubtedly to advertise their own products, via indirect association, as healthy and acceptable, appealing largely to health-concerned parents and individuals. The biggest sin was that the research was accompanied by the glaring disclaimer that "cause and effect associations cannot be drawn" between eating candy and weighing less as the data "may not reflect usual intake", but all these were omitted in the trade association's press release. In the cases mentioned above, we witness scientific research being driven by commercial interests, and the latter appears to have let the former wander astray to neglect the capacity (or perhaps, responsibility) of science to benefit people. Commercial interests, in encouraging half-truths in scientific research, borders on spreading scientific nonsense. This is a clear case for why commercial interests in scientific research should be limited to a minimum, if not wholly removed to retain the authenticity of research.

As a subset of the above argument, commercial interests driving research accelerate the atrophy of the altruistic dimension of scientific research, as hijacking it for profit likely causes it to diverge from serving public interests. This comes at the cost of not only the welfare of individuals in society, especially patients, but also our environment. The US has unimaginably high drug prices – the highest in the world – and this is often justified by pharmaceutical companies on the basis of needing to cover the high R&D costs of drug creation. This justification is not quite sufficient, for it has been revealed that after accounting for R&D costs – around \$80 billion a year – big pharmaceutical companies still had a leftover \$40 billion, all of which would have gone to profit. The corollary is that drug prices continue rising and profiting firms under the veneer of necessity, but injures the patient community by gradually depriving them of treatment. To further illustrate this case of profit maximisation and abandonment of the "save people" narrative, 600 cancer drugs (which are amongst the most expensive drugs) have been developed, while only 42 drugs are available to treat serious antibiotic-resistance infections, which is arguably of equal importance given its widespread devastating impacts on the population. Is the skew towards oncology really the biggest priority? Non-environmentally friendly research would also be a product of commercial interests dominating research. In a bid to cut costs, there is great incentive to resort to dirty but cheap energy (for example, coal) to power research processes. This further compounds the existing threat unsustainable research has levied on the environment (6 million tonnes of plastic waste from research annually, for instance). Research, which should seek to benefit society, has ironically been harming the groups and the environment it was supposed to help – all driven by commercial interests.

Finally, the infiltration of commercial interests in scientific research is hugely undesirable on account of what it does to bedevil the scientific community and undermine public trust. Today, it appears that the mere mention of a corporate role in scientific research is enough to render it compromised, and the upsetting validity of the above perspective is raising severe doubts and drawing great scrutiny of the credibility of scientific institutions. This can be good, surely, on the basis that it is encouraging greater scientific literacy, but considering the majority that lack the skill of telling apart legitimate from unsound research in the deluge of information, it seems a sound proposal to limit commercial interests in scientific research. For one, the rise of the conspiracy theorists, particularly those concerned with the Big Pharma conspiracies, is a cause of concern. The phenomenally high drug prices in the US have led to claims that bogus research is being fed to the public and that cures for cancer are being suppressed, amidst other accusations against pharmaceutical companies who, admittedly, suffer ever-diminishing public faith. These theories offer myriad reasons to deny scientific institutions any trust, leading to wider implications for society. The collective scepticism towards commercial interests that sorely denies legitimate scientists and funders any credit for their contributions to society creates a population increasingly intransigent to scientific advice, reliable or not. This also means reduced public confidence and cooperation in important situations such as receiving vaccines (think belligerent anti-vaxxers) and volunteering as research subjects. As commercial interests can have the effect of alienating scientific institutions from the masses, especially when funders have proven themselves capable of overwriting research with their own agendas, there is good reason to keep commercial interests separate from research.

Society may quite possibly be headed in the direction of believing that research quality and funding source have been conflated into one indiscernible, ugly mess. This development is unfriendly towards the common trend of scientific research hinging on commercial support. Considering this and how commercial interests tend to poison the very fundamentals of scientific research like honesty and altruism, there is an evident need to reduce the influence of commercial interests in dictating, and by extension, distorting research. A clear distinction must hence be drawn between for-the-common-good and self-profit, as difficult as it sounds, for it represents the perfect balance and optimal extent to which scientific research should be driven by commercial interests. Let us strive towards that.

Comments

On the whole, a good range of perspectives discussed with convincing support. Thoughtfully presented. Some over-generalization and a tenuous last paragraph.

How far should scientific research be driven by commercial interests?

It is undeniable that scientific research has a crucial role in today's fast-paced, ever-changing world in which there is a constant need to innovate and continuously come up with more efficacious solutions. Given the paramount role scientific research has played in our lives, questions have consistently been raised on the extent to which scientific research should be driven by financial interests. Although scientific research that is driven by private financial interests may disproportionately serve a handful of corporations instead of society at large and may cause the dangers associated with scientific research to be greater, it is a necessary evil that we have to accept. Moreover, scientific research driven by commercial interests has benefited society significantly in the past and to outright reject scientific research that is driven by commercial interests would be far too pessimistic.

Contrary to the noble and altruistic ideals of scientific research, commercial interest is driven by the amoral laws of profit-maximisation; thus, to the extent that the fruits of scientific research narrowly satisfy the interests of money-hungry corporations, scientific research should not be driven by commercial interests. Since its very inception, scientific research has been predicated on the virtuous qualities of fulfilling human's inherent crave craving for knowledge, as well as the application of scientific research to alleviate humanity's suffering. On the other hand, businesses are governed by fundamentally capitalist principles, which more often than not fail to serve the greater good of humanity, and instead disproportionately benefit powerful corporations. When businesses are handed the reins of scientific research, it is highly possible that the noble values that give scientific research value will be eschewed. Businesses will only fund scientific research that yields profit and will not consider the impacts on third parties. This often results in businesses failing to serve the interests of those who lack sufficient financial power. For example, AstraZeneca, a British-Swedish pharmaceutical company halted research into tuberculosis and malaria – diseases endemic in many less developed countries – to focus on typically "rich man diseases" such as diabetes and cancer. This was presumably due to the realisation that there was no financial gain in alleviating the plight of the poor. Moreover, many pharmaceutical companies were unwilling to conduct research into Ebola vaccines, to provide vaccines to the developing world. According to Science magazine, a harrowing 11,000 people succumbed to the disease in West Africa alone. These people would surely agree that scientific research that begins with the commercial interests of corporations and ends with the shallow pockets of the rural poor, is extremely problematic and inhumane. Hence, given the extremely high likelihood of commercially driven scientific research failing to improve the plight of humanity, it remains clear that scientific research should not be driven by commercial interests.

If the commercial logic of maximising revenue and minimising cost is imposed on scientific research, dangerous and harmful practices that make financial sense will become the norm. Thus, to the extent that commercially driven scientific research serves as a source of, rather than solution to danger, financial interests should not be allowed to drive scientific research. From a financial perspective, maximising revenue and minimising cost would indubitably yield the greatest benefit. The former is done by breaking into emerging markets early and the latter is done by skipping "unnecessary steps" in the production process. Commercially driven scientific research ultimately has the goal of creating new and innovative products that can be sold to generate profit. However, in the rush to enter markets faster than competitors and remain more cost-effective, harmful and dangerous practices begin to make financial sense. For example, in the race to create the world's first Covid-19 vaccine and secure deals with affluent countries, crucial steps in the vaccine research process were hastened. Moreover, in order to boost their financial gains, companies overstated the findings of their scientific research, which resulted in an inordinate faith in the efficacy of vaccines that could have been potentially disastrous. For example, the Covid-19 vaccine manufactured by Pfizer and BioNTech was declared to have a 52% success rate in inoculating a person against Covid-19 in clinical trials. However, Israel found that its actual effectiveness hovered at an unimpressive 33%. This is extremely concerning as it clearly depicts how the vested interests of private businesses led to them skewing research results in their favour, Moreover, it may also drive firms to utilise unethical practices in expediting research processes. In 2018, it was reported that illegal and unethical drug trials took place in Rajasthan, India. According to reports, 19 men from local villages were "recruited" for this trial. Originally promised employment in a care home for the elderly, the men were brought to a local facility and given medication, later suffering severe medical complications. This harrowing example lends further credence to the argument that if science is driven by commercial interests, businesses will turn to unethical and barbaric methods, exploiting vulnerable people and rushing research processes to return a profit,

