



ZENITH 2013

After taking a six month hiatus, ZENITH is back! In this bumper issue, look out for our important sections featuring a large collection of 15 students' essays and the ever-handly skills section, which features the use of illustrations in essays. Other staple sections to look out for include student book reviews, as well as what's just in in Library@Meridian. Also, with all the media attention recently about Edward Snowden and Wikileaks, find out all about whistleblowers in Zenith Abstracts. Lacking statistics in your essays? You will find very useful statistics compiled from the Economist's Daily Chart, covered in Zenith Read Up!

As the exams draw near for both the JC1s and JC2s, the Zenith team wishes all of you good luck!

All illustrations are courtesy of Daryl Cagle (<http://cagle.slate.msn.com/>)

You are most welcome to send feedback and suggestions in enhancing future issues of ZENITH.

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"I didn't feel answers were necessary.
All the questions seemed rhetorical."



...in ZENITH

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ZENITH Essay Selection

Editor's advice to students:

While you may find the examples and points in these essays useful in answering other questions, please be judicious in using such information in a manner that is relevant to the point of contention of the question you are answering.

Are the poor an inevitable feature of any society?

[GCE04Q2]

First-time visitors to the United States via San Francisco are often in for a big surprise. Landing in what is, quite literally, the richest city in the richest state of the richest country in the world, they usually expect to see the glitz and glamour of one of capitalism's crown jewels. Instead, heading into downtown San Francisco, they are greeted by a massive homeless population that spares no effort in begging for the smallest of change. Even in many of the most developed regions in today's world, poverty is part and parcel of these societies. This thus raises the question: are the poor indeed an inevitable part of any society? I believe that while absolute poverty might one day be completely eradicated, poverty will always exist in a relative form due to scarce resources, competition for capital, and the fact that some people are less skilled than others.

While I will go on to prove that poverty is, indeed, an inevitable part of any society, I must first concede that it is foreseeable that absolute, rather than relative poverty could one day be completely eradicated. On one hand, what many in developed countries perceive as 'poverty' is often relative poverty, which refers to an individual possessing a small amount of capital relative to the per capita income of his or her society. Absolute poverty, on the other hand, refers to a situation in which a person's income falls below a certain threshold required for basic survival. The UN defines it as a situation in which a person earns less than US\$1.25 a

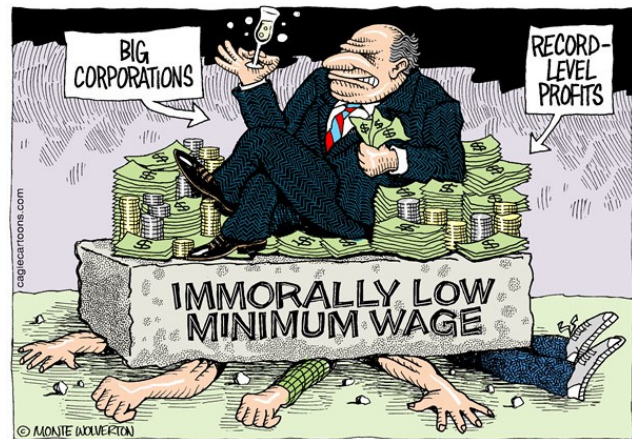
day. Over the past decades, most efforts to eradicate poverty have focused on its absolute form, such as in the UN's Millennium Development Goals which dedicates the first of its eight primary aims to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. While abolishing even absolute poverty is an uphill battle, it could conceivably occur within a few decades. Given the fact that, in the past ten years alone, India has lifted more than 200 million people out of absolute poverty, there is no reason that given sufficient time and effort, the rest of the world will not be able to do the same. However, while poverty may not be an inevitable part of society as far as absolute poverty is concerned, I will go on to show in the following paragraphs how relative poverty is likely to always be a part of any society.

The first and most basic reason why the poor are indeed an unavoidable part of any society is the fact that resources in our world are scarce. In economics, this is known as the Central Economic Problem in which the world has limited resources to satisfy people's unlimited wants. As such, it follows that not everyone will be able to satisfy their desires, causing some to be better off than others. This issue is exacerbated by the rapidly depleting resources of today's world, combined with the exponential rise in the world's population. For instance, current estimates show that the world's supply of fossil fuels is expected to run out by around 2042, and that approximately half of the world's rainforests will be lost around 2020, which will result in a significantly lower amount of resources for distribution. Combined with the fact that the world's population has more than doubled in the past 50 years, and that this growth rate shows no signs of relenting, there will be far fewer resources available per capita. This unsurprisingly leads to some having insufficient resources as compared to others, which in turn is referred to as "poverty". Hence, the poor will likely always be a feature of any society.

Secondly, relative poverty is a natural outcome of competition and free markets, and hence will always remain a part of our social fabric. In a laissez-faire capitalist

system, such as that used by the United States, it is natural for employers to try to increase their wealth, providing them an incentive to lower employees' wages that results in an increasing economic inequality: while the rich becomes richer, the poor simultaneously becomes poorer. As a result, the vast majority of society's capital, technology and infrastructure being controlled by a small elite, who then turn into the "rich", while the lowly-paid blue collar workers who serve them are the "poor". This holds true on an international level as well – workers from developing nations are often exploited to meet the desires of those in developed ones. The Pareto Principle aptly illustrates this phenomenon, with the hypothesis that 80% of the world's wealth is owned by 20% of the population. It holds true in reality as well – workers from less developed economies such as India and China are often tasked with menial jobs such as answering consumer queries in call centres, tediously assembling products in factories, or in the case of certain nations in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Sierra Leone and Angola, mining for diamond ore that is then exported to developed nations as a status symbol for the rich. Even in developed nations such as the US, relative poverty exists as illustrated in the aforementioned homeless populations in San Francisco, and the 2011 Occupy protests against the richest 1% of the population. Hence, due to the competition-oriented nature of our world, the poor will inevitably remain a part of any society.

Another reason why poverty will likely remain part of our society is the innate differences in skills possessed by individuals. Almost every person born has varying degrees of natural ability in different fields and differing levels of motivation to work hard. This will result in some people being able to perform certain tasks better than other people. Those who are lucky enough to possess talent in a field that society rewards well, such as law, medicine, or programming are bound to earn more than those with a knack for jobs such as construction. A simple way to illustrate this is through sport. Athletes such as Usain Bolt, blessed with world-record breaking talent, earn millions with less work than it takes for



some to earn pennies. Now, imagine if Usain Bolt did not possess this talent and was an average Jamaican, he would be earning just over \$9000 a year if per capita income is anything to go by. This, of course, is an extreme example, however, it is also clearly visible in our daily lives, where talented lawyers in Singapore rake in, on average, a salary in excess of \$200 000 annually while cleaners struggle to scrape by with barely a twentieth of that amount. Therefore, due to innate differences in ability, poverty will likely remain an inevitable feature of any society.

Those on the political left may argue that government policies that encourage equality in the form of welfare spending, in contrast to laissez-faire capitalism, could potentially prove to be an equaliser that eliminates poverty once and for all. These optimists claim that if common societal resources such as healthcare were easily and freely available to all, variances in standard of living and hence poverty, could be abolished. They may cite the examples of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Switzerland, all of which have among the highest Human Development Indexes and lowest Gini coefficients worldwide, ostensibly due to their welfare systems. However, they ignore the fact that such a system requires both extremely careful policy management that few countries can muster, and significant prerequisite resources. While taxing the rich more and redistributing wealth may seem attractive on paper, it reduces a significant motivator of work in the form of income that could result in economic stagnation which simply causes everyone to be equally poor. This is what happened

in the Communist Bloc and the USSR through the 1970s and 80s, resulting in their eventual collapse in 1989-91. Overspending is also a serious problem with such a system, as the debt-mired citizens of Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain would no doubt attest to. The few success stories arguably owe much of their welfare to resource endowment, such as Norway, whose economy has historically been based upon North Sea oil. As such, while left-wing politicians may paint a picture of complete egalitarianism, in the real world, poverty will likely remain a part of society.

Will we one day eliminate complete destitution? Perhaps. Yet, will the classless utopia envisaged by Karl Marx in the Communist Manifesto ever emerge in reality? Highly unlikely. Hence, for as long as we can foresee, poverty is likely to remain part of our society in one form or another. That said, striving to eliminate it altogether is indeed an admirable goal, and its harsh reality should not stop us from aspiring for it. For as a wise man once said, "Aim for the stars, and you may reach the sky."

Suresh Viswanath12S403

Review

This is a well-written and well-articulated essay which balances well between showcasing the student's extensive knowledge of nations and their economies, as well as his genuine insights on such a complex and multifaceted issue as global poverty. Well done!

Discuss the importance of religion in society today.

[GCE04Q11]

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...” so begins Genesis, the first book of the Bible giving its first words to all in Christendom. Today, however, the claims it makes and the information it shares have been widely contested and largely disproved. It seems to represent the entire situation of religion in modern society - the cornerstones are

being challenged and its foundations shaken. The question of its importance, then, is a relevant one. I firmly believe that in these present times, the structure of religion has largely lost its importance and only a wisp of its former glory remains. I will elaborate on this by tracing the decline of religion in history through to modern times and examining some reasons for it.

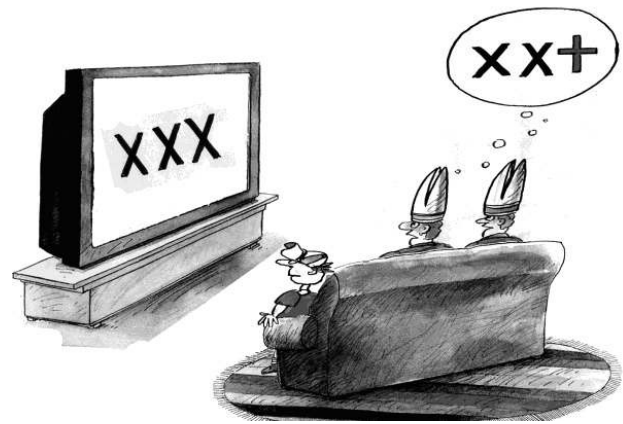
Religion's primary importance, and its reason for conception, has been to explain the natural world around us. However, in today's society it has been outstripped by scientific thought for this purpose. The spread of education and development of media like the Internet have supplanted the mysticism and finality of religion and replaced it with the scientific method. A comparison across time can illustrate this. When Galileo proposed his Bible-contradicting solar-centric model of the universe, he faced dire consequences in the form of imprisonment and death. But this was an era where religion ruled supreme. Compare this to the recent discovery of the Higgs-Boson, also known as the God particle, which was hailed as a celebrated victory. The particle which, in the words of eminent scientists, "left no more need for the God hypothesis", did not even cause a stir, much less an opposition, in religious circles. The pre-eminence of science in the field of inquiry into the universe that was once synonymous with religion is no longer in doubt. The tug of war that lasted centuries has been lost by religion, and along with it, religion has lost its primary role.

Religion was once important in forging a



cultural identity in a community. This used to establish the feeling of brotherhood and one-ness in its followers that was dire for survival. Religious customs that took into account the local systems and environment, indeed, bonded the people as one. Today, such an identity is no longer possible for two main reasons: the rise of nationalism and the migration of people, and the resultant transference of cultural ideas. Nationalism, which was first popularized during the French Revolution, ensures that today's society finds common roots in secular grounds and therefore puts their 'country first'. This is seen today in events like the Olympic Games where nations, not religions, are represented by followers of different faiths. Secondly, migration across the centuries and the establishment of nations meant that a nation could comprise of people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. As nations sought to consolidate and build national identity in a climate of multi-ethnicity, the use of religion to build a sense of one-ness had to be toned down so as to find a common thread, rather than to emphasise differences between various ethnic groups within a nation. This, of course, has resulted in the loss of importance of religion.

A third factor for the diminishing importance of religion as an institution is the practical one of power and political clout. Religious leaders once had a great say in matters of ruling - whether it was the archbishops in European courts or the Brahmins in Hindu ones. Powerful entities on their own, religious institutions also established separate taxes like the *tithe* in pre-revolutionary France. Therefore, it used to inspire awe in the common man that made it a noble calling. Needless to say, that is no longer the case. Today's society values democracy and universal franchise that shifts the power of ruling to the people. Separation of religion and state, now considered essential for any sound democracy, has nullified the influence and importance of religion in people's lives. This has emerged in practical numbers. The membership of the American Catholic Church has fallen by over fifty percent in the last two decades. Clearly, religion no longer holds sway in societies. This alienation from people's day-to-day lives



has reduced the importance of religion in today's society.

Critics may argue that the main importance of religion actually goes into the arena of morality. After all, religion teaches us some age-old morals about 'good' and 'evil' that remain important in today's society and on which the modern laws are based upon. I beg to differ. Religion, in fact, has also lost this moral suasion over people in favour of modern law which significantly deviates from religious codes of conduct. Two recent examples show this as well as indicate the preference of societies and governments. The legalization of same-sex marriage in twelve states of Christian majority USA speaks for itself. The most recent decision in Washington established a moral code that directly contradicted their religious verdicts. Secondly, in Hindu-majority India, the practice of honour killings regarding inter-caste marriages – completely in-line with Hindu teachings – has caused severe backlash from the members of the community who have taken practical actions like the establishment of non-government organisations that protect such couples. Today's society is relying on a different set of morals that is constantly evolving and developing. They may sometimes coincide with religion, but by no means is dependent on it. The argument for religion's importance in guiding morals has also become a thing of the past.

It may also be said that what I have argued represents only the views of those living in certain liberal parts of the world while many other areas are still interwoven with religion. Therefore, some might



believe that the importance of religion in modern society is still significant. One has to only look at the decades-old rule of the Supreme Leaders in Iran to understand this significance. Here, I do concede that different areas are moving at different paces but maintain that the world overall has seen a distinct increase in secularism. Even looking at the least supportive part of the world, we see that there are numerous cases where people are drifting away from religion. Egypt has always been a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood in political prowess yet the post-revolution constitution that President Mohammad Mursi's government signed into law left a bitter aftertaste because of its Islamist flavour. Through the controversial constitution, Islamic clerics would be able to intervene in the law-making process, showing that the Brotherhood was effectively seeking to force the religious teachings on the citizens against their will. As a result, in December 2012, many Egyptians protested by abstaining from the national referendum held on the constitution, with voter turnout at thirty-two percent. Subsequently, on the first anniversary of the Islamist president's inauguration, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets in protests against the Muslim Brotherhood's rule. Another notable example concerns Taliban rule, we see that it was carried out with military might rather than religious persuasion. Yet it was met with unprecedented opposition from within. The example of Malala Yousafzai – a young activist for the freedom of access to education for females in Taleban-controlled Swat Valley, just shows how hands that were assigned to hearth and home are now raised in protest. The decline of Taliban's power was welcomed by the people. These examples prove that even in areas where religion ruled till recently, people have now chosen to move towards secularism. The importance of religion has diminished even in places where it seemed to be the strongest.

The gap between religion and today's society is ever widening. Its decline from many areas of life makes it more of a peripheral entity rather than the sacrosanct sect it once was. Today's

societies, for various reasons, have placed their individuality and liberal thinking above the importance of religion. Religion's light is growing dim and only some may claim, or be perceived as, being directly affected by religion. They, too, bask in an afterglow that is ephemeral.

Navya Sinha 12S103

Review

The impressive breadth of examples in the essay is evidence of a well-read student. While the writer has taken a more controversial stance, the essay has dealt well with how times have changed with respect to the importance of religion. Strong reasons coupled with good observations of global developments combine to provide convincing arguments for the writer's stand.

Can small countries have a significant voice in world affairs? [GCE04Q7]

“Size does not matter” is a saying that underpins the belief that size is of little consequence.

Interestingly, this opinion seems particularly true when we consider global politics. Indeed, in the history of mankind, there are many instances where small countries actually have had a significant voice in world affairs, be it in trade, defence or even religion. This might be rather counter-intuitive, as it is often easier to imagine small nations being ignored and their opinions largely dismissed in the face of the concerns of the larger countries. Yet, the reality is that many small countries do indeed have a significant influence in world affairs.

Firstly, the size of a country may have little bearing on the resources available to it. Such resources endow the nation with influence when it comes to commodity prices and international trade. As small as some countries may be, they may have an abundance of certain important resources needed by other countries. In some cases,

the small country might even possess enough of those resources to control and manipulate the price of the commodity. Changes in the price of the resource could have immense influence on trading price and even impact larger countries' economies. This was evident in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s. One of the reasons Iraq invaded Kuwait was the latter's overproduction of oil, which drove oil prices down and thus impacted the much larger state's economy, since it relied heavily on selling oil to generate revenue for the country. Although Iraq was almost twenty-five times the size of Kuwait, it only had less than 150 billion barrels in proved oil reserves, as compared to Kuwait's 100 billion. The daily oil production of each nation is also similar in spite of the vast difference in size. This shows that a small country, if in possession of important and relatively rare natural resources, can indeed have a substantial influence in international trade, commodity prices and supply.

Some people might claim that only small countries with natural resources are the exceptions, and that all the other small countries have little say and influence on world affairs. They argue that without a rich supply of natural resources to gain position and clout in this materialistic and pragmatic world, small countries do not have much else to offer. While I admit that many larger countries do indeed ignore smaller countries that are not resource-rich, the critics have overlooked countries such as Singapore, which have been able to influence world's affairs in spite of its small size. Singapore, known for its long-standing able administration, was given a rotational seat in the United Nations Security Council from 2001-2002. Being a member of the Security Council, Singapore has had a say in various global issues, including foreign intervention by the United Nations peacekeeping forces. A study by Foreign Policy magazine, consulting firm A.T Kearney and the Chicago Council, revealed that Singapore, though small, is one of the top ten global cities in the world in terms of how much influence it has beyond its own borders. In contrast, large countries without such capable and stable leadership, for example Thailand and Indonesia, may have rather weak voices

and relatively little influence over global affairs. This thus shows that it is effective leadership rather than size of country that determines the amount of influence one has.

There are also small countries who have tremendous influence in religion and thus hold sway over much larger countries. This is especially evident in the way the Vatican City has immense influence as a result of it being the residence of the Pope. Vatican City is the smallest country in the world, located in Italy within the city of Rome. Despite of Vatican City's very small land area, this country has massive influence among all the Roman Catholics, since the Pope's teachings are widely respected and adhered to across the world. The level of respect and deference enjoyed by the tiny country is also evident in President Obama's admission that globally, the Vatican is very influential, being second only to the United States in the number of countries with whom it enjoys diplomatic relations, and also the presence of its followers all over the world, thus allowing the tiny country to stay well-informed about developments all over the planet. Hence, it is clear that small countries can indeed have a significant say in world affairs, especially when the country is widely respected and has good relationships with many countries over the world.

Furthermore, in our highly globalised world today, there are numerous international or regional organisations formed, that regularly hold summits to discuss international affairs. Through these platforms, like the Association of Southeast



Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union or even United Nations, countries, big or small, are able to voice their opinions and concerns in matters which affect the world. With fewer participants at these organizations, as compared to global summits, the smaller countries have a greater part to play and thus more influence. At the end of the day, the organization would then likely table the policies and suggestions to the global community for discussion. This is perhaps most clearly seen in ASEAN's case. Its voice is often heard as a bloc, though the voices of the member countries are rarely heard. However, when agreements are made between countries, all of them, regardless of size, would have to abide by the agreement. Hence, it can be seen that through affiliations and ties, many small countries are able to have their voice heard when it comes to world affairs, albeit indirectly.

Military might and the possession of nuclear capabilities are also factors that allow small countries to have much global influence. Even if the country is small, it may have a tremendously strong military or even possess nuclear technology. One such country is Israel, which is considered a small country compared with most countries around the world, or even when compared to most states in the United States. However, Israel not only possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons and the ability of long-range deployment, but also the reputation of having an army even stronger than some of the larger countries around the world. Such a fearsome image gives Israel a lot of say when it comes to many international matters, particularly

those concerning their own national interests. Thus, it is evident that small countries can have a significant voice in the world's affairs, if they possess military or nuclear might.

Contrary to popular belief and perception, it does not mean that countries with a larger land area always have a significant say in world affairs. There are some countries such as Kazakhstan, Argentina and Mali in South Africa, who have hardly any say in world affairs even though they have a large land mass. Hence, it is important to note that it is not only countries with a small land mass do not have a significant say in the world affairs. Countries with bigger land mass may not necessarily have a significant say in the world affairs as well. From this, we can see that it is mainly due to other factors and not just the size of the country which determines if the country is able to have a say in the world affairs.

In conclusion, the size of the country does not always directly correlate with its global influence and that small countries can indeed have a significant voice in world affairs. Although it is often the size of the country that is usually associated with its influence on world affairs, it is really the other factors that size usually underpins, for instance, one's military capabilities, economic strength, natural resources and such. Hence, it is important not to dismiss a country based on its size, for ultimately, it is what the country has and does that determines its voice on the international stage.

Brandon Tan Chee Hian 13S111



Review

This is a coherent essay with clear arguments presented and is substantiated with a good breadth of illustrations.



Consider the view that the study of mathematics is intellectually satisfying, but of little practical use.

[GCE05Q10]

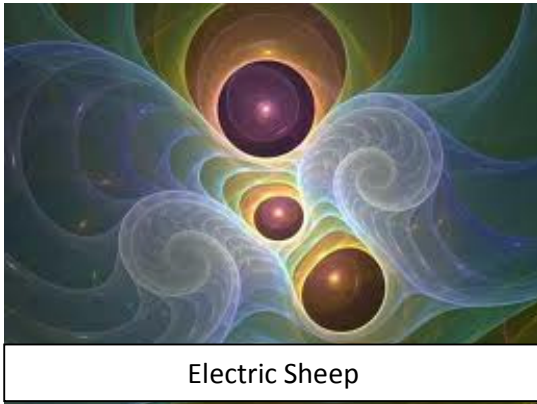
A compulsory subject that is taught in schools from kindergarten to university, mathematics has been put in place by education systems around the world for both practical and aesthetic reasons. While it may seem, on the surface, that mathematics is only for a select group of enthusiasts who derive from it great intellectual gratification, there are however many practical uses that underlie the pursuit of this subject.

To begin with, it is undeniable that the study of mathematics is intellectually sustaining due to its stimulating effects on the brain. The nature of mathematics is based on logic, thus solving mathematical problems would require the person to exercise their brain to seek out patterns of information given, connecting and linking them together and finding the unknown or proving a conjecture. As such, the process of solving mathematical problems is mentally challenging and gives the solvers a great sense of accomplishment when they manage to derive the answers. Furthermore, unravelling mathematical mysteries or conundrums in mathematics allows learners to attain greater knowledge and ideas, which adds on to the thrill of discovery. When Hiero of Syracuse suspected that his goldsmith – whom he believed had added silver to his crown of pure gold – had cheated him, he could not prove his allegations. In the famous story of the Greek polymath, Archimedes, sitting in his bath and reaching an epiphany about how the volume of irregular objects can be determined by how much water these objects displace, thereby verifying the metal purity of an object, his insight was indeed used to prove Hiero's assertions against the integrity of his goldsmith. It was said that Archimedes was so invigorated by his new discovery that he shouted "Eureka! (I have discovered it!)", and ran through the streets of Syracuse naked.

From then on, many other mathematical breakthroughs are referred to as the Eureka effect or the sudden insight into a problem that was previously incomprehensible, and thus strongly suggests how the study of mathematics can be truly intellectually satisfying.

At the same time, due to the nature of mathematics that is based on logic and problem solving, mathematics is not only intellectually intriguing but also practical and relevant to everyone. On a very basic level, mathematics is useful in its ability to help us add, subtract, multiply and divide, especially in our daily applications where we need to estimate the time, distance, or space, to measure the quantity of things, and even to count and bargain. As people go out and buy necessities every day, it is essential for them to be able to calculate the amount of money they are going to spend, thus managing their budget effectively and astutely. In planning the schedule for certain activities, there is also a need to estimate the amount of time that should be spent on a particular task. For instance, high-speed trains such as the *Shinkansen* in Japan and the TGV in France are well-known throughout the world for their ability to arrive on the dot of their estimated arrival time. In fact, for the *Shinkansen*, even for delays caused by uncontrollable causes such as natural disasters, it still managed a delay of only 36 seconds. Certainly, it is mathematics that allows the train operators to approximate delays and arrival and departure times with such high accuracy. Especially in today's society where efficiency and productivity are much more emphasised, commuters are able to organise their schedules such that little precious time is wasted. Therefore, the important role of mathematics in daily life should not be underestimated.

Furthermore, the study of mathematics has greatly contributed to the arts such as that of architecture, design and aesthetics. To create visually fascinating screensavers such as the Electric Sheep – which mystifies and amazes the human eye because it appears the same no matter the scale or size – a mathematical computation called the Fractal flame algorithm is used to produce these aesthetically pleasing



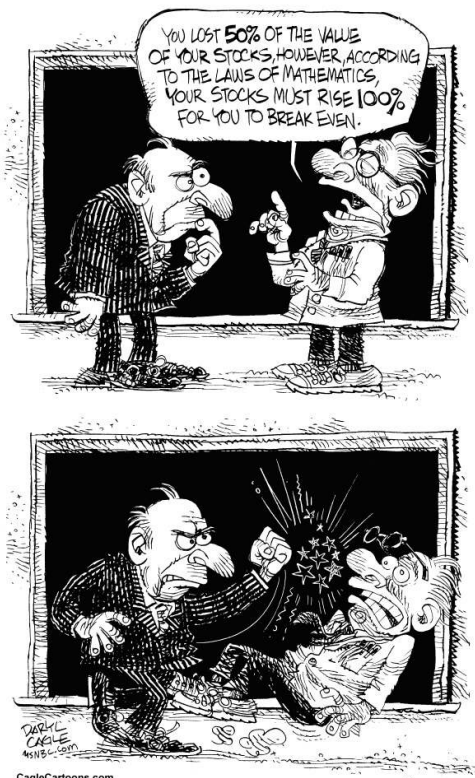
images. Another mathematical formula, the Fibonacci sequence or more commonly known as the Golden Ratio, has also proven to be extremely useful in creating the spectacular structures we see still standing today – in fact, a number of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World such as the Great Pyramids in Egypt are based on dimensions calculated in the Golden Ratio. Other great structures include the Parthenon temple in Greece, the Taj Mahal in India and Notre Dame in Paris. Indeed, during the Italian Renaissance in the 16th century, it became known as the “Divine Proportion” by Leonardo da Vinci and his contemporaries simply because it could be found everywhere in nature, whether in flower petals or hurricanes, and even the most beautiful of human faces such as Elizabeth Taylor and Johnny Depp. Even today, it is used in modern technological and building designs such as Apple’s iPhone and iPad, and Canada’s National (CN) Tower in Toronto respectively. With such important uses in our world today, how can one say that the study of mathematics has no practical uses?

To add on, mathematics is important for the progress of the economy as the foundation for certain financial instruments such as banking, trading, accounting and collecting statistical data are required in all types of industries, whether in manufacturing or service sectors, and are crucial for further economic development. Undeniably, all companies and organisations need a certain group of people to manage the finances of the organisation, which include assessing the total cost of production, total revenue and

depression cost, amongst other things. As such, the jobs of bankers, statisticians and accountants appear more complicated than one may think as their tasks do not only involve basic calculations, but also more sophisticated algorithms and computations. Moreover, it is more difficult to be able to match the correct data with the correct formula, and this is why statisticians and accountants are urgently needed to help companies manage their budgets wisely especially during financial crises. Thus, the study of mathematics is irrefutably practical and inevitable.

However, detractors of my argument are likely to point out that only certain aspects of mathematics studies are applicable to the masses in general. The high levels of mathematical studies such as advanced calculus and overly complex logarithms may seem rather impractical. They only serve to satisfy the hunger of knowledge of scientists rather than provide some practical use for the laymen. I would have to concede that this argument is true to some extent, as the much high-level mathematical knowledge (such as that needed in astrophysics) can only be comprehended by a small group of highly intellectual people. Thus, in general, people do not deem the study of profound mathematical knowledge as necessary. However, one should not forget that this high-level knowledge is only a small part of the study of mathematics as a whole. To hastily conclude the study of mathematics is intellectually satisfying, but impractical is indeed unfair. Furthermore, this high-level knowledge of mathematics may appear impractical today, but not in the future, when humans have developed more advanced technologies and evolved to become more intellectual beings – who knows whether this knowledge may be applied to more practical uses?

Moreover, it is important to note that mathematics standards are also increasing among the masses as higher-level mathematics is becoming more relevant to our modern lives. In other words, more and more people are pursuing high levels of mathematical studies. This can be easily observed in schools where a great deal of



sophisticated knowledge has been added to the mathematical syllabus with each level of schooling. For example, the secondary two students in Singapore have now started to study matrices, while previously it was part of the secondary four mathematics syllabus. This shift is due to the fact that our society is progressing at a fast pace, and there has emerged more sophisticated problems that require higher level of mathematics to solve. One example is the stock market. More often than not, newcomers to stock trading experience great losses, even leading to bankruptcy, due to a lack of experience and knowledge of the market. Therefore, the study of more sophisticated mathematical knowledge such as binomial distribution or Brownian exponential distribution for which the patterns of stocks are found to be based on, is becoming more pertinent and practical. Given the current complexity of finance today, simple and basic mathematics is not sufficient. Therefore, even some of the more difficult and complex mathematical knowledge is necessary to manage one's money. Hence, the study of mathematics is indeed practical, even at higher levels.

Ultimately, I still strongly believe that mathematics plays a significant role in our lives due to its involvement in many of today's applications such as the basic calculation of money and time, computation in statistics and accountancy, construction and financial modelling. Also, currently, many mathematicians and scientists are trying to transform the high-level knowledge of mathematics into more practical uses, though they have yet to succeed. All in all, it is much more reasonable to argue that the study of mathematics is both intellectually satisfying and practical.

Review

The essay shows off the writer's impressive wealth of knowledge regarding Mathematics. Written with excellent examples, the arguments are lucidly and convincingly argued.

“National boundaries make little geographical or economic sense nowadays.” Discuss.

(GCE06Q4)

It is not uncommon to find theories and proposals of a single-country-world propagated around us in this time and age. In fact, the thought of eliminating national boundaries and uniting the entire world as a single country dates back decades and even centuries, with different variations of it ranging from Marxist ideals of stateless communism in the mid-to-late 19th century to the concept of a global Muslim caliphate since the sixth century. Though this ideal may see some merit, for example, the absence of the need for countries to compete for territory and a homogenized society, it is important to recognize several limitations of this ideal which hamper it from actualisation, namely, the unsustainability of a single umbrella government's rule over the planet, the difficulty in resource allocation to different parts of the world and the disparity in the levels of development in

different regions. Hence, in the light of all these, national boundaries do still make perfect sense in today's world.

First of all, national boundaries make geographical sense as it is impossible for a single governing body to oversee, let alone control and regulate the lives of the entire world population in the long run, even if it is supported and assisted by several sub-organisations to govern different regions. The unsustainable nature of this rule arises from the inevitable conflict of interests between groups of people. When unhappiness regarding certain existing policies starts to extend and intensify, this in turn serves as the propelling force for people to revolt against the ruling body and it is virtually impossible for agreements and compromises to be made in all jurisdictions. This is exemplified by the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In order to revive the stagnant Soviet economy in 1985, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev tried to increase political liberalisation in the communist one-party state, and promptly faced nationalist movements and ethnic disputes within the diverse republics of the Soviet Union. This led to several revolutions which ended in the dissolution of the Soviet Union to form the Commonwealth of Independent states, the first being in Poland in 1988 and the most significant being the foiled Soviet coup d'état attempt to overthrow Gorbachev's government in 1991. This demonstrates that it is difficult even to manage a region for a long period of time, as the profound level of standardisation of laws and regulations in a region would disallow quick adaptation of the region to changes in world circumstances such as the world economy. Information regarding the changes on the ground would take a long time to reach the politburo, resulting in the inevitable delays in response to these changes which could be vital to the region's survival. Burdened by bureaucracies, global governance will be unsustainable; hence it makes geographical sense for national boundaries to exist to allow countries to be better managed.