Although it is not ideal for scientific research to be driven by commercial interests, it is a necessary evil that we have to accept. Scientific research requires substantial funding and if funding is not forthcoming from non-private actors, scientific research will be impossible. Scientific research is far more than juvenile experiments using baking soda and vinegar. Scientific research requires sophisticated research facilities, high-tech equipment and specialist workers in order to be fruitful. Hence, it is no surprise that the costs of scientific research are exorbitantly high. Only commercial businesses, with their ability to generate profit and spread costs over a large volume of sales, can be relied upon to provide the funding required. Non-private actors such as the government would be unable to match the financial ability of large corporations, especially given the extremely high opportunity costs that are incurred in funding scientific research. Therefore, it is inevitable that scientific research is fuelled by commercial interests. For example, in the US, it was found that 400 billion dollars of funding for research projects came from companies, $71 billion from universities and $53 billion from the federal government. This sheds light on the inextricable dependence of scientific research on private funding and it remains impossible to separate the two. Moreover, scientific research often occurs over a long period of time, and consistent financial backing is crucial for the scientific research process to be carried out thoroughly. Thus, it can be argued that the profit motive is the only sufficiently strong motive to keep scientific research running in the long run. Countries with their rotating cast of democratically-elected leaders may waver in their commitment but Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) with their single-minded objective of financial return will not. Additionally, to persuade our brightest and most brilliant minds to dedicate themselves to scientific research, the mere clinking of coins makes a far better case than some impassioned appeal to goodwill. Since it is the case that we value scientific research to the extent that forgoing it entirely is out of the question, then we must accept the fact that funding from commercial sources is the best available option to reap the rewards of scientific research.

Although it is true that in some cases commercial interests impede scientific research, there have been many instances in which the goals of scientific research and commercial interests have aligned. Hence, to the extent that scientific research produces solutions that benefit humanity, scientific research should be driven by commercial interests. Ultimately, it makes financial sense to engage in research that answers society's demands. Hence, commercially driven scientific research has, in many cases, led to the creation of novel solutions that have had a positive impact on society. Although such scientific research may not have been undertaken with noble intentions in mind, the end result served to improve the condition of humanity. Therefore, in such cases it is fair to claim that scientific research should be driven by commercial interests. For example, scientific research into genetically modified food that was carried out by businesses led to the creation of genetically modified foods that increased food output by 22% and reduced pesticide usage by 37%. Similarly, commercially driven research into Covid-19 vaccines was successful in creating vaccines that were extremely potent and allowed countries globally to alleviate the suffering of their people. In fact, the speed at which such vaccines were produced, a mere 18 months, can be attributed to the efficiency of commercial companies whilst carrying out scientific research. In this case, it is hard to see how we would have been able to create dependable solutions to combat the pandemic, without the assistance of profit-driven businesses. Therefore, although private companies initiated the research into vaccines with their end goal of generating profits for themselves, they ended up improving the condition of humanity and fulfilling the fundamental goal of science in the process. Hence, to the extent that scientific research concurrently benefits humanity, it should be driven by commercial interests.

Moreover, businesses possess the ability to turn scientific research into tangible products that can benefit society. While scientists may have an unparalleled ability to discover ground-breaking theories, they typically lack the expertise to commercialise their products or research such that they can directly benefit society. After all, it is impractical for science to simply exist in a vacuum to satisfy our intellectual desires. In order for it to be beneficial, it is imperative that it has a positive impact on society. On the other hand, commercially driven entities with their intention to create workable products for financial return, are uniquely equipped with the skillsets required to turn scientific research into useful products. The Singapore Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology, for example, has partnerships with commercial labs overseas in order to find use for their scientific research. Therefore, given the fact that businesses are most appropriately equipped to translate research into innovative products, scientific research should be driven by commercial interests.

Ultimately, it remains clear that we have no choice but to allow scientific research to be driven by commercial interests. However, this may not necessarily be bad as although scientific research may end up disproportionately serving corporations, such scientific research has proven its concomitant ability to benefit society. Additionally, businesses are able to augment scientific research as they are capable of generating products through scientific research that benefit humanity. Hence, it remains far too pessimistic a stand to unequivocally claim that there should be no involvement of businesses in scientific research. Instead, moving forward more limits can be placed on businesses such that commercial interests can optimally facilitate scientific research.

Comments

Overall, this was a thoughtful response with fully relevant points throughout. You provided good evaluation of how commercial interests may help or hinder scientific research and offered a good range of stakeholders to consider. Some examples could have been better illustrated and expanded beyond drugs and medicine. There can also be more nuance in the portrayal of commercial interests, but overall that was well done. The use of language is effective and the essay is well-organised with a clear personal voice. Effective linking devices are evident, but could have been more varied.

PASSAGE

Kate Morgan examines the dangers of being defined by our jobs.

1 The most popular surname in Germany and Switzerland is Müller, while in Ukraine, it is Melnik; both are words for a miller. In Slovakia, the most common last name is Varga, a word that means cobbler. And in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US, it is Smith – as in blacksmith, silversmith, locksmith, gunsmith. These names date back as far as the Middle Ages, when a person's job was such a defining characteristic, it became their literal identity.

2 Today, our jobs do not dictate our names, but they still often become a major part of our identities. After all, one of the first questions we tend to exchange with a new acquaintance is, "What do you do?" In many ways, it feels natural to see a person's profession as a defining detail of who they are. It can be a clue to their values, interests, or background (or simply help two strangers pass time at an awkward cocktail party). But many of us have come to actually define ourselves by our occupations – which often comes at our own expense. How did work come to be so entwined with identity?

3 Historically, most people did not get to choose their jobs. It was usually generational: if your father was a carpenter, so you were a carpenter. But increased access to education over the past century has led to people taking up a greater variety of jobs, and thus more income tiers. So, jobs have become a significant marker of identity in a more nuanced way. When someone says they are a surgeon, you generally assume they have strong education and high income – two metrics that can determine one's standing in society and affect how you subsequently judge the person. Of course, it is a two-way street: many welcome this judgement because they desire to associate themselves with the wealth and accomplishment their professional titles imply. This is especially true among the educated elite. For people who have a certain type of job and certain class, these often become how they identify themselves and how others identify them.

4 However, those who do let their jobs consume their identities may be doing so at their own expense. When people invest a disproportionate amount of their time and energy in their career, it can lead to a psychological state called enmeshment, where the boundaries between work and personal life are blurred. This tends to happen especially for people with jobs that are relatively self-determined, where they are not clocking in at nine and out at five. People in high-powered executive positions, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, academics, and others who set their own hours can end up letting their jobs fill a lot of – or most of – the time in their lives.

5 There are some common signs of this enmeshment trap, like thinking about work whenever you are not there, and bringing up your job within the first three minutes of a conversation. Enmeshment allows the job to eat up one's time and identity, leaving less space for hobbies and interests. It makes it harder to connect with people who are not a part of your working life. When you become so enmeshed in your job that it begins to define you, you also may begin to let it determine your own value. This can have disastrous effects: the successes and failures you experience will directly affect your self-worth. And because we live in a society where careers are less likely to be lifelong, if we switch or find ourselves out of a job, it can also become an identity crisis.

6 Enmeshment does not only threaten the way we feel about ourselves personally. Linking self-worth to career can turn a career hurdle into something considerably tougher to overcome. For instance, there may be a recession or your company may be acquired, and suddenly your job is not what it used to be. It then becomes really stressful for people, and they have poor coping strategies because it is earth-shattering. So, it becomes depression, anxiety, even substance abuse. But until there is a problem, most people who have slipped into a career-centric identity do not even realise it is happening. Indeed, most people who are uncomfortable with how much they are defined by their job also say they are doing their "dream job" or something they love**.**

7 However, we may have a rare opportunity to disassociate who we are with what we do. The pandemic's forced disruption of all elements of our lives – work, especially – has caused many to evaluate what is actually important to them. Some have taken on new hobbies; others have evolved their bonds with family and friends. "When we face experiences that remind us that our mortal existence is transient and that tragedy can strike with little or no warning, we tend to be motivated to evaluate what makes life worthwhile," writes Clay Routledge, a professor of psychology at North Dakota State University studying how American adults derive meaning in their lives. So, while our careers are still in the picture, of course, we may be at a juncture where our jobs become only one significant puzzle piece of our lives.

8 To be sure, doing work you love is not a bad thing, nor is considering what you do for a living an important part of who you are. But moving away from a system where people are defined primarily – or exclusively – by their jobs will take more than realising there is a problem or re-prioritising in the wake of the pandemic. It will also require a cultural shift away from the idea that each person has a professional "calling", dictated by who they are, and that the goal of life should be to discover it. We often set people up to feel dissatisfied: if they do not find themselves in that perfect job, they have somehow failed.

9 Changing that narrative may need to begin long before people actually enter the workforce. Research shows that pressure to find "a calling" makes students feel lost and depressed. Even young children get the message that the career they choose will be part of who they become; consider how often today's children are asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Discussing careers with children can help them see the myriad possibilities their future holds, but asking young people what they want to be may have knock-on effects. The idea that this is when we want children to determine a life course may influence the degree to which, as adults, they end up tying their identity so much to their jobs.

10 While parents can begin to make those changes with their children, adults who feel too enmeshed in their careers have some recourse too. Being deliberate about making time to relax and socialise outside work can help. It can be difficult to make friends as an adult, but joining groups or clubs can provide a leg-up. Picking up hobbies can be very helpful, as long as they have nothing to do with your job. Still, identities develop over time, so we must be cautious against trying to change too much, too fast. Instead, add new identifiers slowly. Rather than drastic, very difficult changes, get hobbies a little at a time, make friends a little at a time. Ultimately, it is similar to diversifying a financial portfolio. You have to diversify your life. Diversify yourself.

20

2021 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 2 | AQ **Lara Tan Rui-Qi | 22A01B**

Kate Morgan discusses issues related to defining ourselves by our jobs and offers some suggestions for mitigating the negative consequences. How far are her observations applicable to you and your society?

In this passage, Kate Morgan raises the subtle yet destructive motion of enmeshment and points to the dangers of allowing one's job to dominate one's public and personal life until it becomes an inseparable, crucial part of one's identity. I agree with her observations in the Singaporean context and find enmeshment and its perils readily manifested and applicable to our society.

In line 35, Kate Morgan states that "[e]nmeshment allows the job to eat up one's time and identity, leaving less space for hobbies and interests." According to her, herein lies the covert peril of becoming overly consumed by one's job: it snuffs out other components crucial to our enjoyment of life but also our fundamental sense of personhood, compromising on individuals leading a multifaceted life full of personality and character. Her ideas and concerns translate readily to Singapore: the risk of enmeshment in our society is high, with Singaporeans notoriously clocking one of the highest number of working hours worldwide. Even without being in "self-determined" jobs (line 29) that offer little job security and owing to Singaporeans' affinity for routine and structure, Singaporeans spend a disproportionate amount of time at the workplace, which makes them all the more susceptible to enmeshment. With a large portion of the Singaporean middle class working conventional 9 to 5 jobs, enmeshment is perhaps more prevalent among those who spend large amounts of time at the office, notwithstanding social events, after work parties and even overtime hours. Therefore, enmeshment, even if occurring within the boundaries of an office cubicle, is still as pervasive in Singapore as Morgan identifies among more freelancing folk.

Morgan also offers hope to remedy this endemic problem: she suggests working adults take ownership of their work hours, rather than the other way around, to revitalise their lives and delineate work and play time for themselves. However, I fear these suggestions are overly optimistic and do not apply readily to our local context due to our highly strung work-life culture. Morgan posits that "[b]eing deliberate about making time to relax and socialise outside work can help" (lines 77-78) and suggests adults put themselves out in new social circles and enriching environments as a remedy to allowing work to control their lives. However, I do not believe Singaporeans will go out of their way to engage themselves or try new hobbies. We are on the whole a rather private and individualistic people, and prefer to stay within our own company of family, friends and (you guessed it) work colleagues. Even in public housing estates, Singaporeans hardly display willingness to relax and socialise with others, continuing to lead their cloistered lives within their own circle of intimate friends; or worse still, in front of their work desks typing away at another impending report. Singaporeans are also wary of change, especially meeting new people and diversifying their loves: why would they go to a festival or event after working hours and allow themselves to be subject to more social interaction when their phones and televisions offer the comfort of Netflix and social media? In all, despite Morgan's hopes for societies to unstring themselves and diversify their lives, I believe such a hope is still a pipe dream in Singaporean society, and only a gradual shift in mindsets and gentle encouragement will encourage Singaporeans to do the same.

Comments

Response shows clear understanding of author's claims, and there is consistent effort to engage critically with these claims. There is also apt and effective use of illustration that underpins your evaluation. Organisation of ideas is strong, with arguments flowing logically and coherently.

Kate Morgan discusses issues related to defining ourselves by our jobs and offers some suggestions for mitigating the negative consequences. How far are her observations applicable to you and your society?

Morgan discusses the potential causes and issues of defining ourselves by our jobs and offers some suggestions to alleviate the drawbacks. I agree with some of the claims she makes, but question the applicability of the solutions presented to a Singaporean context.

Firstly, Morgan posits that "it feels natural to see a person's profession as a defining detail of who they are" (lines 9-10), pointing to how ingrained the mentality of jobs as our identity is. This is clearly reflected in Singaporean society. Given that we are a small island-state with no natural resources, it is little surprise that we have placed so much value on our human capital since our inception. The PAP adopted a policy of de-politicisation while focusing on bread-and-butter issues since our independence, and this has inextricably tied our national identity to economic productivity. By continually emphasising economic progress as our means of survival, our national identity has been built on success. By extension, the immense value our society places on one's career (and its success or lack thereof) encourages our citizens to internalise the importance of getting a high-paying job. Morgan's claim that people judge one's "standing in society" (line 19) based on their job holds especially true in Singapore, where most parents want their child to be doctors or lawyers. The snobbish claim "You better study hard, otherwise you will become a road sweeper!" is one every child in Singapore has definitely heard from their parents. Our emphasis on meritocracy as a national value is a double-edged sword, celebrating the success of the elites as well-deserved but also deriding low-income workers as "stupid" or "didn't work hard enough". We are liable to use jobs to define one's identity simply because of the way we are brought up. This echoes Morgan's claim that forcing children to "determine a life course" results in them "tying their identity… to their jobs" (line 75). Our school system requires children to decide on their ideal vocation early on, for example taking the humanities in JC locks you out of a medical career. At a time where kids are trying to find themselves, over-emphasising the effects of such choices (due to the trickle-down effect on your future) is unnecessarily stressful. Lastly, Morgan's claim that enmeshment "tends to happen especially for people with jobs that are relatively self-determined" (lines 28-29), is extremely true in the context of Singapore. The toxic work-life culture we developed, due to our emphasis on economic prosperity, has resulted in adults constantly overworking themselves just to get ahead of their peers. A 2021 study found that Singaporeans worked the 2nd most number of hours in a week, and we were the most fatigued in the world. Evidently, Morgan's assessments reflect Singaporean society due to our societal context.

Yet, I question how effective her suggestions to mitigate these situations would be when applied in a Singaporean context. She claims the "pandemic's forced disruption… has caused many to evaluate what is actually important" (lines 52-53), and while it must be said that this is true to a certain extent, one wonders how many Singaporeans truly feel this way. In fact, it can be argued that due to the pandemic, work has had an even greater penetration into our lives. Companies were introduced to the idea of working-from-home, a policy that the Singaporean government greatly encourages. This blurs the line between work life and home life, and enables people to overextend and work unhealthy hours even more. Instead of reassessing their values, like Morgan claims, I would argue the pandemic has intensified our unhealthy habit of tying work to every part of our daily lives, and it is not the solution Morgan promises it is. Furthermore, she claims that "a cultural shift" (line 64) is needed, to break people away from this idea. It is arguably too idealistic to be applied to a Singaporean context. In a country where our national identity is economic success, to break away from this idea that jobs are important would be to lose the glue which bonds us together. It would certainly be a challenge (almost impossible) to wean society off that idea, one which is arguably necessary for our continued survival and prosperity. Despite the clear drawbacks, Singapore did become the economic miracle of Southeast Asia through emphasising the importance of jobs and success. Her solution is simply too far removed from reality to be able to cure this issue in Singapore. I would argue that a stronger focus on personal mental health is superior to the society-wide cultural shift Morgan suggests, as it does not change too much, but alleviates some of the negatives of enmeshment. Hence, I am inclined to disagree with the solutions she presents, as they are difficult to implement in a Singaporean context.