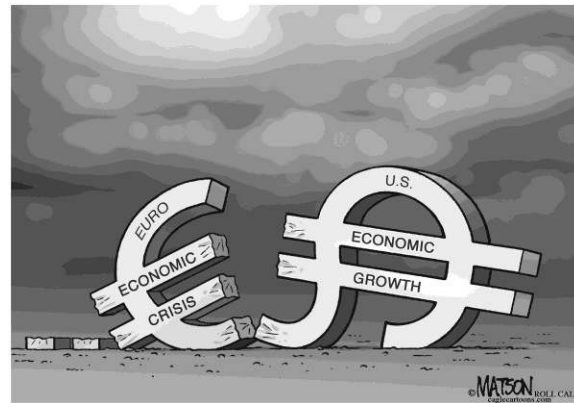
Idealists may suggest that with increasing ease of getting from one part of the world to another nowadays, be it through the proliferation of flight routes and sea routes worldwide or a generally more open and relaxed immigration policy in many countries, the world population is becoming increasingly homogenised, causing national boundaries to lose their geographical significance. However, this view fails to consider that people are bound to organise themselves with those of similar culture the same way birds of a feather flock together. Since the Eastern part of the world is still largely conservative, it is difficult for Western culture to be completely accepted and later lead to cultural homogenisation. The continued existence of ethnic enclaves in cities which have large numbers of migrants is testament to this. Migrants tend to cluster in close geographic spaces where they can easily tap on migrant networks. For example, in every city where the Chinese diaspora have made their home, there exists a Chinatown. Today as migration picks up pace, major cities throughout the world have other similar enclaves: Little Italy, Koreatown or Little Seoul, Little Manila or the Barrio – the Spanish version for Hispanic-American migrants. Hence, even if national boundaries are removed and people are free to move whenever and wherever they want, they are also more likely to congregate with those of similar cultures based on familiarity, forming unintentional and implicit "borders" between these large groups of people which may parallel different populations of people from different countries. The larger



implication is that people do still feel a sense of distinction from people of other groups, something which cannot so easily be removed through removing national boundaries. Thus, it still makes geographical sense for national boundaries to exist in this aspect.

Besides culture and politics, there are also economic justifications for the existence of national boundaries. Firstly, an often-banded optimistic claim is that the absence of international boundaries removes the need for countries to compete for territory. Hence resources that were formerly allocated to fuel the conflict for territory can be used for the development of the country. However, then comes the question of how the world's resources should be allocated. Who decides this allocation? Most probably those with the largest economic power, the richest, most developed countries. It would be naïve to assume that these countries will give their resources to much lesser developed countries in the interest of first and foremost sustaining their own development. Especially in this day and age when Earth's resources are becoming increasingly scarce, it would be natural to assume that those with power will channel most of the resources to themselves for their own survival at the expense of the potential development of less developed regions of the world. In the long run, the rich-poor divide will be more evident and even be amplified by the elimination of national boundaries. Even with national boundaries in the present situation, Mankind sees a large disparity in the levels of development between the most developed countries and regions such as the United States and Western Europe, and the least developed third-world regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. What will the situation become when national boundaries are removed? Hence, it makes economic sense for national boundaries to exist because of the difficulty in deciding an equitable allocation of resources.

Secondly, another possible claim is that the erasure of national boundaries would seem a wise economic move since it allows for nations to trade with ease and without barriers, reaping mutual benefits



for all through comparative advantages gained. One can point to the escalation of international trade in the past century and corresponding explosion of global wealth to see that lessening national boundaries reaps vast economic benefits. With this in mind, trade blocs have formed in the forms of the Eurozone and even the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, the interconnectivity of world economies is a double edged sword. Like how the flapping of a butterfly's wings in one country may cause a hurricane in another, a small economic problem in a small country, such as a financial default, can plunge the entire world into a deep economic depression. Countries with large trade sectors like Singapore and Taiwan, heavily dependent on export revenue and imports, will certainly bear the brunt of adverse changes in economic situations in the West. Events in the last five years have also shown us the great risks of removing national economic boundaries – where the failure of one country to regulate its banking industry led to the collapse of multiple banks across the Atlantic Ocean and the inability of a country to practise fiscal discipline threatened to send the whole European Union into a deep currency crisis. In this way, the removal of national boundaries makes the world even more vulnerable to severe economic crises in the future. Therefore, it would be foolish and unfeasible to eliminate national boundaries based on economic considerations.

In a nutshell, national boundaries make geographical and economic sense to a large extent, taking into consideration the unsustainability of a single global government, impracticality of complete

cultural homogenization, the difficulty in allocation of resources and the increased susceptibility to economic crises. Despite the various ostensible short-run benefits that the removal of national boundaries may bring, one must look into the long run to recognize that national boundaries are a must in order for the continual development and survival of Mankind.

Jonathan Ang Yik Ming 12S101



Review

Several insightful arguments raised and argued in a cogent manner, with good use of relevant examples. Excellent!

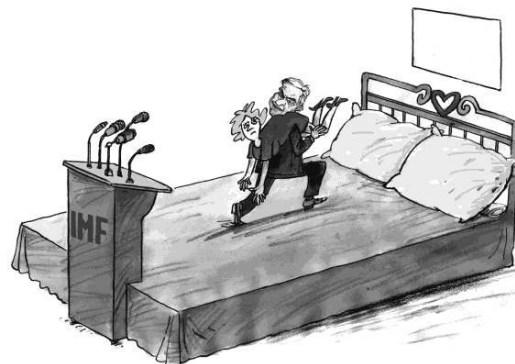
As long as people in the public eye do their job well, does it matter what they do in private?

[GCE09Q12]

Mitt Romney had been a promising aspirant for the presidency of the United States in the election of 2012. However, he still lost, albeit by a small margin, to the charismatic incumbent Barack Obama. One reason for his defeat, and one which was often used effectively against him by Obama's camp, was his tight-lipped secrecy over the past record of the business firms he owned when he was a businessman. Did the firms evade taxes? Did he pocket the funds from this illegal tax evasion? All the questions about the firms he dodged, and many analysts accord his defeat to his failure to be completely transparent to the public. From this, one can see that a person in the public eye, even if he is excellent in his career, needs to be honest about what he or she does in private. As such, all these things done away from the spotlight matter, as sooner or later the public will know about them. I am inclined to agree that, indeed, even if someone in the public eye has a stellar performance in their work, what they do out of it is important.

First and foremost, a person in the public eye is accountable to the public.

Regardless of his career, the very fact that he has the attention of the masses already binds him to the expectations of the public. Celebrities and politicians, in their fame, have their actions reported to the public by the media and are thus responsible for whatever they do. It is this accountability that warrants transparency from these famous individuals or groups. Indeed, politicians can be diplomatic experts who are able to manoeuvre their way through tricky situations and problems, but their track records have to be squeaky clean if they are to deserve the public's trust. Therefore, their private deeds must be laid bare for the public to see if they are to make reasoned judgments on the politician's behaviour. For celebrities, their private actions can be unearthed and thrown into the open by the paparazzi at any time, and thus if they want to maintain a healthy reputation in the media and their privileged circles, what they do in private has to be as clean and blameless as possible. Take Dominique Strauss-Kahn for an example. He was a brilliant economist and was held in high regard as the chief of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from 2007 - 2011, and had negotiated many important deals with countries in need of funds such as Iraq. However, all his credibility went up in smoke when his illicit deeds came to light in 2010, when a Ghanaian chambermaid accused him of rape. Later that year, after resigning from his post in the IMF, his meeting with several over important key figures, such as the chief of police in the Lorraine region of France, was interrupted by the police, and it was revealed that they had been entertained by Belgian prostitutes at the meeting. Once again, Strauss-Kahn's reputation, which he had





been trying hard to polish for a presidential bid in France, was tarnished. Therefore, what one does in private is indeed very important, as such things can be easily unearthed and revealed to the public, to whom transparency is vital for a person that is in the public eye. They must thus regulate their private deeds very carefully.

Furthermore, it is all the more integral that what famous people do in private be morally upright, for the very fact that they are doing well in their jobs and duties will cause people to revere and respect them. Many teenagers worship successful actors and singers who seem to lead lives of glamour and wealth, and adults who actively participate in the political sector will respect the opinions of high-ranking politicians whose policies and actions bring about great benefits for a country. A famous person whose career is doing well will very likely earn the adulation of those who yearn for such success and will thus earnestly imitate their actions so as to be able to replicate their triumphs. Therefore, what people in the public do is very important. For if their private actions are morally shameful or to an extent that they cannot be freely presented to the public, then the consequences of such actions will be translated into their outward actions and lead to erosion of values among those who hold them in high regard. Even if politicians can manage the country well or celebrities entertain the public well, the morals and principles they espouse, which will be revealed and practised in private when no one is watching, will affect others. In private, one's true self often dominates one's actions, and if one's morals are not in accordance to those in humanity, the lack of moral regulation will slowly manifest in the outward way in which people handle situations, even in the very seemingly small and insignificant things. As a result, what people in the public eye do in private definitely matters as their abilities will be determined by them, and in the same way the lessons espoused to the public will be impacted. John Lennon was the key iconic figure of the tumultuous sixties in the US, when civil war was ravaging Vietnam and teenagers were actively calling for a cessation to violence and a subscription to peace. Lennon sang many songs on peace and many teens

revered him for his opinions and beliefs, and he certainly did very well for a celebrity in the 1960s. However, his private life had been racked by divorce, promiscuity and an addiction to psychedelic drugs, which was a significant contributor to the culture of the sixties. Teenagers brought much grief to their parents by dropping out of school, taking psychedelic drugs avidly and religiously and demonstrating their promiscuity. It had been a period of cultural upheaval in the US, which reinforces the point that what people in the public eye do in private definitely matters, as the effect they have on the malleable public is very real.

However, detractors may point out that if no one sees the private lives of people, no one will know. "Out of sight, out of mind", they say. Any private deeds can stay within the personal boundaries of these individuals. Yet it is the very identity of these people that makes their personal private lives difficult to be kept under wraps. The public scrutinises anything and everything that are even remotely associated to the people in the spotlights of the media, and the action of any one of them may give something away about the character of the person: how he is, what he has said, how he treats others, et cetera. Being in the public eye means that one is holding the interest of millions of people, and to withhold information from them will be very tough. The prevalence of social media has further made it harder for public figures to mask their private lives from the public. It therefore matters what people in the public eye do in private, as they can be revealed very easily. In an instant, the successes of these people in their careers can be disregarded in the light of any shameful thing he has done away from the public eye. One notable example of how it is difficult to keep one's private life under wraps is the case of Bo Xilai. He had been the star of the Chinese Politburo, one who had been projected to ascend to the very top of the Chinese Communist Party. His capabilities as governor of Chongqing had been undeniable, and there were great prospects for his career. However, he had been secretly making illegal deals in the foreign sector, earning large amounts of cash through foreign bank accounts which



he cleverly disguised to keep people from discovering his lucre. Only his wife, Gu Kailai, was in the know. She later poisoned a foreigner who had allegedly asked for a larger portion of the dirty money which he had helped launder, and, upon their refusal, threatened to harm their son who was currently studying in the UK. The vice-mayor of Chongqing, who was privy to the circumstances surrounding the foreigner's death, had tried to ask for inquiries over whether Bo's wife was involved in the murder, was promptly demoted to a lower post. Angered, he revealed the scandal to US authorities in China and immediately Bo Xilai's career was destroyed. He was ejected from the party and his wife lost her credibility as a lawyer, being forced to stand trial for her participation in the murder. Thus, the importance of a person's private life is clearly evident when he is in the public eye, for the ease of discovering information makes him easily accountable to the public.

Some may say that no one can forsake his private life; a public figure is as entitled to one as any other person on the street. However, it is the very nature of this position that causes them to lose some of their rights to their personal lives. Stepping into the public eye entails giving up privacy, and by doing this, public figures can be said to have willingly surrendered their lives to the scrutiny of the media and the people. As a result, what they do in private is important. Politicos and celebrities cannot yell at the paparazzi to leave them alone – they are public figures after all, and the media thrives on their information. It is therefore not practical for these people to desire privacy and hope that whatever they do privately goes unnoticed. For example, when Edison Chen's sex videos were leaked to the media, many people sat up and gaped. He was raked over hot coals in the media and on the Web, and several of his lovers, such as Gillian Cheung and Cecilia Cheung, had to suspend their activities as celebrities to escape being in the limelight. He could not have insisted that the videos belonged to him and their circulation was an affront to his rights, as a public figure with fame like his cannot be said to have a fully private life.

Mitt Romney perhaps felt that his private life did not matter to the public, but to the consternation of the Republican party, it did. If one is in the public eye, he must certainly ensure that his private life matters to him before the public decides that it matters to them.

Lee Hui Ying 12S101

Review

This writer makes a highly convincing case with a very lucidly written essay that is well-developed and illustrated with current examples. Well-done!

Should everyone be expected to donate suitable organs after death? [GCE12Q9]

When pioneering work on the surgical technique of organ transplantation was first made in the early 1900s, surgeons faced the insurmountable problem of organ rejection. By the 1960s however, medical scientists had worked out the use of immunosuppressant drugs to prevent organ rejection. Today, the list of organs and body parts that can be transplanted is no longer limited to kidneys, livers and hearts, and the organ transplantation success rate is high, saving the precious lives of those who are near to death due to organ failure. Therefore, organ replacement has had significant impacts on society, and should be further developed to ensure better healthcare for all. However, the problem is that alternative organs are in shortage, which has delayed the transplant surgeries and subsequently led to the deaths of the patients. On the other hand, there are many healthy organs which could have been donated to help those patients but left intact in the grave with their owners. This is considered by some to be a huge wastage. As such, for the humanitarian mission to help our fellow men who are on the verge of death due to organ failure,

everyone should be expected to donate suitable organs after death.

The most compelling reason for expecting everyone to donate suitable organs after death is that of morality and ethics. From a young age, we are all taught about kindness, empathy and fraternity. These values are also emphasized consistently in many religions such as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. While help can come under different forms such as well wishes, moral support and money, it is worthy to realize that donating suitable organs is the best and most effective way to help the patients with organ failure. After all, our bodies will decay after death, so instead of emphasizing on the need to have our whole bodies intact, which will be of little significance to us at that point in time after all, we should encourage everyone to donate their organs, or even make mandatory the donation of organs, after death for the greater good of the society. According to World Health Organisation's report in 2012, only one in ten people in need of an organ manage to get one. Also, in United Kingdom, there are more than 10 000 people in desperate need of organ transplants but only 3000 transplants take place every year. As a result, more than 1000 die waiting for a donor annually. Such tragedy can be eradicated; the solution is within our reach. Thousands of lives can be saved by the donation of organs after death. Thus, everyone should be expected to donate suitable organs after death to help our fellow men who are in need of organ transplants to survive.

Furthermore, since the technology for creating artificial human organs is still in its infancy stage, the only way to sustain the supply of human organs for organ transplants is through donation. Thus, everyone should be obliged to donate suitable organs after death. According to the European Heart Journal in 2003, the median age of survival for heart patients fitted with a pace maker was 8.5 years. This shows that even when some forms of artificial organs are successfully created, their effectiveness, especially in the long run, is still questionable. While one can point to other medical breakthroughs such as organ cloning and stem cell research, one should not forget that they are

flooded with controversial and ethical issues, which hinder their progress. Therefore, at least for now, the only viable way for sustaining the lives of those with organ failure is to use human donated organs. Until medical technology advances further and all ethical issues associated are resolved, everyone should be expected to donate suitable organs after death to help patients who are in need of organ transplants.

Another reason why everyone should be expected to donate suitable organs after death is to reduce illegal trading of organs on the black markets. The affluent patients who suffer from organ failure and are desperate to live will resort to buying organs from the poor people who are in desperate need for money and are willing to do anything to earn money even at the expense of their bodies. There are a large number of such black markets for organs in the developing countries where a large proportion of the population lives under the poverty line, such as in India, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, and Vietnam, just to name a few. In fact, in 2008, Tang Wee Sung, a Singaporean retail magnate was at very high risk of death due to severe diabetes. Without a transplant, his chances of surviving five years were considered slim. He was then charged for attempting to buy a kidney from an Indonesian for US \$200 000. On the organ black market, poor organ 'donors' are only paid a pittance of US\$1500 for a kidney. Moreover, in China, the supply of organs is in such great shortage that some dealers in the organ black market resort to a desperate method of offering a free iPad for each organ donated. Such commodification of





organs on the black market is morally wrong as it exploits poor people and subjects them to dangerous operations. Thus, by encouraging and even making it compulsory for everyone to donate suitable organs after death, human organs will be relatively sufficient to cater to the patients suffering from organ failure. Furthermore, the quality of organs traded on black markets may not be up to healthy standard, which poses further harms to the recipients. Therefore, to prevent such social ills of trading organs illegally and unethically, everyone should be expected to donate suitable organs after death.