Comments

Excellent exploration of the origins of Singapore's work habits with copious links to the unique habits and characteristics of our local context. Response is also notable for the links that it drew to the earliest policies of our political party.

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2022 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 2 **Tan Shian En | 22S03K**

'State censorship of the media is no longer necessary today.'
What is your view?

In 2015, Paris, a tranquil morning at the Charlie Hebdo publication office was shattered when two armed terrorists burst into the building and opened fire. Within minutes, twelve people were dead, murdered for being part of a magazine that had long riled up Muslims with cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in addition to satirical depictions of other religious figures. The magazine strongly defended its right to publish as part of France's long-standing and highly-championed tradition of freedom of speech, but the tragedy sparked fierce debate on the regulation of the media and the role of the state in media censorship. The media today has evolved into a highly complex pillar of society; with the age of new media, states have to grapple with new issues such as fake news rampant on social media, or the difficulties of maintaining a fair and objective press to act as the Fourth Estate. Hence, while state censorship of media may be seen as no longer relevant or even unwanted, I believe that some state censorship of the media continues to be necessary today.

Proponents of the argument that state censorship of the media is no longer necessary today may point to the wide range of information available via new media, giving the average individual access to news like never before. With so many different news sources, one is able to consult different sources and consider different viewpoints to gain holistic perspectives on societal issues or events today. State censorship is then no longer relevant given citizens are able to gain fair and unbiased insights into the different happenings in the world. Indeed, with credible news outlets like the BBC, The Economist and The New York Times all offering easily accessible news applications, or the rise of podcasts debating a variety of topics on platforms like Spotify, people today have far greater access to a range of news sources, and state censorship may therefore be deemed unnecessary in ensuring citizens have access to accurate and credible news. In fact, with the rise of authoritarian regimes more tightly policing the media, some may even argue state censorship of the media is undesirable. The closing of independent news outlet Apple Daily in Hong Kong under the controversial National Security Law, for instance, was met with great dismay and concern over the future of free speech in the state. Russia's recent intensive clamp-down on its media, with staff of its last-standing independent news outlet walking out of the studio last week in protest, further supports that state censorship of the media is not just unnecessary but unwanted today, given that state censorship may be easily abused to curtail rights and suppress dissent amongst the populace.

However, the view that state censorship of the media is no longer necessary fails to take into account the complexities of new media today. With the new age of technology shaping media into a very different form than the traditional mediums in the past, state censorship of the media is indeed at times necessary.

Firstly, new media today has seen a rise in the use of algorithms as social media companies profile users to better tailor their news feeds to their preferences. With the development of tracking cookies and the use of bots, users' every move on the Internet is recorded and stored in an ever-growing database, with algorithms then generating news sources of articles that users are more likely to click on and read. This, however, has led to the sinister echo chamber effect, where users end up being continuously exposed to views that already align with theirs, which can quickly lead to the hyperpolarisation of communities. No country is a more stark example of this than the US: The Wall Street Journal's "Blue Feed, Red Feed" showed just how skewed far-leaning Republican or Democrat supporters' news sources can be, and certainly explained a lot why the US electorate is so sharply divided along party lines. Such hyperpolarisation can damage democracies and threaten their very foundation. On 6 January 2021, Trump supporters stormed the Capitol demanding the overturning of the presidential election results, after being highly radicalised by right-wing sources that continue to propagate falsehoods on election fraud in the 2020 election even until today. With the propensity of new media to be a breeding ground for extremist news and conspiracy theories, state censorship is certainly relevant and necessary today where the state should step in to regulate media sources. The view that citizens are able to differentiate and pick out credible news sources for themselves is unfortunately a naive one in a world where citizens increasingly view politics from the standpoint of a "political fan" instead of a truth seeker. It is therefore up to the state to adequately practise censorship to protect their communities from becoming hyperpolarised.

Secondly, the democratisation of media today has led to a sharp spike in fake news, with the ease of access to social media and lack of regulation meaning news sources are not assured of their credibility. While in the past reports and articles would have been subjected to vigorous fact-checking and editing, today anyone can post content on social media platforms without any sort of evidence or credentials, and this has led to a rise in fake news that requires the state to get involved or risk endangering the security and stability of society. In 2014, fierce religious clashes broke out in Myanmar between Buddhists and Muslims after an article emerged that a Muslim man had raped a Buddhist woman. The article was later found to be completely fabricated but was widely shared on Facebook before the unrest broke out, stirring up many underlying tensions between the two religious groups in Myanmar. With fake news on the rise and having the potential to upset the stability of society, it is thus imperative for the state to step in and censor such false information accordingly. Beyond causing civic unrest, fake news can have deeper implications for a country. In 2020, misinformation targeting Muslims spiked in India after several members of an Islamic group tested positive for Covid-19 after attending a religious event in Delhi, leading to calls for economic boycotts of Muslim businesses. False news that eating vegetables and eliminating meat from your diet could prevent you from getting the virus also spread quickly across India's infamous WhatsApp chats rife with fake news; by April 2021, Indian authorities estimated that up to 130 billion rupees had been lost in the poultry industry as a result of such misinformation. Evidently, fake news has critical consequences for society, and with the democratisation of media today, it is a growing issue that governments all over the world continue to grapple with. On the grounds of protecting social security and stability then, it is more often than not necessary for state censorship of the media.

Lastly, the economic model of new media has grown in such a way that state censorship may be necessary in regulating unethical practices of the media industry today. In the past, traditional media outlets earned their keep from subscription fees by viewers as well as advertising revenue. Today, media outlets fight for the eyeballs of users as more clicks equal more revenue. Such a model, however, has led to some journalists resorting to unethical means of gaining insider footage or insights to put them ahead of other competitors and generate more revenue. For instance, in 2021, Italian public broadcaster Rai TV broadcasted CCTV footage of a cable car crash in northern Italy which killed all 14 on board as the cabin crashed into the side of a mountain. Following this initial airing, the footage was then shown several times by other media outlets, with only some blurring the victims' faces. These media outlets came under heavy criticism for their decision to broadcast the outage due to the lack of respect and consideration for the victims and their families. State censorship would be appropriate under circumstances like these to protect the very communities that the media today reports on. Contrast this example to the case in 2004, when an Al Qaeda-linked group captured and beheaded American contractor Nick Berg. The editors of several major US news agencies such as CNN and CBS were confronted with the stark dilemma of whether to broadcast Berg's gruesome ordeal or to censor it and risk being outdone by competitors. Eventually, most of the outlets decided to censor the video to avoid serving the terrorists' objectives of sparking widespread fear and accentuating public opposition to continued US presence in Iraq, earning praise for their responsible actions. It is however debatable as to whether they would have made the same decision today, where media outlets are constantly striving to outdo one another in grabbing eyeballs. With the evolution of the economic model of the media industry today, there has been a rise in unethical practices that could harm or inadequately protect the groups in society being reported on, which is why state censorship of the media continues to be necessary today, where the state should step in as and when to regulate the media.

It must be acknowledged, however, that state censorship varies from country to country. While it continues to be necessary in today's age of new media, we should also be wary of the potential abuse of censorship to serve the intentions of an authoritarian regime or dictator. In Russia, citizens are fed tightly-controlled and highly-targeted propaganda from the Kremlin, with independent news sources all but entirely shut down. In China, the Chinese Communist Party continues to heavily censor content related to human rights or issues on freedom of speech like that of Tiananmen Square. In fact, last year the keyword "tank man", an icon of the Tiananmen protests, gave no search results on the Bing! engine after yet more Chinese censorship. Thus, it is difficult to judge completely if state censorship is still necessary today or not. Censorship being so closely intertwined with politics and a ruling body's hold on its people means the argument is rarely so black and white. While state censorship continues to be relevant and necessary in today's world where fake news and the use of algorithms can threaten the very fabric of society, it must also be approached with caution lest it be abused for purposes other than ensuring and maintaining an objective, alternate voice that provides readers with the truth – the very purpose of the media at its core.

Comments

Insightful and incisive, although skewed towards social media (you do offer some justification for that). Coherent flow and well-supported. A pleasure to read.

2022 | Y6 | GP TP | Paper 1 | Question 3 Faith Hailey Toh | 22S06R

Consider the view that we are moving further away from, rather than moving closer to, achieving gender equality.