However, detractors argue that making donation of organs after death will violate human rights as each individual has an alienable right over his own body. There are also other associated social issues regarding the relatives of the deceased donors. A person's life may end but his relationships with others who are still alive still last. Family members of the expected donor may strongly object to having the bodies of their loved one dissected for organ donation. In such cases, it should be conceded that organ donation should not be forced upon the deceased individual for the will of his family. Thus, though donation of organs after death is necessary, clear guidelines should be drawn regarding the specific circumstances when donation is exempted.

Also, some may argue that in the case of extracting organs from brain-dead patients, it is difficult to confirm with one hundred percent that the person will die, thus, making it compulsory for such people to donate their organs is questionable. For example, in 2012, the father of Stephen Thorpe living in Leicester England strongly objected to having his son pulled off life support to extract his organs though the son had been declared brain dead. Later, over long term care, Stephen eventually made a full recovery. While this may be a highly rare case of misdiagnosis, it nevertheless highlights that there needs to be strict rules and guidelines with regards to how an individual is obliged for organ donation. The precision in determining

whether a patient is truly brain dead is also needed to be emphasized and closely regulated.

In conclusion, everyone should be expected to donate suitable organs after death for the humanitarian mission of saving the lives of fellow men. Such an expectation is also reasonable given that the medical technology for creating artificial organs is yet fully developed and exploitation of the poor for organs in the black markets in the less developed regions is rampant. Nevertheless, to ensure that donation will be a good cause rather than harming the donors, clear guidelines and regulations should be enforced.

Hoang Hanh Thu 12S414



Review

The essay presents the key issues behind organ donation after death in a very clear and succinct manner, and is supported with good illustrations.

'Too much attention has been given to gender equality.' Discuss.

[MJCJC2MYE2013Q5]

Gender equality is no longer a new term. Since the emergence of first wave feminism in the 19th century Western world, waves of various movements calling for gender equality have insistently swept the globe. From taking up the pen in defense of one sex over the other to a somewhat united call for the vindication of the rights of women, their efforts have seemingly paid off. Today, women certainly seem to largely enjoy the same rights as men, which have led some critics to think that it is high time to halt the heavy emphasis on gender equality that the world has lately already been practicing, and to direct our focus and resources instead to more pertinent issues, such as the threat of global warming. In light of the above, while I understand that excessive attention may have been given to some aspects of



gender equality, on the whole, I still largely believe that not enough attention is being given to global gender equality.

Firstly, while on the surface it might seem that women have achieved economic equality or some semblance of it as they now head out to work and draw their own incomes, on deeper analysis one will find that this economic equality is a façade. Though it is true that in most developed nations, over 70% of their female population have joined the workforce and an average of 20% are taking on C suite positions in the boardroom, this is only a very superficial indication of economic gender equality. In the United States, a woman earns only 70 cents for every one dollar that a man makes doing the exact same job. Also, in the United Kingdom, 30,000 women are sacked annually just for being pregnant whereas their partners are not affected in the slightest bit. This shows that in actual fact, though women are allowed equal economic participation, they are not equal to men but valued economically lower. The flippant dismissal of pregnant female employees is a clear indication of the insensitive marginalisation of females in the workplace. Gender discrimination in the workplace is still rampant and this is a pressing issue which should draw the world's attention and concern rather than be conveniently swept under the carpets like the many sexual harassment cases that female employees are plagued with. As such, this is proof that attention given to gender equality today is not too much. In fact, the reality of the situation is that more needs to be done.

Those who disagree may claim that women have already largely achieved equal social status, which is proof that gender equality is already a reality. Thus, the world has already done enough and should now focus its attention elsewhere. These people cite countries like Australia and Singapore, where there are laws put in place to protect women from rape and abuse, acts which unfairly and cruelly take advantage of women's vulnerabilities. Not only do these laws favour women, but in the event of it being invoked, it protects the women at the expense of the men, even if the women were initially willing

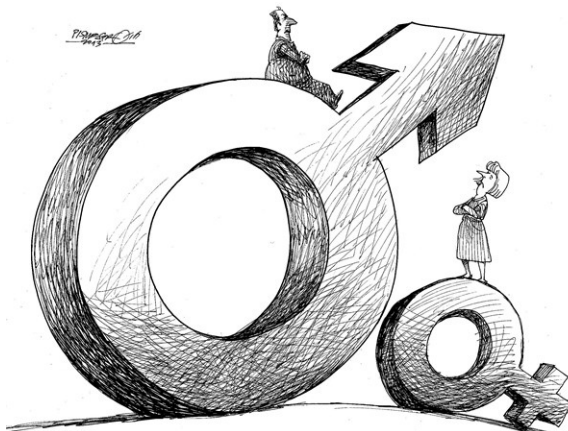
parties. As such, they claim that enough is done, even at the level of the law, for women in terms of protecting their rights and honour as equal human beings, and that gender equality has already been achieved. However, this is a very simplistic and limited view as the above point largely only applies to developed nations. In developing or more conservative countries, gender equality is a concept yet unheard of, much less practiced. In India, gang rape of women are a daily occurrence of which Indian authorities do little to address or redress. Only recently has the world turned its attention to such a horrific and traumatising practice after reports surfaced about a young female student being violently raped on a bus. Her injuries were so severe that she eventually passed on even after receiving urgent round-the-clock medical treatment in Singapore. Despite international condemnation, unresolved rape cases continue to be heard of and uncovered in India, South Africa, Ethiopia and Brazil because the situation is so bad that women do not even dare to report their own rapes out of fear. This thus proves that attention given to gender equality is far from enough, especially in developing countries, as so much more needs to be done to stop the unequal and even brutal treatment of powerless women all over the world.

Secondly, gender equality has not been achieved yet as more time and effort needs to be pumped in to entirely eradicate several gender stereotypes in today's society that continue to restrain women. For instance, female body builders are still considered taboo and female celebrities and singers continue to be publicised in a highly sexualised light, promulgating the age-old notion of



women as men's sexual objects. Such examples may appear harmless or normal on the surface, but such objectification of women undermine the idea of women as equally intelligent, independent and capable human beings. In addition, even the media continues to promote the 'damsel in distress' notion through Disney films and superhero movies such as The Hulk or Superman alike. Upon closer examination, one will find that media which subverts the strong-minded independence and capabilities of a single woman is ubiquitous and they subconsciously promote the idea that women are ultimately inferior to men; they need men to swoop in and rescue them in spite of themselves, but seldom the other way around. If there were any such female superheroes, like Wonder Woman and Batgirl, they are sadly still physically inferior to their male counterparts, heavily sexualised or given a unique tendency to be emotional or sentimental – a key flaw in all superhero narratives. This thus proves that subtle but real undertones of gender inequality still run rampant in today's society, and attention should be given to this matter to bring about awareness. Thus, I disagree that too much attention has been given to gender equality.

Critics of my argument may think that their countries, and the world as a whole, are better off directing their energy and resources to more productive use, such as drafting methods to help their economies cope with the looming global recession. This group claims that it is unwise to expend any more time on pursuing gender equality as in the face of evermore pressing problems, it is not a priority



anymore. However, they fail to see the bigger picture, that it is precisely the need to achieve economic development that we should keep our focus on gender equality. Experts say that women have increasingly become essential to today's economy. This is because technology has resulted in a shift from an industry-centred economy to a service-oriented economy, which has traditionally been female-dominated. Manual labour provided by men is now almost irrelevant, as we have machines to do it faster and better. Instead, the focus is now on soft skills such as communication, which women are undoubtedly more well-versed in. Because the demands of today are changing so rapidly, moving in a direction so different from the past, all the more our socio-cultural and economic perspectives of women – and men – must be updated. Due to the rising economic vitality of women, it is imperative to first remove barriers that have prevented women from being equally valued full participants in the economy, promote then maintain gender equality to keep our women happy and well-equipped to drive our economies. A Boston Consulting Group observes that working women will control US\$15 trillion in spending by 2014 and by 2028, they will account for about two-thirds of consumer spending worldwide. Women's income has a strongly positive economic stimulus effect; it can thus be said that gender equality is the key to a thriving economy in today's world. Thus, more attention should be given to gender equality if countries want their economy to prosper.

Lastly, the attention given to gender equality is still insufficient as seen from its marked absence in the world of politics. Women have persistently tried, without much success, to break into this male-dominated realm, as seen in how there is still a lack of a female US president after a long history of 45 elections. Even in the case of female South Korean President Park, she faced national backlash and criticism, with many lamenting that she was only elected because of – and hence defined by – the legacy her father left behind. Similarly in the case of Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, immediately after her election, critics speculated that



she would not last beyond two years. The above examples prove how gender equality is nullified and all due respect is foregone when politics come into play. Women continue to be under-represented in this political public sphere though women certainly have made dramatic gains in electoral politics in recent years; and those standing proudly in representation of their nation often are derided and heavily criticised instead of admired for their leadership, capability and bravery. Until the day the world has an equal proportion of men and women in all its parliaments, more needs to be done and more attention needs to be given to gender equality.

In sum, while gender equality has seemingly been achieved in today's world and many acknowledge or recognise the value of attaining such equality, it still has not been completely put into practice due to several reasons. As such, I disagree with the view as even now, we still have not done enough. More attention needs to be drawn to areas where gender equality is still a fantasy in women's dreams, so that more awareness can be garnered to allow us to do even more, in the hopes that one day, gender equality will be a global reality regardless of circumstances, cultures and locality. Then, and only then, can we say that enough attention has been given to gender equality.

Leong Kah Mun 12A301



Review

A lucid and mature response with consistent consideration given to present day socio-cultural, economic and political contexts to validate the arguments! Overall, this is a very well-written essay.

Consider the view that religion divides.

[MJC2013JC2MYEQ9]

'A clash of civilizations' was chillingly predicted to be the new epicentre of 21st century and future conflicts

by an American political scientist of the 20th century, Samuel Huntington, who foretold a shift in the players and reasons for conflicts in the post-Cold War world. Instead of conflicts along territorial, economic or ideological lines, Huntington envisioned the dominating source of human conflict in the future to be cultural. Indeed, it does appear that as a result of globalisation and increased interaction between differing cultures, religion has become a divisive force and sometimes violently so. However, I would argue that religion does not inherently divide, and can even provide a framework for unity. Rather, it is when leaders exploit religion as a political tool as well as the inherent tendency of humanity to view the world in black and white terms that lead to such divisions.

Firstly, some may argue that in our globalised world, religion has become a strongly divisive force. In the current state of the world, wherein cultures are increasingly brought into contact with each other, greater exposure to foreign concepts and ideals that one may not agree with can lead to potentially divisive effects. With the intensely personal and cultural role filled by religion in most societies, religion tends to bear the brunt of the blame for such divisions especially when one presents itself an affront to another. As predicted by Huntington, the 21st century has indeed seen conflicts resulting from the 'clash of civilizations', as people turn to religion as a bulwark against new or sometimes simply foreign and alien ideas. In the Islamic world, the perceived failure of Western democracy resulted in the 1979 coup that saw the installation of Ayatollah Khomeini as its new leader, who installed Sharia Law as the new ideology of the country, taking on a more aggressive stance towards Western ideals. Indeed, terrorist organizations such as the Al-Qaeda have built their ideology around Islam, and the rash of terrorist attacks globally, exemplified by the potent symbol of the 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers, further shows how religion has emerged as a strongly divisive force in an ever-changing, globalised world. However, I would argue that this is a rather myopic take on the rise of religious fundamentalism and division within the

world. The truth of globalisation is that it results in a major and disorienting upheaval of social norms that have been established for decades – it has been demonstrated time and time again that such radical changes to one's way of living results in people falling back on old ideologies as a defense mechanism, and religion just happens to be a convenient tool. Indeed, even in Greece today, with record unemployment rates, there has been a marked rise in the support of neo-Nazism, with Golden Dawn, a party modelling itself after Nazi ideology, winning 16% of popular votes. The truth remains that religion does not divide on its own – it is the major upheaval of social norms that results in the masses looking towards the past as a form of protection, and this can take on a number of forms. Whether this precludes a turn to religion, or political ideologies such as Nazism is dependent on the context of the situation. Hence, religion is not an inherently divisive force, being instead a universal human activity and disposition one engages in to cope and deal with new changes, as a way of asserting and grounding one's identity and place in this disorienting world, that unfortunately necessitates the drawing of walls and divisions between groups.

In addition, I would argue that it is the exploitation of religion by political figures that further lead to such divisive effects. Being a deeply personal matter, politicians often appeal to religion as a way of attaining mass support that results in such religious divisions. For example, Rick Perry, a US 2012 presidential candidate, appealed to his support base by condemning Obama's "War On Religion", further demarcating himself as the moral alternative to the supposedly heretical Democrat party. The potency of religion as a method to appeal to ethos, one's moral ethics, is one that is exploited by leaders throughout history as a way of presenting themselves as moral and just – such a declaration is done to present their opponents as immoral and godless in a bid to validate themselves; but inciting such fervour results in the perpetuation of divisions along religious lines. The Republican Party in America has increasingly become more and more



Christian resultantly, and the vitriol directed towards the more moderate Democrats exemplifies how leaders have exploited the nature of religion to garner mass support heavily driven by some form of emotional and spiritual moral outrage, leading to the continued division of the nation into two diametrically opposed camps. From religious wars such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the 1966 Buddhist Uprising in response to Roman Catholic South Vietnamese President Diem's religiously biased and oppressive policies against the nation's native Buddhists, it is further evident that politicians around the world have indeed exploited religion to achieve their own ends. The unfortunate consequence is the perpetuation of deep schism, whether intra-nation or inter-nations. Hence, the divisive nature that religion seems to embody can really be attributed to the machinations of political leaders, who rely on such division and fanatical loyalty to attain mass support.

In the right hands, however, religion can in fact become a framework for unity, a very strong glue to bind communities together. After all, the foundations of religion are love and acceptance, peace and tolerance, as most aptly encapsulated in the Christian teaching of 'love thy neighbour'. From the weekly Sunday mass to the annual Mecca pilgrimage, religion has proven itself as an important basis for a community, sometimes even disparate or diasporic ones, to come together in faith. People from different socio-economic statuses too can connect on a deeply profound and spiritual level. If a country's citizens are deeply religious, religion can often serve to hold that country together



but as discussed earlier, leaders paradoxically have used religion to inspire fanatic loyalty or achieve ends via means that run counter to religion's inherent teachings. Moreover, while it is this faithful devotion to religious communities that have inspired misunderstandings and xenophobia towards other communities as discussed previously, it is arguable that this is only in the short run. Religions are not so dissimilar. They are all founded on basic moral decencies and ethics after all; there is no reason that people cannot learn to coexist in the future. Rather than being used to divide, with the right leaders, both political and religious, religion can unite even differing communities. Furthermore, as the world becomes smaller, cities become increasingly cultural melting pots and people become accustomed to different cultures and religions, with prolonged exposure, tolerance can and must develop if we are to survive without apocalyptic strife. As in Singapore, wherein religious harmony is encouraged by the government, people of all religions respect and celebrate one another's customs – you are just as likely to see Chinese guests at a Hari Raya celebration as you are to see a Muslim boy playing with firecrackers alongside his Hindu neighbours on Deepavali. Rather than divide, I believe that if people properly and faithfully exercise the teachings and values of religion, religion can and will serve as a unifying force.

Indeed, one can argue that it is the inherent tendency of humanity to categorize and pigeonhole people, thereby reducing them to nothing more than stereotypes that leads to such divisions. After all, divisions exist on many different levels – racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism – the list goes on. As famed author John Green once said, "The truth resists simplicity". However, it appears instinctive for us to simplify everything. It might be some flawed human predilection to conveniently reduce others into nothing more than cardboard cut-outs; and religion just happens to be merely one more demarcation for us to base our judgements on. The rise in unwarranted American Islamophobia due to the

terrorists claiming to be Muslims is a prime example of this. Rather than viewing it as an isolated case, Christians began viewing Islam as an inherently violent religion, and Muslims everywhere have faced discrimination resultantly. Religion does not divide – people's perceptions of others divide, and religion just serves to help people form such pre-conceived notions and judgements that lead to such divisions. Hence, ultimately, it is not religion that divides – it is the fallible, reductionist nature of the human mind that does so, with even studies showing that an average human brain can only perceive a maximum of 150 humans to be as complex and multidimensional as they are.