To an observer who has some understanding of the issue of gender equality, it may seem that the fight for equal rights, opportunities and treatment of genders, specifically male and female, is over. After all, who can ignore the prominent and empowering steps that have been taken in recent years? For example, the #MeToo movement that gave women the power and voice to speak out about the sexual injustices they have faced is a salient example and symbol that perhaps in these few years, the fight to achieve gender equality is finally getting somewhere. However, even as we take steps forward, new and perhaps unexpected complexities do arise that present both women and men with challenges in fighting for equality, or even just the ability to express themselves freely and unlock their best potential. Because of these new uncertainties which are arguably even harder to navigate than our past problems in gender equality, one can question if we are really moving closer to achieving gender equality or consider if we are actually taking steps backwards. I believe that while undeniable progress has been made, due to deeply-ingrained and implicit gender biases as well as new challenges that the modern fight for equality presents, we have not moved closer to gender equality but rather are moving away from it.

Still, some may argue that when comparing today's world and prospects for women with how it was like in the past, that women today have it much better and therefore, we have moved closer to eliminating the gap between the rights of women and of men. What this means is that women have been afforded greater equality of opportunities, and affirmative action has also been put in place to ensure women get their fair share as well as representation in positions of power. For example, in California, companies are required to reserve at least one seat on their board for women. Some countries like Norway also require 40% of leadership positions in companies to be allocated for women. Compared to the all-male leadership that may have been seen in the past, women are now actively given the chance to lead, express their opinions, and enact change in their positions, which is an opportunity they may not have been given in the past. We can also consider how there has been a noticeable shift in political power from men to women in the past few decades, where more women have been vaulting power at the highest levels and enlarging their sphere of influence and power. Consider prominent women like Jacinda Ardern, the New Zealand prime minister, and Tsai Ing-Wen from Taiwan, who are the representatives of their countries. More and more women are coming into office, which is arguably the highest degree of power, suggesting that women have not only advanced in terms of representation, but that they are doing so due to their own merits and ability. For example, Jacinda Ardern and Tsai Ing-Wen were widely lauded for their sharp and decisive response during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. All this suggests that not only has the power imbalance between men and women been negated in some way, but also that women are more respected in their roles and are able to enact change. Moreover, we can consider that progress for women has not only taken place in developed countries, but also less developed countries. Today, women in Saudi Arabia are finally able to get a driving license and Jordan has repealed a law stating that men would not be punished for rape if they married the woman. In less developed countries, where women undeniably have it much worse, there are signs that through laws and policies, women are achieving more autonomy over their bodies and their right to independence, suggesting that a new culture of empowering women has emerged. Therefore, due to laws, affirmative action, and overall greater representation of women in positions of power, it may be said that we are moving closer to achieving gender equality.

However, while I agree that women have somewhat been accorded more respect, more opportunities and more power, as mentioned before, I think that these examples are just surface-level ones that may suggest the gender imbalance has been eliminated, when in actual fact the matter is much more complex. For example, while some women who hold positions in politics are praised, lauded and well respected, others may not receive the same treatment. An example of this is Hillary Clinton and how she was ravaged by the media during her first presidential campaign in 2008, being referred to as a 'witch' or 'witch-like' at least 50 times in the press. Women are still greatly looked down upon and disrespected even when they have made it to high levels of accomplishment, just because of their gender. We can also consider how affirmative action like setting quotas for gender representation may have good intentions, yet may lead to women getting overlooked at the same time. For example, women in boards that have mandated quotas may be dismissed as incompetent since they seemingly made it to leadership positions not due to their own merit, but due to their gender. This may cause others to lose respect for her and thus the influence and authority that comes with respect may disappear. Therefore, while I agree that significant progress has been made in the fight for gender equality, there are still many complexities that cannot be overlooked when we consider how to effectively empower both men and women.

Instead, I am of the belief that we are moving away from gender equality due to the fact that the complexities and difficulties both women and men face today are arguably even harder to get rid of and because the consequences are far more painful for men and women. Firstly, I believe that while explicit biases against women may be rarer today, implicit biases about gender still remain that are deeply ingrained and even more difficult to change. While social activism and laws put in place may suggest that society believes women and men to be equally competent and equally deserving of rights and freedom, deeper prejudices about the roles men and women should play do remain that limit their advancement in their career and life in general. One of the most prominent examples is in Germany, a country that has been led by a woman, Angela Merkel, for years. While the presence of a woman in the highest leadership position may suggest that Germany believes women to be as capable as men, studies have found that 41 per cent of people in

Germany are uncomfortable with the idea of a female leader. These suggest that people still hold implicit and uncovered biases toward women, where they still think women may not be the right fit to lead a country due to the sole reason of gender. If these biases exist in Germany, a developed, first-world country that has been led by a woman for years, one may wonder about the significant biases that may be present in other parts of the world where women are not as visible. The reason these implicit biases may exist may be due to social desirability bias, where people are hesitant to outwardly express opinions that are seen as socially or morally wrong, but may still inwardly believe and hold on to outdated notions of the role of a woman. What is more concerning is the consequence of these implicit biases. Women may be lulled into a false sense of security when they see other women making progress when, in fact, there are deeply-embedded biases in society that will seek to bring women down and deprive them of opportunities. These biases can impede a woman's career progression and may also confine her to certain spheres. For example, research shows that in politics, female ghettos have emerged such as education and family ministries, showing that women may be limited to only a certain amount of power and progression in accordance with what society thinks they are capable of handling. Arguably, these limitations are even more painful for women. As compared to the past, where gender equality may have been more black and white, in the sense that women either had rights or did not, today, a woman may feel even more demoralised when she is allowed to advance to a certain level, is able to see and is close to attaining the next level, but is prevented from doing so due to prejudice against her. This describes the glass ceiling phenomenon, where women are allowed to dream of better prospects and have the ability to advance but are just stopped from doing so. In a way, this may be even more degrading of women since they know they have the ability, yet due to their gender, they may be stripped of their dreams and hope. Because of this, I believe that women still contend with deep biases against them which makes the fight for gender equality even more difficult, and thus, we are moving further away from gender equality.

In addition, gender-related biases not only confine women but they also negatively influence men. In societies that are more patriarchal, where the men are supposed to lead the household and provide for their family while the women are expected to look after children, men are confined to a narrow definition of what male success constitutes. To many, it still seems like the role of the father is less important than that of the mother, which may deprive men of the ability to build deep bonds with their children and family due to societal expectations that necessitate that they focus on their job instead. For example, in court disputes over custody of children, it has been proven that the mother is often favoured over the father, suggesting that men are also stripped of respect in the domestic sphere. These biases and expectations of men are reinforced in the media, where men are often represented to be more concerned about their work rather than their family and are presented as aggressive and less emotional. Young males who grow up consuming such media then feel the pressure to conform to societal expectations of toughness and strength in terms of throwing themselves into work rather than focusing on being a present and loving father. Another way this affects men negatively is in the way they deal with emotions. As the age-old saying goes: "real men don't cry". Men often feel the expectation to suppress their emotions and not talk about their feelings since they are expected to be 'tough' and 'strong' and emotionless. This idea of toxic masculinity has heartbreaking consequences for men, where it is sometimes taboo for men to seek help for their mental health concerns, which can lead to high incidences of depression and other mental health problems. Unfortunately, research shows that suicide is the biggest killer of men aged between 20 and 30, suggesting that the expectations of men and the roles they are expected to play not only lead to them being confined to a small sphere of success, but can also lead to the loss of their lives. Clearly, narrow expectations of gender roles that are still present today affect men greatly as well, perhaps even more than in the past, pushing us further away from gender equality.