Conclusively, I would argue that truly, religion's divisive effects are merely a result of our own fallibility as a species – whether we use religion as a bulwark against the forces of globalisation and new ideas, or as a political tool to separate one ideology from another and for social control, or whether we simply find it impossible to view others as complexly as we view ourselves. Indeed, whether it is the Iron Curtain or biblical doctrines that separate and divide us, we have stayed a divided species. However, religion's ability to unite and bring together a community may serve us well in the future, if in the right hands, and provide us with a far more optimistic possibility for the future, one of tolerance and acceptance.

Yogesh Tuli Hirdaramani 12A301

Review

The essay was very maturely and thoroughly considered. Some very poignant and insightful observations were given which made for a sober yet delightful read.

How far do you agree that conformity is no longer desirable today?

[MJC2013JC2MYEQ12]

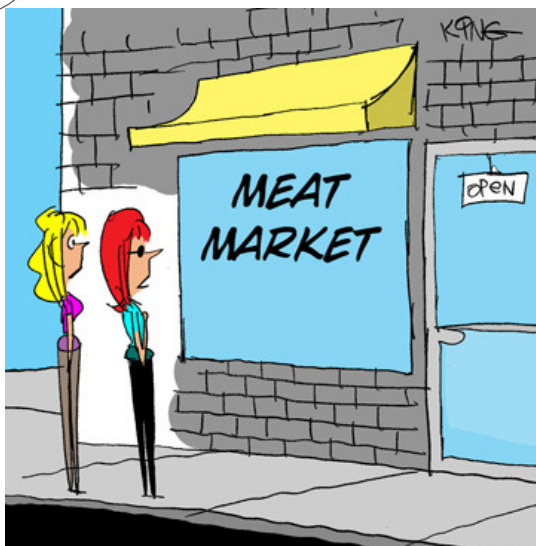


The famous music video 'Another Brick in the Wall' by Pink Floyd features school children wearing similar uniforms and indiscernible face masks marching in rhythm in schools to classrooms, much like cogs in a machine or as the title describes: another brick in the wall. Perfectly the epitome of conformity, everything is just rather monotonous and dreary. Although some may say that sounds uncannily like a day in a public school or even more so like workers marching in rhythm to their workplaces every weekday morning, allow me to assure you that there is still room for individuality, even in the strictest of all public schools or the busiest of working societies. Conformity may not have entirely lost its relevance or value, however I would argue that conformity is no longer as desirable today as compared to the past.

Individuality is certainly more desired today than ever before, particularly in the pragmatic society we live in, where meritocracy is the name of the game we all play. Each of us tries to stand out from the crowd, to be better than our counterparts, all just so that we can get some recognition for whatever it is we are doing. If conformity were truly desirable, then each of us would be mediocre. However, where is the advantage or appeal in being just like anyone else? In any market, firms try their very best to differentiate their products, investing millions in developing their products, hiring marketing personnel to push their products to consumers, showing off how their product is so different yet so much better than those of their industrial competitors. Certainly, most firms who are able to do this successfully are able to capture the largest share in the market economy.

These firms are therefore heavily rewarded for doing their best in trying to be different. Internet and catalogue retail site Amazon.com is the embodiment of this truth. This is the company responsible for the Kindle, an e-book reader that enable users to shop for, download, browse, and read e-books, newspapers, magazines, blogs, and other digital media via wireless networking. According to an International Data Corporation study from March 2011, 48% of the 12.8 million e-book readers sold worldwide in 2010 were Kindles, and as of December 2011, Amazon announced the sale of over one million Kindles per week since the end of November. Their success can be attributed to Amazon's continued efforts in always trying to improve their product, be it in its functionality or the details of its design interface. Yet at the same time the company knows what its biggest drawing point is: in the tech-age where every gadget boasts multiple functions, the kindle sticks to providing the best no-frills reading experience it can. This is the way meritocracy favours the creative and individualistic in society today, making conformity the worst trait to possess.

Individuality is not only something industries desire, but it is also something that many people celebrate. For many generations, women of the Victorian era were expected to conform to certain dressing standards. They were to be bridled in corsets and covered in high neckline dresses that fell below their ankles. When they were considered old enough to be ladies, Victorian girls had to do their hair up in a topknot and were expected to enjoy "lady-like" pursuits such as knitting or embroidery; they were no longer allowed to go "gallivanting". From the famous classic *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott, Jo declares that "if having my hair up means I cannot do as I please, then I'll have them in two tails till I'm twenty!" This sparked the dismay of her sisters, who felt that she was not conforming to the standards that were expected of them. Yet today, this book remains well-loved for many reasons – including the celebration of Jo's blatant disregard for what was expected of her. More modern examples of how non-conformity is celebrated today



"I understand Lady Gaga buys some of her outfits here."

is how Lady Gaga, one of the most notable pop celebrities today, constantly stuns the world with her 'out of this world' outfits and performance style. From dresses made entirely out of raw meat, to controversial music videos that seem to suggest things that society is not able to accept, Lady Gaga is famous, or infamous, precisely because she refuses to conform to the people's notion of dressing and performance. With the ever-increasing number of people recognising and embracing pluralism, where diversity is accepted and very much appreciated in society, it is little wonder that non-conformity is increasingly celebrated today. Therefore, I believe it is rather evident that conformity is no longer something as desirable today.

Even in many schools today, students are being taught that conformity is not always the best or indeed, necessary. Students are encouraged to stop writing "boring" essays and to be more creative in their expression in order to have their scripts stand out in an examination so that they may be awarded better grades. Students are encouraged to think "out of the box" or in an unorthodox manner and apply the knowledge they have acquired to questions that require them to do so in order to gain a decent mark. Additionally, schools in the Western countries have allowed students to wear almost whatever they please, in an effort to allow students

to assert their individuality, instead of all being forced to wear the same uniform. Schools today emphasise on 21st century competencies such as 'critical and inventive thinking', in the words of the Singapore Ministry of Education. This is with the aim of preparing students for an unpredictable and changing world in which they will have to live and work in, where new knowledge today becomes obsolete tomorrow. For such creative thinking in our future generations to take place, dunking conformity is the way to go.

Of course, as mentioned in the introduction, conformity has not totally lost its relevance in certain aspects. There are instances where conformity is still very much desirable even today. Although there are some norms that are acceptable when bent, many are still not. One such example is the law. The law is a set of rules that society agrees to adhere to, thus as a member of society, one should conform to these standards or risk being thrown in prison. In this case, conformity is important and most certainly desirable by most if not all standards, for the absence of conformity to laws almost certainly guarantees anarchy and chaos in human societies. The repercussions of this could range from weakening of business confidence in a country and hindering economic progress to being the lawless society as we know Somalia to be today. After all, being a law-abiding citizen is still very much a valued characteristic in all societies, and in this sense, conformity is still desirable.

Nevertheless, much as conformity is still desired in societies for civil obedience and law and order, it is increasingly losing its relevance in many other fields in the light of the rapidly changing world. Surely it is worth celebrating and playing up our individual traits, for it must be our idiosyncrasies that make us all rather interesting as humans. Conformity, on the other hand, only means that we are as individual as the people we march in line with.

Gwen Khoo Yu Qing 12S414

Review

Written with a strong personal voice, the essay is filled with a variety of interesting illustrations. While it could be more thoroughly fleshed out, this is nevertheless an entertaining essay to read.

Is it fair to suggest that the media manipulates more than it informs?

[MJJC2MBT2013Q11]

African-American politician Malcolm X once said "The media is the most powerful entity on Earth. It has the ability to make the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent because it controls the minds of the people." Indeed, the media holds the power to alter the mindsets of the world and the way it does so is through manipulation. The media, from print to broadcast and now new media, has a primary function of reporting the truth and therefore can be said to inform. But in informing the world, it is often criticised by its detractors that it strays from its supposed objective stance, moving instead to evoke feelings in the hope of seeking to attract and captivate its audience. This may not be such a fair statement after all.

The aim of the media is often to capture people's attention in the shortest time possible, while performing its role to keep the audience informed. This is crucial in ensuring the particular publication or firm stays relevant and in demand. With

globalisation, many different competitors emerge in the media industry as local papers and media firms have to compete with foreign media companies to garner loyal readers and viewers. As such, editors often have to be creative in their selection of material in order to set themselves apart from the other publications vying for the audience's attention. This is particularly prevalent in entertainment magazines such as US Weekly which often takes the latest gossip and shares parts of the story at a time. They withhold information to create buzz around the issue, releasing it bit by bit so as to encourage sustained readership. In doing so, these magazines have manipulated information, since the information given is limited or otherwise flawed, to improve their distribution numbers. Such manipulation of information and news may however be argued to be necessary for corporate survival, given the cut-throat nature of the media industry today. This goes to show that while the media does indeed manipulate the information it presents, so as to attract their audience by enticing them with selective information, this act is likely motivated by the firms' need to survive in such a competitive world today.

Moreover, the media may be seen to manipulate society's thoughts and wants by creating and reinforcing stereotypes in society. This is especially true in entertainment, where more often than not, this section of the media glamorises the hedonistic, materialistic lifestyles celebrities have, and encourages the viewers or readers to aspire towards such goals. Magazines regularly set unrealistic standards of beauty, forcing the members of society, especially the females, to reach for the impossible standards or risk a life of depression and loneliness. Various television programmes are also guilty of emphasising perfection in both the physical body and also in terms of lifestyle. For instance, "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" stresses the need for women to do everything within their means to achieve the "perfect" body and life, even espousing the effectiveness of various methods. While the media might be said to inform the audience of the ways in which some lead their lives and their opinions on





beauty, the continuous emphasis on physical appearance and materialism actually manipulates the audience into thinking that this is the prevailing standard held by society. The result of such manipulation is evident in the increased obsession with body image. Research done in Canada has shown that not only are girls as young as five or six aware of fad diets, those as young as eleven or twelve have been on these diets. This clearly points to the fact that the media has indeed manipulated the audience, by choosing to focus only on particular opinions and issues, thus causing society to change the way it thinks and behaves. That said, the media could merely have been pandering to the demands and preferences of the audience, who are interested in and drawn to such content. Moreover, there is also need for the media firms to appear as relevant and up-to-date with the latest prevailing opinions and perspectives, tempting them to focus on the more current issues and perspectives, thus reinforcing the standards and also accelerating the cultural shifts. Hence, while the media does manipulate more than it informs, given the emphasis of its content, it may not have had much choice in the matter.

In addition, the media may appear to be manipulative, given the different slants that news reports can take. Different newspapers, media companies and journalists have different opinions and even allegiances to various political parties or mindsets. Hence, the presentation of the same piece of news can be from different angles. The media may thus be seen as manipulative, focusing on the material that bolsters their argument and sometimes omitting what does not. In the United States, each new case of gun violence brings forth a new wave of debates on gun laws. Different newspapers deal with it differently according to their political stance; whether they champion the Democrats or Republicans. Closer to home, The Straits Times, generally seen as supportive of the incumbent government, is often criticised for bias in its news reports and omission of particular viewpoints. Such bias could be seen as the manipulation of the media so as to influence the people's opinions on

the issues or the organisations favoured by the media company. While there are indeed concerted efforts to mould the people's opinion in some cases, particularly when the media is used as a tool for propaganda, it must be acknowledged that in the selection of material and choice of angle from which the news is reported, subjectivity is inherent and almost impossible to eliminate. In a way, such differences in reporting may ironically reflect the diversity of authentic opinion and perspectives within the community, though it is perhaps more often cynically construed to be attempts to manipulate the truth for some vested interest. Nevertheless, while the job of the media is to inform objectively, the selection of material is inherently a subjective process, leading to the prevailing opinion that there is more manipulation than objective reporting in the media.

Can it be said that the media informs more than it manipulates then? There is good reason why newspapers, in particular, are touted to be the most reliable form of information because the information is verified before being published to ensure its accuracy. After all, the image and reputation of the newspaper and its publisher rests on the truth of its reports. Information disseminated by newspapers therefore informs and creates awareness in individuals allowing them to be in the know about global and domestic issues. Also, the up-to-date objective reporting on various news events and situations, without attempts to sugar-coat the harsh reality, shows that the media does not manipulate more than it informs. Even in times of crisis, such as during the SARS outbreak in Singapore, when there may be selective reporting or manipulation of information to prevent widespread panic, the media proved reliable and informative, focusing not on the peril and dire situation, but on information on the virus and different ways to protect ourselves and our families. Hence, people turned to the newspapers and broadcast media for regular updates on the situation. Had the media sought to manipulate the situation, its reliability would have been compromised and people would not trust the information provided. China's handling of the SARS



outbreak is evidence of that. In the 2003 SARS outbreak, China's government and media faced criticism over alleged concealment of the actual number of cases in the country, impacting their collective credibility immensely. With the explosion of online media sources, many which stand at the ready to expose the truth, manipulation and distortion is not a viable long-term strategy. Hence, the continued viewership or readership can be taken as testament of the reliability of the media in informing more than manipulating its audience. That said, it is imperative to qualify that this is not always the case across all newspapers. The different forms of the media serve different functions, thus the manner in which they report the news varies. It is also important to note that the reporting of facts with conscious suppression of particular key information is ultimately still manipulation in itself. Hence, I still believe that the media manipulates more than it informs.

It can also be argued that the media, as a single entity, primarily informs since the provision of various viewpoints stimulates thought and this exposure to the myriad of opinions allows the readers, as mature individuals, to come to their own conclusions or make informed decisions. This is especially evident in the advertising of products via advertisements, slogans, jingles and so on. Advertisements seek to enhance our product awareness and it allows us to make an informed decision prior to our purchase. By having the media put forth a slew of advertisements, it potentially increases our welfare and allows us to make more informed decisions when choosing between brands, variations and models of a particular product. From that perspective, we may see the media informing more than manipulating. Of course, this is not to say that advertisements do not manipulate subtly with catchy jingles and even corny taglines. We have L'Oreal's "Because I'm Worth It" self-empowering tagline which beckons women to get in touch with their inner goddess and on her account, spend hundreds of dollars on the brand's beauty products so much so L'Oreal, reportedly sells approximately 50 products every second, profiting a whopping 2.9 billion

pounds in 2012. Similarly, M.A.C's "makeup for makeup artists" exploits consumers' insecurities and desire to emulate the glamorous models and celebrities. While one may construe these advertisements to be merely informing the consumers of the various options available, it is undeniable that advertisements have immense influence in playing on consumers' insecurities and fervent desires. Yet, ultimately, in the words of David Foster Wallace, these advertisements "did what all ads are supposed to do: create an anxiety relievable by purchase." Advertisements were meant to sell a product after all.

In the words of politician Jules Carlyse, "we are so cleverly manipulated and influenced by the media...that the truth has become hopelessly lost in semantics." There is no denying that the media manipulates, and often, it does so more than it informs. Yet given its various roles it has to play, above and beyond merely providing information, it may not have a choice. Perhaps, then, as avid consumers of the media in the 21st century today, it is time we be more discerning in what we choose to believe in.

Evangeline Chow Shu Min 12A202



Review

This is a complex essay which shows insightful consideration of 'is it fair'. Strong personal voice lends conviction to the arguments.

Is it realistic to expect businesses to be socially responsible? [MJCJC2MBT2013Q6]

Marks and Spencer became the first major retailer to sell a Fairtrade clothing range in 2006 and with its warm reception, the company continued to expand its range of Fairtrade products. This emphasis on ethical trading and sustainability formed the foundation for the company's green strategy. Corporate social responsibility goes beyond mere compliance with the laws, to

the loftier aspiration of furthering social good. While some may still hold the opinion that businesses should focus on profits and leave civic duty to the government, this way of thinking is now deemed old-fashioned. In today's world, businesses not only have to ensure their economic survival in the competitive global market, but are also counted on to be socially responsible for their actions. While some critics may argue that it is realistic to expect businesses to be socially responsible, given their impact on our society and environment, I am of the belief that it is unrealistic to expect businesses today to be socially responsible.