Lastly, while activism and feminism have empowered women and given them voices, there may be unintended consequences of feminism that push women even further back in their fight for equality. For example, prominent movements such as the #MeToo movement have brought many sexual perpetrators to justice and empowered women to speak up on injustice, yet unknowingly they may have created more problems for women in the workforce. As society sees women getting more power and control and fighting back, ironically, this may lead them to gain further dislike for the feminist movement, and some may even stop associating with women for fear that they will be negatively impacted and accused. For example, after the #MeToo movement, some men and employers expressed that they were more reluctant to hire women and also preferred not to have one-on-one meetings with them. While the #MeToo movement gave women power, the unintended consequence was that people became afraid rather than accepting of capable women, fearing that their power to speak up could cause them to be accused of harassment. This consequence causes an inequality of opportunities for women, since they are deprived of employment opportunities as well as the chance to be coached and mentored, and to work in collaboration with their male superiors, which ultimately impedes their progress in their careers. The feminist movement is also a topic of wide debate as society sees feminists as being too strong or outspoken, with some men referring to feminists in a derogatory way, using the word "Feminazis". This suggests that while through activism, women have gained more power in speaking up, it has also caused maybe more conflict between males and females, stripping women of other forms of opportunities and respect as well. These new problems that power brings requires women to learn how to navigate a new identity and try to survive in their careers while holding the respect of those around them, which is a Herculean task. Therefore, I believe that steps forward have been negated by steps backwards in the fight for opportunities for women and respect for them.

All in all, it is undeniable that change has been made, where women today have much more power and opportunities than in the past, but we consider how changing dynamics between men and women have created even more problems for women to contend with. We also consider that deeply ingrained biases against women and men in terms of their societal roles still persist, relegating them to a narrow definition of success and impeding their progress in achieving gender equality. Therefore, I believe we are moving away from achieving gender equality. However, I do question if gender equality can actually be achieved. While we can acknowledge that men and women may be equally competent, there are still fundamental differences between the two genders which I believe will always cause tension, conflict and power imbalance. After all, there may be some gender stereotypes that are beneficial to women and some that are not. Knowing this, it is extremely difficult to navigate the uncertainty of what gender equality really means. Does it mean that women get exactly the same as men, or should we allow for society to cater to the inherent differences between the genders? These questions are probably the root cause of why we are still taking steps backwards in gender equality, as it is increasingly difficult to qualify what exactly we aim to achieve. Nevertheless, I believe that discussion around this topic is necessary for continued progress and balance between genders.

Comments

Very, very strong response that consistently makes effort to discuss contemporary contexts (though not evenly – still, most is sound) and to offer weighed, insightful evaluation. Discussion of issues impacting both women and men also does you credit! This essay is a good example of how thoughtful illustration can be made without necessarily using "specific" examples. Excellent language use throughout, with maturity and conviction of expression. Ideas flow clearly and coherently. Introduction paragraph was somewhat shaky, but the rest of the essay is adeptly controlled, not least the rewarding conclusion.

Owen Chau Zhi Hui | 22S03J

Is there a place for social media beyond entertainment?

In a world where social media inundates almost every aspect of our lives, one does question its overarching functionalities and purpose for humanity. Many arguments could be drawn up for different roles that social media could play, such as being a tool for social change or helping to bring people closer together. Yet, the most common consensus is that social media's primary function and place is merely for entertainment; that is to say, beyond this role of helping to provide us with content that we find interesting, social media has no place in our society. I disagree with this opinion to a large extent, as I wholeheartedly believe this to be untrue. Social media, as aforementioned, can be used as a tool for change or to bring people together, and it would be unwise to know this and still assume that social media is purely for entertainment.

Opponents and critics of my stand may postulate otherwise, claiming that there are very little grounds with which to substantiate such arguments. Prima facie, that does seem true – social media was conceived and still survives on the basic criterion of being able to entertain. After all, hardly anyone would use predominant platforms like Instagram or TikTok if they did not offer some modicum of intriguing, fascinating content. This belief that social media is purely for entertainment is compounded by some of the drastic methods these social media companies resort to appease their users' insatiable appetites for mindless entertainment. YouTube, for example, has very specific and targeted algorithms that can effortlessly recommend videos from creators that fall within one's interests and worldviews, sometimes with unnerving accuracy and precision. Instagram and TikTok feature "infinite scrolling" as a programmed part of their platforms, ensuring viewers never run out of posts to be entertained with (this has become so worryingly effective that Instagram has started to roll out new pop-up notifications between posts begging users to take frequent breaks from scrolling). These developments do make it seem like, on the whole, both the social media platforms and ourselves as social media users retain an innate belief that social media is only good for one thing – entertainment. While this is definitely not wrong, it would be narrow-minded not to consider how social media is slowly but surely evolving to better suit other crucial roles in society as well. After all, every bundle of entertainment comes with other pretty neat functions that have created markedly unique and important roles for social media to play, namely its ability to connect people, and its effectiveness as a means for social change.

The first, primary place for social media besides entertainment is its intrinsic ability to bring people closer together. In the times before social media even existed, different societies were far-flung from each other, leading to poor communication and the isolationism of these societies taking place. Yet, the advent of social media has created a world in which someone hailing from a quaint Italian suburb could easily chat with someone residing in a bustling Brazilian city centre. Social media has given us an unprecedented, never-before-seen means of socialising and communicating, especially since it has such a large scope of reach, and boasts extremely quick methods to communicate. Instantaneous messaging or updates about one's life would have been nearly unthinkable in the past, but now, it is a social norm that everyone takes good advantage of. This, combined with social media's ubiquity around the globe, has resulted in a massive community of online users. Instagram, for example, has one billion monthly users. Facebook has almost thrice that amount, boasting 2.8 billion monthly users. Twitter is no slouch, either, weighing in at more than half a million monthly users. This creates opportunities for people from all walks of life to create virtual communal bonds, be it over shared interests or global issues. Reddit has thousands of niche communities allowing its users to befriend each other over their hobbies or favourite movies or music, such as the subreddits for different sports like r/FormulaOne, or subreddits for users to share their academic notes and teachings with each other, like Singapore's very own r/SGExams. Social media's ability to link people is not just for superficial topics, too. Online therapy, where users seek advice or rant to other users as a means to vent their frustrations, is becoming increasingly popular. After all, the anonymity afforded by throwaway accounts with no identification allows us to seek vast and diverse sources of comfort and advice, without fear of judgement or reprisal. Online dating is becoming increasingly common, too, with many happy couples having found their soulmates through social media platforms like Tinder. Overall, it is evident that social media can help to better generate inter- and intra-societal links, bringing people closer together under the shared umbrella of whatever platforms they choose to use. This is a crucial function that cannot be ignored, as we can only stand to benefit from becoming more cohesive and united as a global populace. As such, it is not true that social media has no place beyond entertainment, as it can also help to bring people closer together.

The second, more nascent role that social media can play is with regard to its effectiveness as a tool for change. As previously mentioned, social media's vast reach and hyper-connectivity mean that it can have serious potential as a form of leverage to enact socio-political change. Anyone and everyone can use a plethora of platforms to initiate action for change, especially if they have perceived injustices that they wish to correct. This is extremely prevalent in online coalitions like hashtag campaigns, where users demonstrate their willingness to stand together for common causes like #HeForShe, a movement encouraging men and boys to help involve themselves in ways to boost gender equality and women's rights, or the #icebucketchallenge, where users raised funds for patients with ALS. Such massive movements help to open people's eyes and widen their mindsets with regard to previously unseen or unheard-of injustices or social issues. A notorious cause célèbre was that of the television show *Alice in Arabia*. The show's creator, Brooke Eikmeier, who had previously served as a crypto linguist in the Arab language, created a show with Arab men as the characters. However, many online users were quick to point out that Eikmeier had included many controversial and harmful stereotypes of Arab men, painting them as abusive and oppressive people. After thousands of users campaigned for the show's removal due to its unfair representation of a minority group, ABC pulled the show from their network, showing how users can readily unite and take a stand to correct these injustices and prevent them from perpetuating harm to smaller groups of society. A more prominent example of social media being used to spark social change for justice is the #metoo movement, where victims of sexual abuse spoke up, courageously bringing their assaulters to task and igniting much-needed discussions on how to better prevent such atrocities from recurring in the future. In certain situations where more pressure is needed to be placed on large organisations or institutions for their wrongdoings, social media can even serve as the catalyst for genuine, real-life action to be taken. For example, the Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protestors and the #BlackLivesMatter demonstrators utilised Telegram and Twitter respectively to organise large-scale movements like protests or marches in the streets, in order to pressurise their governments into taking action against what they considered to be unfair and unjust social issues. These movements, born of the moral outrage and dissent of those online, managed to force previously seemingly untouchable institutions like governments to reconsider their plausibly anathema-inducing policies and decisions. The benefits of social media as a tool for change are not just limited to these large-scale movements, either. Social media is, by nature, very inclusive, as absolutely anybody is able to, in some way or another, access it and communicate with others. This creates a common ground where everyone's voices are equal, which may have previously been untenable for certain groups of people in society like the differently abled. Deaf people, for example, rely heavily on sign language to communicate in real life. However, the number of non-deaf people fluent in sign language is incredibly low. This leads to members of the deaf community not being able to discuss their hardships and needs with others in a convenient manner. With social media, everything changes. Using the medium of text, the previously invisible needs of such communities are able to be discussed and debated by everyone, allowing for destigmatisation and a greater acceptance by those in society of the differing needs of different people. Another example is Be My Eyes, a relatively new social media platform that allows the visually impaired to seek help in viewing certain objects through video calls with volunteers and to submit community posts about what living with such different ways of experiencing the world is like. This helps to educate and inform people in a more inclusive manner on such social issues, thus helping to shift social perspectives and attitudes, and creating a more cohesive community for all through social change. It is thus clear to see why social media can be such a powerful tool in enacting social change, and hence, we should definitely consider this as an additional role for social media outside of entertainment.