Firstly, faced with intense competition in global markets today, firms are more profit-motivated than ever to ensure their survival. They would often resort to all means and ways to ensure that profits, hard-earned or not, can line their pockets. Social responsibility often involves going beyond the company's interests, so as to further the overall benefit of society. Such noble spirit often compromises the firm's profits, and contradicts the profit-motivated nature of the company. An example which epitomises the selfish nature of the firms is the Monsanto Company, which has been named the world's most unethical company. An agricultural company that leads the production of genetically modified foods, the company unfairly sues farmers who try to produce food organically and ethically. Should the lawsuit not be ruled in their favour, they can still achieve their desired results as the small-scale farms become bankrupt due to legal costs. This is so as to secure their profit margin, whilst ignoring the positive impacts those farmers have. Furthermore, the company is involved in the creation and production of highly poisonous herbicide, Roundup, which is

known to cause damage to the ecology and humans. In spite of a 2008 scientific study's findings on foetal fatalities, the company persists in its irresponsibility, all in order to maximise its profits. Sadly, such companies are not the exception. We often read and hear about cases like Monsanto in the news, proving that it is not realistic for us to expect businesses to be socially responsible as they are ultimately more concerned with earning profits than everything else.

Secondly, in our interconnected world today, there are significant numbers of multi-national or transnational firms. Given the nature of their businesses, these firms may not feel rooted to the country that their corporation is based in. Hence, they might not have any impetus to display any sense of social responsibility in their business activities and could simply be more interested in exploiting the resources available there. An example would be Philip Morris, a cigarette and tobacco company based in the US. It contracted farms in Kazakhstan to produce the vast amounts of tobacco needed for its operations, and even used child labour in spite of children's susceptibility to Green Tobacco Sickness. In addition, the company exploited children in less developed countries to distribute free cigarettes to their peers in clubs and concerts by leveraging on their ignorance and vulnerability to addictive habits at a young age, enabling the company to gain profits at the expense of these children's health. Another notable example would be the Foxconn saga in Guangzhou, China. Foxconn is a Taiwanese company, with factories in China that produces electronic parts for major companies like Apple. It has been accused of providing poor living and working conditions, and even causing immense emotional distress which resulted in suicides. Such incidents clearly show the implication of transnational companies outsourcing their production to factories in developing countries, where these major companies can absolve themselves of the responsibility of caring for the workers' welfare. Although authorities from Apple did visit the factory and promises were made to improve working conditions, these were only done upon media





pressure, revealing the utter lack of genuine care for the workers and community so far removed from the headquarters. This thus shows that the firms' lack of identity and sense of belonging often can result in social irresponsibility, especially in terms of mistreatment of their workers in foreign lands. Therefore, it may be far too idealistic to want firms to be socially responsible.

Thirdly, it is imperative to note that it is unrealistic, especially with respect to small firms, to expect businesses to be socially responsible, given the resources required. Small enterprises may simply not have the capability to take on social responsibility. This is due to the fact that they have to fight for their survival and they do not have the economic means to do so as compared to larger corporations. One such example would be the local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) such as Polar Puffs & Cakes, which is a Singapore-based bakery and confectionery shop that has been in business for more than 20 years. Despite their relatively long history as an SME, they are unable to establish a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy and division within the company, unlike other big firms such as Ikea, an established furniture giant. This is because it lacks the financial capability to do so. Furthermore, even with some resources available, social responsibility is also often not the top priority compared to other more important issues like venturing abroad to expand their business and such. The priority of the firm and its shareholders would often be the expansion and long-term sustainability of the company before emphasising social responsibility, with the commonly-held belief that CSR projects are the prerogative of large companies. Hence, it would be unrealistic to expect most businesses, especially the smaller ones, to exhibit social responsibility as not many have the means of doing so.

Some critics may argue that it is realistic to demand firms be socially responsible, as they are in direct control of the impacts they have on society and the environment. They may cite examples like Starbucks, which pledges to reduce the felling of trees by using sustainable

methods of producing the cups used in its cafes. While I would not refute the ability of some firms to embrace social responsibility, it is imperative that one does not forget that firms are not obliged to incorporate social responsibility in their business. After all, businesses are there to improve the economy, and do not have to take on the onus of caring for the society. Companies like Chevron, which explores and extracts oil in areas like Nigeria, have harmed the environment and the health of those living around due to the pollution that it has caused, but no compensation was made to the people residing at the area, much less any actions taken to conserve the environment. The firm already has to concern itself with answering to the shareholders and thus needs to focus on its profits. Instead, considering the taxes paid to the local authorities, the onus should be on the government to ensure the environment and society's welfare. Hence, we cannot reasonably expect firms to be socially responsible as they do pay taxes to the governments and are not obliged to juggle the two conflicting objectives.

Some critics may assert that in recent times, where consumers are beginning to exercise their 'civic duty' by making critical choices on what they spend on and buying only products of companies whose social or political values they like, firms are pressured and can be expected to become socially responsible so as to attract investor capital and retain customer loyalty. Indeed, it is indisputable that there is a rising trend by firms to prioritize CSR. However, such ethically responsible consumers are still considered the minority in today's consumerist world and are thus unable to significantly encourage most firms to be socially responsible. For instance, Singaporeans who are largely a pragmatic lot seem to care more about other factors such as convenience, cost and personal preferences when making decisions about what to buy. With regards to the trade and consumption of shark fin, despite the new push to garner support for a banqueting and trade ban, there remains a long way to go in reversing the culture of consuming shark fin soup. As such, shark fin industries do not feel pressured to inculcate ethical



methods in their production. Therefore, we can see that it is still unrealistic for us to expect firms to be socially responsible since most consumers themselves are not socially responsible in the first place.

In conclusion, it is unrealistic for us to expect businesses to be socially responsible, for being profit-incentivised, they are not obliged to; even for the conscience-driven enterprise, they may lack the capability to do so. However, with awareness of climate change and increased concern over the firms' ethical practices or lack thereof, more firms may be seen to step up on social responsibility, bringing hope for more socially responsible firms in the future.

Chin Yi Ling 12S209



Review

The essay is on the whole very well-written, albeit pessimistic. The breadth of examples shows a consistent reading habit. Keep it up!

Is it ever justifiable for a government to use violence against its own people? [MJC2013JC2MBTQ1]

After the First World War, Syria was hacked from the carcass of the Ottoman Empire. After the Second World War, it won its independence, eliciting a pervasive euphoria amongst its people. After all the infighting that rages in this once-idyllic state and the torrents of abuses and violence that the government is dishing out against its own people, Syria may now cease to exist. Certainly, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is not the first leader to use violence against his own people. Throughout the history of mankind, governments around the world have used violence as a vital tool to uphold retributive and rehabilitative justice. Yet today, with the surging of new waves of democracy and the shattering of the notion that governments are omnipotent, we ask ourselves whether it is ever justifiable for a government to use violence against its own people. I, for one, believe

that the government is well within its rights and obligations to utilize violent methods to deal with the likes of dissidents, rebels and criminals because it has to be concerned with the interests of the larger majority of its people, whose safety may be undermined if these outlaws are not restrained. With that said, it is important to note that violence should not and cannot be used against peaceful citizens for the furtherance of personal interests, in the way that Gaddafi in Libya and Al-Assad in Syria have.

When the government reaches a crossroad where it has to choose between the security of the majority of its people and the sacrifice of the interests of a minority that is wreaking havoc, this is when it has to use violence to deal with these groups of uncooperative citizens resolutely and with conviction. One reason why a government would use violence against its own people would be to tackle people who are threatening to tear apart the social fabric of the country and undermine the physical well-being of its people. One such group of people is the political dissidents who spread malicious and distasteful opinions just to sow discord between the government and its people. These people propagate untrue rumours and create internal conflicts within the country. For example, in Tibet, monks with political agendas are resorting to self-immolation in the push for independence from China. They use methods of self-harm and propaganda to undermine the stability of the country. Given the provocative nature of such actions, the Chinese government has to use violent methods against these people immediately, to remove the source of the unrest before social harmony and camaraderie between its people are affected. In Singapore, the ruling government implemented the Internal Security Act, which allows the government to imprison and punish political dissidents without a trial. This was done in consideration of the fact that Singapore, being a young multicultural community, is even more vulnerable to such divisive actions. Therefore, given the importance of a cohesive community, a government is justified to use violence against its own people to prevent a minority from tearing



apart the social fabric of the country and hurting others.

Violence can also be used to uphold retributive justice. Murderers may be hanged and rapists, possibly caned. A government can use harsh punishment, including violence, against its own people who have committed crimes, so as to punish criminals who have flouted the law. This serves the function of deterrence, sending out a strong message to others to not commit crimes and undermine the legitimacy of the judicial system. The idea of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" resonates well here. In fear of violent punishment, potential criminals will think twice before they act. This is evident in Liberia, where the number of rape cases fell by 13.4% after the ruling government implemented a series of heavy-handed measures to deal with rapists, such as caning. This drastic decrease shows the effectiveness of violence in upholding retributive justice and ensuring that law and order would be well-preserved. Given the potentially immense benefit to the law-abiding community and society at large, a government is justified in using violence against its own people, those who have shown contempt and a blatant disregard for the law.

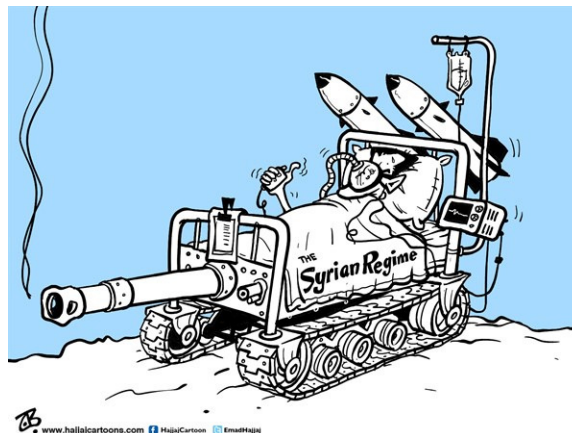
Moreover, appropriate use of violence to curb crime and instability, even against its own people, enables a government to project a safe, secure and positive image in the eyes of the international community. As mentioned earlier, the mere threat of the use of violence is a powerful mechanism to ensure political and social stability. Should a government avoid the use of violence against its own people when the need arises, it may be seen as inept and unable to control its own domestic affairs. The possession of violence as a tool for punishment is a symbol of the authority and control over its people, to ensure law is enforced and stability protected. Hence, without the appropriate use of violence against its own people, the government would lose credibility. For example, in the Northern Ireland conflict, otherwise known as the Troubles, the government was unable to prevent the splitting of the country into two distinct

religious factions and the eventual occurrence of a Bloody Sunday which resulted in the loss of lives of 26 innocent Irishmen – all this because the Irish government was apprehensive of using violence to tame the situation. As a result, the Irish saw a massive drop in investments, tourism and consumer confidence. Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland lost credibility in the eyes of international observers as they were seen as unstable and incapable of ensuring their own internal security. Therefore, a government is justified to use violence against its own people so as to assert itself as well-run and capable of presiding over its own domestic affairs.

Yet, some may argue that it is not justifiable for a government to use violence against its own people as it betrays the duty of care that the government should have towards each and every of its citizens and that it shows a blatant disregard for the rehabilitation of its people who have committed crimes. These critics argue that the government should at all times, use rehabilitative and non-violent measures such as jail terms, counselling and other forms of treatment. Unlike decades ago, there is now an unmistakable shift in the political, economic, social, normative and institutional structures in many countries towards being nurturing and people-centric, and the use of violence can be seen as the government forsaking the minority of people who have erred and making examples out of them. Hence, it may be argued that a government is not justified in using violence against its own people as it is antithetical to the notion of duty of care and the use of rehabilitation. However, on this point, I beg to differ. While rehabilitation is indeed important for these criminals, the government should still be allowed to use violence so as to deter potential criminals and send a clear message to the citizens that the law needs to be respected and taken seriously, that the government is taking a heavy stance towards crime-busting. In India, a rape case happens about every half-hour. This is because of the lax laws that the government has towards these atrocities and the aberrations of such rapists usually

go unpunished or lightly let off. As such, even the Verma committee, headed by the former Chief Justice, is proposing violent approaches such as caning or capital punishments to deal with this "rape culture" and instil a sense of respect for women. This shows that violence is still pivotal in a government's arsenal of weapons to deal with criminals. Furthermore, violence and rehabilitation are not mutually exclusive methods in combating crime. When it comes to rehabilitation, the assumption is that the criminals have some unresolved issues, mental illness or are lacking in some essential life skills, which rehabilitation and various treatments would then address. For some rational criminals, rehabilitation will not work and it may only be the threat of violence that ensures such criminals learn their lessons and not re-offend. Therefore, the government should be justified to use violence as it is able to deter would-be criminals and uphold the credibility of the justice system in the country, while also working in tandem with rehabilitation to restore the criminals to a life of contribution towards self and society.

Lastly, some may argue that it is not justifiable for a government to use violence against its own people, as it may often be in a bid to further their own personal interests. Autocratic countries are usually hurled with criticisms that they use violence to quash political opposition and instil a sense of fear in those who dared to go against them. Violence in these countries is usually used to stifle political freedom and limit the rights of citizens who contrive to sing a different tune from the government. The Arab Spring is a clear example of the way many dictatorial governments use violence to clamp down on political detractors. Gaddafi fired missiles and used the army to deal with civilians who embarked on peaceful protestations. Even towards the end of his rule, with the last remnants of power, he still used violence to take down those who opposed him, in a vain attempt to re-establish his own political power. More recently, there have been accusations that Syrian President, Bashar Al Assad used chemical weapons on neighbourhoods that were strongholds of the opposition, killing hundreds. On this point, I do concede that a government



may use violence against its own people to further its own agendas, and not for the interests of its people. This is especially so in countries that are still mired in autocracy and live under vile dictators that oppress, such as Cuba and Venezuela. However, it is important to note that such dictatorships and abuses of violence will probably be a thing of the past soon. With the advent of technology, people have undergone a political awakening and have shown that they are no longer political ignoramuses that will condone the devious abuses of violence. The Arab Spring represents the empowerment of the people who will no longer be silenced and oppressed. Therefore, while I concede that a government may abuse the use of violence for its personal interests, it has to be pointed out that such blatant abuses are few and far between.

In conclusion, I believe that it is justifiable for a government to use violence against its own people most of the time, as long as it is in the best interests of the people. With appropriate use of violence against the minority who threaten the peace and stability, the interests of the majority can be best protected. In his inauguration, the UN Secretary-General envisioned a future for the world - that is safe, secure and sustainable. Such a utopian future may only be possible if governments are allowed to use violence to ensure the stability of individual countries.

Terence Yeo 12A101





An excellent essay which demonstrates very good analysis and breadth of knowledge.

The education system is facing greater challenges today than ever before.

DISCUSS. (MJCJC1MYE2013Q5)

Living in an increasingly globalised and interconnected twenty-first century, there has been much debate about the relevance and capabilities of our education system to nurture skilled and competent individuals who can actively contribute to our society and community. It is certainly true that education systems of today are faced with increasingly surmounting and unprecedented challenges, never quite experienced in earlier decades or centuries. This is evident through the increasing dilution of values that challenge social norms, the arduous task to remain relevant and cogent with the radical and cosmopolitan world of today and the presence of increasing parental pressure that challenges the authority of educators.

First of all, one of the most pertinent reasons as to why education systems today are faced with unparalleled challenges in educating and disciplining students is the onset of rapid globalisation in the past decades that has led to the dilution of many societal values that were once rooted in our communities. Social vices like smoking, binge drinking and pre-marital sex are steadily and readily being accepted by our youths of today as acceptable behaviour and not antagonistic behaviour once strongly frowned upon. For instance, in a survey conducted by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it was reported that in 2012, 22% of high school students binge drank, a considerable spike from the 5% that did in 1975. As youths become increasingly tainted by the far-reaching ubiquity of social vices, educators and institutions find it increasingly difficult to educate a generation of youths that hold little regard

for perceptibly antiquated and conventional values such as abstinence, hard work and filial piety and it is becoming an uphill task to ensure that each and every graduate or educated individual is of high moral propriety. Furthermore, as youths become vocal with their expression of ideas and behaviour, it is increasingly arduous for educators to suppress their lofty ambitions and impart a set of fixed and confirmative set of rules to a generation of disgruntled, self-opinionated youths with their own aspirations, dreams and desires. Thus, education systems of today are being increasingly challenged due to the rapid abuse of social vices that threaten the superiority of the values and ideals that are being catechized by institutions around the world.