In conclusion, social media definitely plays an important role in bringing people closer together and helps to serve as a crucial tool for social change. Without social media, we would definitely not have achieved as much as we currently have, in terms of connecting different parts of different societies together or driving socio-political movements against unspeakable injustices. Knowing this, it is specious to claim that social media has no place in our society beyond its basic function of entertainment. While we have managed to take good advantage of social media thus far, I believe that there is still immeasurable potential for it to become so much more.

Comments

Good work! Comprehensive – your arguments were very well developed and fully explained meaning that the issues were evaluated in considerable depth. Examples were wide-ranging and apt. Keep it up!

Aloysius Wong Zhi Hong | 22S06J

Is there a place for social media beyond entertainment?

By 2030, more than 3.5 billion people across the world will have at least one social media account, as claimed by a study done by Facebook Analytics in 2020 – and that is just a raw underestimate. Social media has undoubtedly permeated its way throughout every nook and cranny in culture as we know it today and is more often than not synonymous with the advent of digital entertainment. Yet, is that truly all it is capable of? Many users, perhaps those not in touch with the advantages social media possesses, dismiss this digital landscape as a mere entertainment outlet, which I personally believe to be an outrageously ignorant perspective on the untapped potential social media has. In fact, the reaches of social media extend far beyond its rudimentary role to induce laughs or excitement but goes as far as to have tangible political, economic, and even ground-breaking effects on social culture in today's world. I am therefore inclined towards the notion that social media does have a solid role beyond its entertainment value.

Of course, the average uninformed millennial or teenager would usually disagree with me otherwise: that social media does best and only best at entertainment. Understandably, such a view is rooted in the myriad of flashy and sometimes hilarious trends that dominate social media today, a globally digital phenomenon that has countless users enamoured with participating in those trends. Take the recent waves of memes that have arisen out of popular platforms like Instagram or Facebook, with the act of doing ridiculous poses like 'planking' or even 'kneeling' in inappropriate situations taking the internet by storm. Other trends include celebrities who utilise social media to interact with their fans in a multitude of parasocial ways, be it online polls or even live streams. The endorphin-inducing effect social media has had on its users is similarly found most predominantly in the entertainment side of social media. Instagram in early 2020 found that most of its "screen time", or the amount of time spent on certain pages, consisted of around 2 billion man-hours spent scrolling through entertainment sites alone, be it shows, podcasts or even just comedic shorts, accounting for more than 90% of global screen time. With the global trend of social media users seemingly directed only towards satisfying their need for entertainment, it can be argued that there does not seem to be much room for other aspects to take centre stage. Is it not consequently safe to assume social media is ideal only for the sole purpose to put smiles on our faces?

At face value, the argument is relevant to a large proportion of its users, and convincingly so. However, it fails to consider that beyond the glamour and spotlights of the entertainment it churns out lie deep-seated political implications. For all the global connectivity social media professes, there is in actuality a wealth of information being transmitted that bears huge implications on our political landscape. Looking at the entertainment side of the matter, it may be a surprise to see politicians utilising their vast reach to galvanise support for their political outreach. In the 2016 US elections, Bernie

Sanders used TikTok as a source of crowdfunding, employing his deadpan sense of humour to appeal to the more digital-savvy members of social media, and great success, as evident from the three million dollars he procured in roughly three months. But perhaps more importantly, the political awareness he spread for his campaign similarly induced a wave of support for his political ideologies among the youth, enabling him to amass a sizable digital presence despite being overshadowed by the more dominant Republicans and Democrats. Fast forward to the recent 2020 US Elections: Joe Biden employed a similar tactic in using Instagram to sway support for his cause, garnering support from both his own supporters and previous voters still dismayed with the prior election win of Donald Trump, and managing to overturn the political edge the Republicans once occupied for the presidential seat. Social media as a vital tool in turning the tide of elections has undoubtedly seen tangible effects on political elections, in part due to the lack of gatekeeping in terms of communication between the masses and the powerful. To quote Mark Zuckerberg's commentary at Princeton University in 2017 on the role of social media, "[Social media] in the 21st century serves as an equaliser tool… democratising access to information by removing all barriers". Indeed, the partitions of power are blurred when it comes to communication between the masses and politicians, and such a novel phenomenon is bound to make social media a powerful asset in securing one's political mandate to rule, certainly far past the supposed entertainment value it is assumed to have.

Social media also serves as an economic hinterland for companies looking to expand their profits and consumer bases, which social media's qualities readily provide. Famed psychologist David Dunning once postulated that social media today runs on a "digital attention" economy, where businesses can market awareness and products to consumers through the use of advertisements and attention-grabbing snippets to generate profits. Unsurprisingly, in today's post-truth world, where the more emotionally appealing and pathos-driven messages are valued relatively greater than their objective counterparts, such an economic mindset thrives. A study conducted by Duke University in 2018 found that more reputable (or notable) news sources such as The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal are resorting to more sensationalist headlines on social media to attract more viewers, with more emotionally-charged diction being used to enhance audience relatability. Companies have similarly attempted various methods of attracting customers, with Forever 21 and Gucci using hypersexualisation to appeal to their minority male consumer bases. Depictions of women or even men in more revealing, borderline scandalous positions are shown to 'beckon' consumers to try out the products these companies are peddling. These examples are not without their results, with their current dominance in their respective fields, be it journalism or fashion, speaking volumes about the effectiveness such sensationalist content has on consumers' psyches. This is compounded by the algorithms that control users' social media feed based on their more intimate details and interests, working in tandem to draw consumers into consumerist habits, much like moths to a flame. Statistics from the US Tax Administration and the IRS found that in 2017 alone, social media accounted for an eye-popping 780 million dollars in revenue for companies in the US alone. It is hence enlightening to admit that social media's ability to line pockets is indicative of its role, one far past entertainment, especially in today's profit-driven age.

Moreover, in a global landscape embroiled in harrowing and ever-changing circumstances, social media is an omnipresent factor in disseminating information, particularly aiding the more marginalised groups among us. As stated earlier, the voice of the once-unheard individuals is made louder tenfold in the realm of the digital landscape, and often to raise awareness of the ideals and plights suppressed by unfortunate circumstances. A timeless example would be Malala Yousafzai's rise against the morally-reprehensible and misogynistic ideals of the Taliban against women. Following her attempted assassination in 2015, Malala's plight was featured on a widespread scale that not even she could have possibly imagined, with the tear-jerking image of her mutilated face and yet her determined eyes sparking righteous outrage against the cruel oppression of the Taliban. A documentary on her experiences by the BBC has amassed more than ten million views on social media websites, with women's rights organisations, countries and powerful female political figures echoing their support on social media, where her life's mission had resonated with the hearts of many. Years later, the emancipation of women is making leaps and bounds, with female literacy rates in Pakistan increasing from 47% in 2017 to 62% in 2021. While the initial outburst for equity has long since gone down, the fact is the presence of Malala's work has been immortalised with the continual posts and endorsement by various users. Another more recent example would be the ongoing Russian-Ukraine War, where, at the time of writing, Ukraine has seen roughly two weeks of an excruciating, morally unjust war that none of her people had asked for. And above all this, there is President Zelensky's strong social media presence on various platforms: calling out to NATO for assistance, criticising Vladimir Putin for Russia's lack of humanitarian efforts and, even more poignantly, calling on his Ukrainian people to stand together against all odds. The unifying power of social media in this example is what I personally am most emphatic about: to enable a leader to unify his own nation to stand together against all odds is a phenomenon I feel without question goes beyond its entertainment value. It is through social media that Zelensky's patriotism and charisma inspired millions of Ukrainians to bear arms against Russian forces, speak out against the totalitarian Russian regime, and even depict the untold sufferings that both sides are facing from the war. To shed light on something as visceral as war in today's relatively civilised age should mark a new perspective on social media as paramount to inciting social causes, far beyond what mere entertainment can ever offer.

Social media is here to stay, not just in entertainment, but in every aspect that shapes the society we live in today. Rather than succumb to the dopamine rush or instant gratification we commonly sift through social media for, perhaps it is better to pause our thumbs when we are scrolling down, and evaluate the bigger picture of what we see through the tiny lens of our devices. There is a literal and digital world on the other side of the screen, and it is up to us as digital natives, today and tomorrow, to use social media for our betterment.

Comments

Comprehensive, ample and thoughtful reading of question. You've expanded on the keyword "place" fully, taking it beyond conventional/shallow approach to question. Meticulous work invested throughout.

Qiu Yahan, Olivia | 22S06R

**The solution to global hunger is simply about providing more food.
How far do you agree?**

In our volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and complex world today, many global issues continue to plague mankind. Among them, society has shone light on the problem of global hunger for many years. Despite technology advancing by leaps and bounds, international organisations and foreign aid available to address this issue, global hunger still persists. This has certainly left many optimists and realists, who believe the solution to global hunger is simply about providing more food, scratching their heads, befuddled as to why food insecurity still exists. The very fact that nearly 33% of the 7 billion inhabitants on Earth still face food insecurity today is clear testament that the preceding view is an oversimplification and too narrow a view to hold water. We have to take into account the sustainability of foreign food aid that cultivates overreliance or donor countries affecting the efficacy of simply blindly providing more food, as well as the presence of inept or corrupt power-hungry politicians who perpetuate food insecurity and exacerbate starvation in pursuit of their own vested interests. For these reasons, I disagree that the solution to global hunger is simply about providing more food.

Detractors may still maintain that providing more food will solve global hunger, with the presence of effective technology and availability of international aid. Granted, there may be some element of truth in their firm beliefs. In the short run, a greater output and reserve of food to be distributed to those in poverty will alleviate their plight and pain. Technology has been lauded as the panacea to all global issues and global hunger is no exception. The development and use of genetic modification has indeed ameliorated hunger for millions of people around the world. By modifying crops to be resistant to pests and extreme weather conditions, the output of agricultural products has increased by 22% and farmers' profits have risen by 68%. Satellite farming utilising the global positioning system to water and harvest crops has reduced the cost of production, incentivising farmers to supply more output. This translates to more food that can reach an impoverished community and a greater spare capacity of food stocks that governments can buy to safeguard against droughts and other natural disasters that destroy crops and prevent a bountiful harvest, plunging their nation into widespread starvation again. Furthermore, in our globalised and increasingly interconnected world, international organisations have been set up to counter and address humanitarian crises such as global hunger. Notably, the Red Cross has been set up in almost every country, helping to facilitate international aid by directing food aid to wherever widespread starvation persists. In Zimbabwe, over 750,000 tonnes of food aid in the cereals have been sent by the Red Cross to feed the millions of Zimbabwean citizens. International aid has also been on the rise, with a record high of 161.2 billion spent on international aid in 2020. Governments of wealthier nations such as the US and China have been consistently sending food aid to war-torn areas rife with strife and stricken with food insecurity, such as Afghanistan, since the 1990s. Providing food to those who need it is indeed, in theory, an effective means of solving hunger in some areas in the very short run.

However, providing more food only treats the symptom and not the root cause of the complex, multifaceted problem that is global hunger. In fact, international organisations have been lambasted for their ineffectiveness in solving global hunger. Similarly, international aid, despite amounting to millions and billions every year, fails to solve global hunger, due to its unsustainable nature that breeds a culture of complacency and dependence on donor countries. By giving recipient countries millions in food aid and solving the issue of demand outstripping supply, countries will grow over-reliant on foreign food aid that arrives each year without fail. This leads to a decrease in demand for local food supply, dwindling the incentive for local producers to think of ways to maximise and increase home-grown supply of food, further leading to a cycle of overreliance that would leave recipient countries in a worse state than before, should the food aid be stopped suddenly. Afghanistan, which has been receiving US food aid, still depends on US even after decades of opportunities to be self-sufficient, as it sees no reason to expend exorbitant sums of government expenditure on cultivating self-reliance when doing so entails countless opportunity costs too heavy to disregard. Instead of giving a man a bucket of fish that will only sustain him for a short while and leaving him with an insatiable appetite for more, one should teach a man how to fish by giving him the necessary equipment and skills to do so. Rather than blindly throwing sacks of grain and wheat to the needy, donor countries should instead provide funds to invest in capital machinery and genetically modified crops that will instil self-reliance in these territories stricken with hunger. It takes two hands to clap: without recipient countries doing their best to alleviate their own citizens' plights, donor countries with their limited supply of food aid will never solve the problem of global hunger.

In terms of politics, as long as there continues to exist corrupt and incompetent leaders who wield starvation as a weapon and immoral tactics to entrench their draconian rule over the people and to further their vested interests, global hunger will never be solved, even with sufficient food being produced globally to feed all 7 billion humans. In totalitarian governments, political leaders often do not have their citizen’s best interests at heart, instead prioritising other nationalistic goals instead of ensuring their people’s wellbeing. A case in point would be North Korea, with one of the lowest GDP per capita of under $2000 and a third of its population malnourished and starving. Rather than focusing on ways to end its people’s suffering, its leader Kim Jong-un lavishly spent millions on nuclear weapons to brandish against its neighbours, in pursuit of nationalistic aims. He even went so far as to reject food aid from the US and other Western countries during the global pandemic in 2020 due to his paranoid suspicions and deep mistrust of the West, leaving his people to starve. Clearly, even with humanitarian aid and food offered to countries with persistent issues of hunger, rogue and belligerent leadership prevents global hunger from being solved. On the other side of the world, Zimbabwe’s late former

Prime Minister Robert Mugabe infamously used starvation as a tactic to force people to vote for him and to strengthen his mandate to rule, by withholding food aid from regions that were against his regime. International food aid also often does not reach the masses who desperately need the sustenance to survive, due to corrupt politicians who take the bulk of the aid for themselves. The UN has predicted that over 5% or $8 billion in international aid is lost to corruption every year. Even prestigious humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross mismanaged international aid during the Haiti earthquake that left millions with food insecurity, with over 50% of funds being magicked away, presumably to other corrupt organisations. The presence of international organisations and aid means nothing if the aid never reaches the populace, due to egotistical, bellicose leaders refusing aid or corrupt autocratic politicians abusing power to further entrench their mandate to rule, depriving their electorate of basic human needs and leaving them on the brink of death.

In conclusion, saying that the solution to a problem as complicated and widespread as global hunger is just to supply more food is far too simplistic and short-sighted. The issue of global hunger extends beyond the inaccessibility of food, to uncontrollable factors such as extreme weather conditions brought about by rapid climate change as well as global pandemic that drastically reduces global supply of food and countries' abilities to donate their already depleting supply to other countries in need, at the expense of their own citizens' food security. Even if food was available for wealthy and benevolent countries to offer as aid, it may not reach its intended destination at the doorsteps of the impoverished and malnourished, but in the hands of leaders in positions of power, who withhold stocks of food and deprive the people of basic needs to ensure their political longevity. Global hunger is a multifaceted problem that requires multifaceted solutions. Increasing supply through foreign aid has to be coupled with funds for research and development as well as capital investments to ensure self-sustainability and to possibly, one day solve the issue of global hunger.

Comments

Excellent response, fully and consistently answering the question, showing nuance of assessment, breadth of discussion, and depth of evaluation. Your nod towards other factors in the conclusion is very thoughtful, though more discussion of these in the main body would have strengthened the overall response. Nonetheless, this takes little away from what is a truly mature, confident response. Confidently expressed throughout, with conviction of voice and adept use of a variety of qualifiers and transitions. Excellent introduction and conclusion.

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Editorial Team