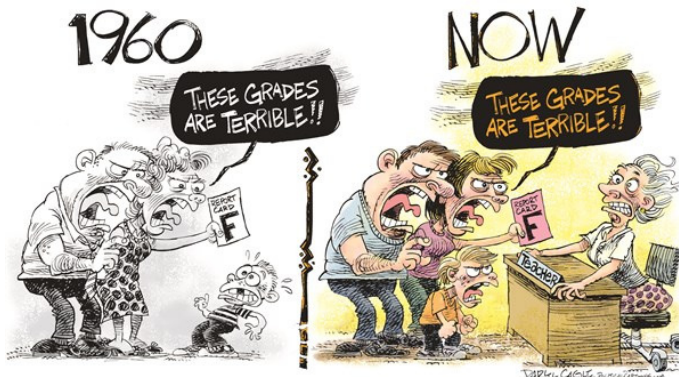
Schools and institutions alike have found it increasingly challenging to produce competent graduates that have the relevant expertise and abilities to compete in a cutthroat economy where ruthless competition abounds and where innovation is essential. According to a survey of employers, of which included accounting and marketing giant, Ernst and Young, released in April 2013 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 93% of the respondents reported that a capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems was most important for graduates. It is evident that many major multi-national corporations, ranging from oil and gas corporations such as Exxon Mobile to technological leaders, Microsoft, are now scouting and hiring employees that have a set of refined and proficient soft skills as opposed to the conventional "straight-As", academically adept graduate. Work ethics such as being able to manage inter-personal relationships, one's problem solving skills and communication abilities are now favoured over academic and technical excellence. Apart from having to nurture this new set of twenty-first century competencies, education systems have to contend with the ever-changing world of today where innovation and creative thinking are the keys to success. Schools have found it increasingly arduous having to strike an

intricate balance between the more conventionally perceived academically based subjects such as the sciences and mathematics, and the humanities-based subjects, as they now have to struggle to produce graduates that are not only competent in their relevant jurisdictions but critical thinkers, analytical innovators and creative professionals that can effectively contend and compete in the fast-paced economy of today and actively chart the world's progress.

Apart from struggling to remain relevant, education systems are also facing greater parental pressure and expectations that they often have to fulfil in many developed countries around the globe. With increasingly hectic lifestyles in many developed countries, many parents multi-task daily as both nurturers and professional executives, and many find it a constant struggle to balance both the rigour of their work as well as fulfilling the responsibility of parenting their children. Hence, it is only conceivable that many parents today tend to play a less participative role in their children's education and most would bear the perception that the educators and teachers would play a sufficiently adequate role in tutoring their child both academically and morally. With greater expectations from parents, educators often operate under intense pressure to ensure that their students are both performing well academically and are behaving responsibly. Furthermore, with the enhanced emphasis to perform academically and holistically well in school in today's competitive society, most parents today would not hesitate to lodge a complaint against an educator if his or her teaching ability is deemed as inept or

inadequate. The intrinsic value of being an educator in our society is being increasingly undermined as schools have to deal with both the discipline of students as well as the surmounting displeasure of parents. Hence, it is evident that schools today are facing more difficulties than ever before with the reduced participative role that parents play in their children's education and the swelling expectations that parents bear on the education systems today thereafter.

Detractors may assert that with the advent and rapid progression of technology, schools are finding it easier and more convenient to educate its students due to the ease of sharing information and imparting knowledge. Admittedly, technology in its many forms has made the submission and grading of work easier for teachers and has made communication between the pupil and the teacher far more convenient and has increased the efficiency of learning. However, in many ways, technology is often a bane to education rather than a boon. Due to the excessive chatting, online slang and shortcuts that have become a routine in the lives of these students, their linguistic and writing abilities have experienced a tremendous decline. According to a news article by the Voice of Russia published in March 2013, New York City's literacy rates are on the decline: a startling 80% of high school graduates lack basic skills like reading, writing and math and are required to relearn them before qualifying for community college. The decline of students' linguistic abilities have undeniably made it more challenging for institutions and schools to teach and examine the students at the intensity and rigour that their predecessors were and to ensure that academic standards and linguistic proficiencies are being religiously maintained. In addition, the rapid progressions made by technology have also made it easier for illegitimate dealings by students in order to attain academic acclaim. Doctored certificates and degrees are a major problem today where counterfeits appear so genuine that they are able to fool potential employers and professionals and a reported staggering 17% of college degrees and tertiary certificates are forged. Such malpractice





and increased accessibility to such unethical means have demeaned the value of learning and may discourage students from undergoing the exigency of sitting for and passing examinations and instead encourage them to adopt an easier route to instead doctor certificates as evidence of their feigned academic achievements. Apart from having to struggle to maintain the students' academic proficiency and moral conduct, schools now have to contend with cheating and academic malpractice to ensure that their reputation as learning institutions are not demeaned.

It is certainly true that education systems face a multitude of challenges ranging from the increasing rebellion of students to remaining cogent and relevant in educating its students. Despite the numerous challenges that our education systems of today face, I believe that with continued support from governing bodies, educators and students, schools can make a tangible and concerted effort to ensure that our education systems remain relevant and adaptable in the rising tide of tomorrow. After all, change is the only constant in life.

Lee Si Xuan 13S306

**Review**

The essay raised relevant, well-developed arguments. There was also a clear attempt at balance.

'Wealthy countries are not necessarily successful countries.' How far do you agree? (MJCJC12013MYEQ11)

Thomas Jefferson, in one of his most eulogized moments of wit, once said that "the care of human life and happiness, and not its destruction, is the first and only object of a good government." While the drafter of the Declaration of Independence did not allude to what motivated such a daring promulgation, it would not be too great a

stretch to assert that Jefferson sought to define good governance and warn us of the dangers of an authoritarian rule that failed to concern itself with the welfare of its people. Such an ominous foreshadowing seems especially relevant in the modern context of today, where states may be getting wealthier, but this has not equated to a concern for its citizenry. The question inevitably raised is as simple as it is divisive: are wealthy countries successful countries? This essay will hence contend that the definition of a genuinely successful country should not merely be the possession of wealth, but must instead encompass a spectrum of factors to equal weight, and therefore wealthy countries are not necessarily successful ones.

The premise of the arguments put forth by those who equate wealth and success is simple. They claim that in today's world, money is the root from which all other things stem. In the absence of money, all else would cease to function, because people as well as their governments would not be able to buy things, and this must translate to failure. They often contrast countries in extreme poverty, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, with affluent European states. While the distinction between the two types of countries is apparent, their argument falls apart on two counts. First, they assume that all things in the world can be bought via monetary transactions. While this may be true of material objects like food and clothing, can the same be said of other, perhaps more intangible things? Patriotism, good governance, and bonds of friendship; these, among others, are what I would argue a truly successful nation provides. Yes, countries in the Horn of Africa may not be the most successful, but can this solely be attributed to the mere lack of food and material goods? In the same vein, are European countries successful simply because their people have said material possessions? The simple answer to both these questions is a resounding no. It is evident that the success of a nation is defined in the exhibition of traits that run far deeper than the possession of material wealth, as I will go on to elaborate. On a second level, even if we should assume that the



possession of wealth, either by individuals or by states, leads to success, it is naive to even say that such wealth will lead to unilateral benefit as a result of buying things. Massive amounts of wealth placed in the hands of governments may lead to corrupt practices, which certainly do not guarantee a country's overall success. In the hands of certain individuals, this would be a glaring sign of inequality and inequity, which is not a mark of successful country, because countries must be considered as a group of starkly different individuals, each with their own needs and wants. The simplistic equation of wealth leading to material gain leading to success is thus severely flawed.

Aside from the rather mercantile notion that wealth and material gain are equitable to a successful country, I would argue that equality, especially in terms of wealth, is pivotal to a country's success. Far too often, wealthy countries are rich because money is located exclusively in the hands of the upper strata of society, leading to a poignantly apparent gap between the haves and the have-nots. While it is true that such a rift is merely an unfortunate by-product of capitalistic principles and is bound to occur as long as the economy is not operating on communist ideals, these divisions have simply become too great, leading to an irreconcilable empathy gap, wherein the rich and the poor fail to connect on even a basic level. Resentment and strife burgeons, and this in turn cripples civic society as it becomes unable to progress. The workforce loses motivation to work and be productive, and in dire, more extreme cases where tensions become estranged, protracted conflict ensues. Exemplifications of this occurring today are not hard to find. The 'Occupy Wall Street'



series of sit-ins were reflective of deep-seated rage at the disparity between the top 1% of Americans in terms of wealth, who possessed three quarters of the nation's money, and the bottom 99%. This disgruntled majority was not only observed in America, as 'Occupy' movements caught on, quickly spreading to over purportedly affluent countries, like Canada, Italy, and Spain. The aggrandizement of the 'Occupy' movement's global reach was coupled with an augmenting degree of violence, as initially peaceful civil disobedience erupted into skirmishes with law enforcement officers, devolving so far in some places that a plot to set off explosives on a bridge in Cleveland was uncovered. It is hence pertinent to note that income gaps severely cripple a nation's ability to be successful, or even operate on a basic level, and a dissatisfied plurality of citizens is certainly not what a successful country should embody. Hence, simply having wealth should not be equated to success, as this wealth must be distributed as equitably as possible to ensure the common happiness of society at large.

On another level, success of a democratic country must take into account the basic rights and freedoms of its citizenry. The axiom of this point is that successful countries also evince a strong respect for rights and freedoms as entitled to all human beings. All too often, states fail to consider this, leading to an empty civic society. These rights and freedoms are necessary to protect man's life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Without such rights, man is left unable to self-actualise and pursue his vision of happiness, leaving him to feel empty and disillusioned. This may in turn invoke dissatisfaction with the government, that which was elected no less to protect his very happiness, and hence provoke political instability. China, currently the world's second largest economy, has grown rapidly to become a world economic power in the last two decades, propelling hundreds of millions of her urban population to the middle class but never having embraced electoral democracy. While Chinese citizens have not been so disgruntled about the lack of electoral freedoms that they have

embarked on protests the scale of the countries involved in the Arab Spring, it is notable that dissent continues to fester in various parts of China, such as in separatist states Xinjiang and Tibet. Chinese dissidents have also increasingly embraced the internet as a means of expressing and organizing opposition to the government or Communist Party leadership, and technology tools have become a principle way for Chinese citizens to spread otherwise censored news and information. Blogging and micro-blogging platforms such as Weibo regularly contain such views. A number of prominent Chinese dissidents, scholars, and rights defenders and artists maintain blogs to which they post essays and criticisms of the Communist Party. Wealthier countries may not invite the

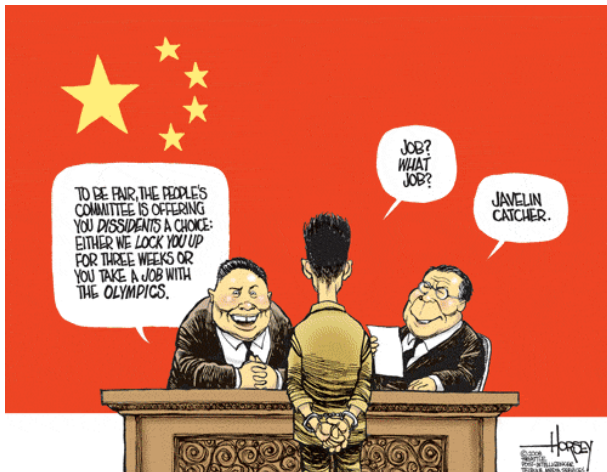
scale of dissent poorer countries do, however, they cannot be said to be successful states since they are depriving their citizens of fundamental freedoms which every citizen of a country is entitled to. Governments must respect and uphold the sacrosanct rights endowed to all of mankind, in order to defend the peoples happiness, a quality inherently tied to the success of a nation.

In conclusion, wealth is a factor when analysing how successful a country is. However, simply having wealth should never be considered sufficient. States should use this wealth wisely, and wealth must also be held by all strata of society in the most equal fashion permissible. Furthermore, a government's respect of its people's rights and civil liberties is imperative.

Gerald Teng Boon Hwi 13A301

Review

The essay is very well-written with a strong personal voice and impressive vocabulary. While the essay lacks a fourth point, the depth of insight already makes the essay very comprehensive.





ZENITH Brush Up!

Use of Illustrations in Essays

Illustrations are a **necessary feature** in every GP essay. However, an oft-heard complaint from students is that they can't think on the spot of illustrations. So how should one improve on this? It would have to be the good old way of daily reading of newspapers, books, magazines, even model essays.

Most students would however know that it is not as simple a case of 'name-dropping' just to illustrate one's points in an essay. So here are some tips on improving the use of illustrations in your essays.

WHAT TO ILLUSTRATE?

- OV topic sentences – optional to illustrate, but can be useful. Just make sure that the OV illustrations are kept short and succinct.
- SVs and Rebuttal – **NECESSARY** to have illustrations. Your explanation alone isn't sufficient. Your paragraph will either sound descriptive/narrative, which makes it very 'O levels'; or it will sound hypothetical, which makes it completely unreal and unconvincing.
- Illustrate what you mean by the topic sentence, and/or the reasoning behind your topic sentence.

Where would you add the illustration in the paragraph below?

Question: Can crime ever be eradicated?

In order to examine why crime is unable to be eradicated, it would be pertinent to first examine its roots and the plausibility of first eliminating that. Poverty is one of the many reasons why people commit crime. It is easy to say that criminals who committed crime due to poverty are foolish, however, one is in no position to comment until he or she has personally experienced the same degree of grinding poverty which leaves one in dire lack of the money to feed one's family or meet the most basic of needs. Under such circumstances, one is left with no choice but to resort to crime such as robbery or kidnap to meet that immediate need. Others may also see crime as an easy way out of the poverty cycle, a way to earn 'easy money'. Of course, the next question is whether poverty can be eradicated, and the clear answer, after years of concerted global efforts, is no. The impossibility of ever eliminating poverty means that there will consequently always be a group of impoverished people who are compelled to turn to crime to meet their financial needs. As such, crime can never be eradicated so long as its roots continue to exist.

Here, it would be useful to illustrate with statistics on the high rates of robbery or kidnap cases that commonly take place in inner cities and slums where the poor live, eg. favelas in South America.

Illustrate this claim with the example of a crime that poor people resort to in order to earn 'easy money' – becoming drug mules, turning to prostitution or trafficking of young women/children.



HOW TO ILLUSTRATE?

1. **Case studies - intensive analysis of an individual unit (e.g., a person, group, or event) so as to stress factors in relation to your point. You would use a case study if the example is very salient and expresses your point best.** What case studies best illustrate the following issues?

- The impact and scale of terrorism – 911, Madrid train bombings, London bombings
- Too much media freedom having an impact on social harmony – 2005 Danish cartoons saga
- Destructive force of natural disasters - 2011 Japan Kansai tsunami, 2004 Aceh tsunami, Hurricane Katrina
- The importance of the Arts in Singapore in helping to attract tourists – The Singapore Biennale, MBS packages for shows and stays
- Heightening tensions between Singaporeans and foreign residents – Serangoon Gardens foreign worker dormitory protests, the incident that led to Cook a pot of curry day
- Censorship compromising the entertainment/creative value of certain artworks – Royston Tan's 15.

In giving case studies, to avoid rambling on and on, ***keep to the details of the example that illustrates your point.*** Peripheral details are unnecessary. What details would you remove from the bottom paragraph? What examples and details are instead necessary?

Question: Does technology aid or hinder people's freedom?

Technology has the ability to give people freedom of speech, especially on the Internet today through social networking platforms, such as forums, Facebook and Twitter. A good example of how technology has aided the freedom of thousands would be the recent Jasmine Revolution in the Middle Eastern countries, first Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and now the ongoing conflict in Syria. These countries have suffered under cruel and corrupt dictators for years, where leaders are rich and people are poor. For example, Hosni Mubarak, the fourth President of Egypt from 1981 to 2011 first came into power after the assassination of the previous Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat. He ensured his reelection through the years by turning to mass vote rigging and vote fraud. He also reined in the opposition by relying on a repressive security force. Mubarak obviously enriched himself, his family and other cronies, gaining an estimated US\$70 billion in family wealth over 30 years of rule. He owned expensive homes in Manhattan and Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, his son Gamal also known to own an ostentatious home at an exclusive address in Central London. These countries thankfully are today finally breaking free from these dictators using online social media, made possible by technology. Many of the revolutions and protests were organised through Facebook or Twitter, the popular social networking sites. It is through these sites that rebels have gained supporters as they are able to disseminate ideas and information efficiently to millions without the oppressive governments being able to crack down on them or restrict their access to such information. It is notable that Facebook today has more than 800 million members and Twitter, 500 million. Nevertheless, in sum, technology through such platforms, allows for people to exercise their freedom of speech.

Check below! Did you cancel out the right lines?



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All of this background information on Mubarak's corruption is unnecessary as it does not concern the point presented in the topic sentence.

Instead, details of the actual beginnings of the Arab Spring using Facebook or Twitter campaigns should be inserted here.

There is of course no need to discuss both social media platforms' reach here.

2. Give a list of 2 – 3 examples. 1 isn't good enough. 2 – 3 short and briefly described examples would do.

Technology cannot be said to have made our lives easier as it has had adverse impacts on our environment and ecology, which in turn create more problems for us to solve as a human race. The numerous adverse impacts on our environment run the gamut from ❶ pollution, ❷ over-extraction of resources to the greatest danger to Mankind as yet – ❸ global warming. To illustrate, the vehicles that technology created to allow convenient and speedy travel run on gasoline or other fossil fuels which are ❷ fast depleting even as we speak. The process of burning fossil fuels also further contributes to ❶ pollution by emitting gases such as nitrogen oxide, ozone and particulate matter, well known to cause lung irritation and respiratory illnesses. More importantly, vehicles emit copious amounts of ❸ carbon dioxide, the main culprit to global warming. Lest one thinks that it is only vehicles that cause humans environmental problems, rather than technology, let us not forget that all forms of technology invariably run on energy sources, which are generated by burning fossil fuels. Furthermore, technology must also bear some blame for contributing to ❹ toxic waste. When technologies are updated, people invariably dispose of obsolete gadgets and appliances, which fill our landfills with ❹ e-waste containing lead and cadmium, which are contaminants that are highly toxic and non-biodegradable. Technology has thus cursed us with many environmental problems which need cleaning up, thus how can it be said to have made our lives easier?

Do take note however, that in giving examples, they should not be so brief that they do nothing to help illustrate your point at all. How would you expand on the following example to illustrate the point effectively?

International travel seems to have a modern-day nightmare in the light of the fact that it has become an easy target for extremists and terrorists to hijack and attack, for example the 911 terror attacks.

Hint: Illustrate how 911 showed that aeroplanes are an easy target for terrorists. 4 planes were hijacked. Once in flight, the passengers could do little to stop the terrorists nor land the plane safely.



Lastly, do **use your common sense when choosing examples**. Make sure they actually illustrate the point!

International travel cannot be called a nightmare in view of how convenient it is today for people to travel anywhere and everywhere they like at speeds unfathomable in the past. For example, with spacecraft, Man can now even get to the Moon and back... **[Like...seriously!?!]**

3. **Statistics – Needed when you are looking at observable trends. However, trends tend to sound fabricated in your imagination unless some study has been conducted and published by reputable sources and cited in your paragraphs!** What statistics would you cite for the following observable trends?

- Rising costs of living – inflation rates, rising housing prices, food prices, Consumer Price Index
- Rising income gap - Gini coefficient
- Less job security – unemployment rates, recent retrenchment figures
- Economy not doing well – GDP growth (quarter on quarter)
- People getting stressed – suicide rates, people seeking psychological help or medical help for stress-related ailments eg. hypertension, gastric ulcers, insomnia
- The increasing importance countries place on education – government expenditure on education, proportion of national budget devoted to education
- Young people becoming more materialistic – More young people toting branded products, rising credit card debt amongst young people

4. **Anecdotes, idioms and fables – these are probably useful for philosophical questions and for interesting introductions.** However, these are very hard to use and do take care not to get lost in the narration of the story line, forgetting instead about the point meant to be illustrated.

Qn: How important are dreams?

People often scoff at creativity and deem it as the whimsical fantasies of lunatics. However, these “whimsical fantasies” are what created some of today’s greatest technological advancements and creations. An example would be the invention of the first aeroplane by the Wright brothers. The brothers often dreamt about what it would be like to fly and these dreams were often laughed at by their friends and people in the community. It took the Wright brothers several tries to successfully build a plane, but when they succeeded, it wiped the smirk off everyone who had ever dismissed their dreams as rubbish. It was the dream of the two brothers that we now have such a quick and convenient form of travel – air travel. Thanks to the Wright brothers, human beings are able to fly. Another notable example is the inventor of the modern-day telephone Alexander Graham Bell. His newly patented idea of telephones was dismissed as ‘idiotic’ by telegraph companies in the 1800s. Thankfully, he pursued his dream and continued working on the invention of the telephone, for it is unthinkable how communication would otherwise take place today. This shows the importance of dreams in that they are able to move people to come up with new means and ways to achieve it, which in turn leads to many contributions to society as clearly demonstrated in the above example. Hence, it is important that people have dreams and not write them off as fantasies.

Hint: You can also try using Greek myths/legends eg. Pandora’s Box, Icarus or Aesop’s Fables to illustrate values or moral lessons.



WHY USE ILLUSTRATIONS?

You know you have to use illustrations, and you know why you are using the illustrations but the reader would not know unless you explain **WHY**. **Showing the link between the example and point it illustrates** is very important.

There are two ways in which this link can be shown:

a) Writing a connecting sentence after the example:

Question: Consider the importance of humour.	
<p>Humour is also commonly used in speeches and written work with the intention of being engaging. In writing, humour can come in the form of something ironic or something completely unimaginable. Speakers also use it to drive at a point while keeping the audience entertained and craving for more. It allows for the capture of the audience's interest, which is key for an excellent read or talk when the audience bores easily. J.K. Rowling once delivered a speech for graduating students at Harvard University, entitled 'The fringe benefits of failure', where she poked fun at her early failures in life. Even though the topic was meant to be serious, she managed to integrate her own sense of humour, making the graduates laugh and more importantly, accomplishing what she set out to do: <u>ensure that the message concerning the importance of resilience to failure was deeply engraved in the graduates' minds</u>. As such, I believe that humour is important when addressing an audience to ensure an engaging and memorable experience.</p>	Topic Sentence
	Explanation
	Example
	Linking sentence
Summation	

b) Writing the example to include the explanation and link to the point:

Question: The word 'failure' should never be used in education. Discuss. (07A levels)	
<p>One cannot simply continue in one's learning journey without knowing one's gaps in knowledge, and the use of failure in assessments is meant as a clarion call for students to either <u>plug their gaps, or improve on their methods of studying</u>. By learning from where we have gone wrong, students are able to then pinpoint their faults and make improvements from there. In Mathematics, by learning from what one's common calculation mistakes are, one would then be able to <u>reduce the number of careless mistakes one makes</u>. In the mastery of English language, by learning from one's failure to use subject-verb agreement or the subjunctive correctly, one would be able to <u>successfully write in grammatical language the next time</u>. Hence, the use of failure in assessments is an important tool for students to <u>realize their weaknesses, so as to make the necessary revisions</u>. This can then truly be called education.</p>	Topic sentence
	Explanation
	Example 1
	Example 2
	Summation of point and stand.

** Notice how the same idea of 'plugging gaps' and 'improvement' are repeated in the examples?



Other problematic uses of examples:

- When you use examples in your opposing view (OV), beware that your rebuttal (R) is rebutting the point in the OV, and not the example in the OV.

In the following example, what should the rebuttal be instead?

Qn: Does technology aid or hinder people's freedom?

Technology can also be used to restrict people's freedom, usually in the form of surveillance technologies. Authoritarian governments like North Korea and the Soviet Union in the past have been known to employ widely CCTVs and phone taps so as to deter dissident activity, somewhat akin to the dystopian society described in Orwell's novel, 1984. Today, people may even use surveillance technology to restrict their family members' freedom, such as to spy on their spouses whom they suspect of infidelity. However, such use of surveillance technology to catch cheating spouses is not always effective and one has to engage a private detective instead...

The rebuttal should concern how technology's use to hinder people's freedom is not necessarily wrong nor unjustified. This rebuttal instead evaluates if technology is effective in hindering people's freedom, which is completely the wrong POC.

- Examples need to reflect the context of time/space required in the question. Eg. Modern society / Your society / The developed world / Poor countries...

What is wrong with the example below? What would you change?

With the advancement of technology, more work can be done in the shortest amount of time possible, thus bringing convenience to mankind. For example, before the invention of computers, people used to type their documents with a typewriter, it was a hassle for the user as typing errors could not be corrected and thus the typist often needed to retype the whole document again. However, today the computer allows users to edit their documents before printing it out...

The example is outdated and hardly shows "advancement of technology". The student can add on another example of how far computers have come today and the multifarious complex tasks it can perform far faster than the human brain...

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

GOOD LUCK BRUSHING UP ON YOUR ILLUSTRATIONS!

ZENITH Abstract

WHISTLEBLOWING

Who Are They & Why They Do It

Imagine that you have learnt that somebody is planning to dump toxic waste in a reservoir not far from where you live. This information is not public. **What would you do?** It appears likely that you would alert the authorities or perhaps talk to the press. In some circumstances, however, we might be told that doing this would be immoral or a breach of confidence. These are the cases in which you are employed by the perpetrator. Alerting the authorities would make you a whistleblower and doing so without first discharging your duty of loyalty to your employer would make you guilty of performing an act that is not morally permitted (especially according to business ethics!).

Today, incidents of organisation wrongdoing are increasingly making headlines. While once thought to be rare, broad coverage of recent corporate wrongdoings has led to a widely-held belief that scandal may be uncovered in virtually every business, organisation or even government. With greater frequency, reports of wrongdoing are made by members close to the inner workings of the organisation, rather than by external auditing agencies or your average cunning news reporter keen on a sensational exposé. These whistleblowers risk retaliation both by their organisation, the law, or censure from the media and the public in their efforts to expose, perceived or not, immoral or illegal acts.

Word Origin

Whistleblower comes from the common practice of law enforcement officers and referees blowing a whistle to indicate an illegal action or foul play.

Do you know this idiom?

blow the whistle ~ (figurative) to report someone's wrongdoing to someone who can stop the wrongdoing.

Whistleblowing Defined

In short, it is the casual name for reporting a suspected wrongdoing: illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices, at work. Officially this is called "making a disclosure in the public interest". While whistleblowers typically have both internal and external reporting channels available to them to report organisational transgressions, research suggests that nearly all whistleblowers initially attempt to report wrongdoing via internal channels which is less threatening for the organisation compared to external reporting which threatens public scrutiny or legal intervention.



In the United Kingdom, the Public Interest Disclosure Act introduced in 1998 states that whether you are an employee, agency worker or self-employed (if supervised), you have legal protection if you suffer a detriment or you are dismissed because you blew the whistle by making a "protected disclosure". What amounts to a protected disclosure includes:

- if someone's health and safety is in danger;
- damage to the environment;
- a criminal offence by an employer;
- if a company is failing to honour its legal obligations (eg. required insurance for its business);
- the covering up of a wrongdoing



Retaliation against Whistleblowers

Once a whistle is blown, the organisation's management may make two types of decisions: (1) to disregard the claim or take appropriate action, or (2) reward or retaliate against the whistleblower.

The use of external channels, however, is more likely to elicit the organisation's retaliatory behaviours and quite reasonably so since it violates the power and authority structure present within the organisation. Nonetheless, how anonymous the whistleblower can remain is a crucial factor in ensuring his or her protection.

What are the forms of retaliation? <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Attempted coercion of the whistleblower to withdraw accusations of wrongdoing▪ Outright exclusion of the whistleblower from the organisation▪ Organisational steps to undermine the complaint process▪ Isolation/ostracism of the whistleblower▪ Character defamation▪ Imposition of hardship or disgrace upon the whistleblower▪ Forms of discrimination or harassment▪ Threat to personal security	Retaliation is motivated by the organisation's desire to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Silence the whistleblower completely▪ Prevent a full public knowledge of the complaint▪ Discredit the whistleblower▪ Discourage other potential whistleblowers from taking action (setting an example)
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Logically, the organisation's response depends in part upon whether management agrees with the merit of the whistleblower's claim and with the whistleblower's obligation to take action. Under circumstances where an organisation is dependent upon the continuation of the wrongdoing or when they are not dependent upon the whistleblower, the organisation is more likely to retaliate against the whistleblower and continue the wrongdoing.

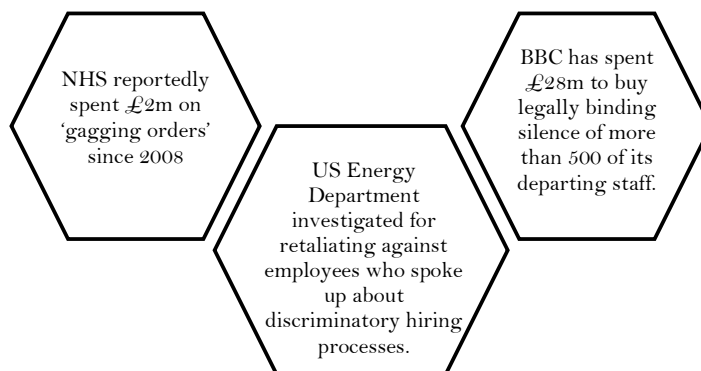
Retaliation rate against U.S. company whistleblowers climbs, senior staff affected, survey finds

Julie DiMauro | Reuters Blog | 6 Sept 2012

NEW YORK, Sept. 6 (Thomson Reuters Accelus) - Retaliation against workplace whistleblowers is rising sharply, expanding into previously safe categories of employees such as senior-level managers and even in workplaces with notably strong ethical cultures, a study found. The trend comes as new regulations require more formal reporting channels for internal whistleblowing and more managers use them, study sponsors said. They recommended that companies more closely monitor what happens to whistleblowers after they report.

The findings were released this week by Ethics Resource Centre (ERC), which bills itself as a non-profit, non-partisan research group. They are contained in a supplemental report to its 2011 National Business Ethics Survey (NBES) which examined nearly 5,000 employees of private-sector companies. The survey found that 45 percent of employees witnessed misconduct at work — a new low since the bi-annual survey began in 1994, and a record 65 percent of those witnesses reported the misconduct.

However, more than one in five (22 percent) of employees who reported workplace misconduct in 2011 said they also experienced some form of retaliation, compared to 12 percent in 2007 and 15 percent in 2009, ERC said. Retaliation was defined as physical harm, online harassment, harassment at work or at home, demotion, job shift changes or cuts to hours or pay.

**THINK:**

- Consider the reasons why there might be a difference in obligations and priorities between individual and organisation.
- Should all companies implement internal procedures to enable employees to raise concerns internally about their practices and processes?
- Should whistleblowing be a protected right, protected by organisations and/or governments?

The Ethics of Whistleblowing

For someone considering whistleblowing, the moral dilemma is largely the conflict between political free speech and loyalty towards workplaces. But another ethical issue arises when we consider who the whistleblower is. Heroic vigilante aiming to kill harmful corporate and/or national secrets and free the world's information or disruptive tattletale, data terrorist guilty of treason of the highest order?

Although whistleblowers are often portrayed as courageous individuals who attempt to take that first step at controlling illegal organisational behaviour and therefore are deserving of respect, the act of whistleblowing can be viewed as a disloyal and very disruptive act which may bring much harm to the whistleblower's colleagues, peers and many others not directly connected to him/her. Although some whistleblowers might have provided a great service to society, might the world be best served if the need for external whistleblowing were obviated by appropriate management practices?

The Verdict on Whistleblowers in Limbo**Whistleblower as the Good Patriot?****Senator proposes National Whistleblower Day on same day as Manning verdict (30 July 2013)**

The idea might not win approval with the rest of the Senate, but Republican lawmaker Chuck Grassley has put in a resolution for a new commemorative holiday for the US – National Whistleblower Appreciation Day.

'Anything we can do to uphold whistleblowers and their protection is the right thing to keep government responsible,' said Grassley, who is famous for personally aiding whistleblowers in their battles against rule-breaking officials. 'If you know laws are being violated and money's being misspent, you have a patriotic duty to report it.' The choice of 30 July, the date suggested, is not accidental. It marks the 235th anniversary of what was one of the earliest whistleblowing regulations implemented anywhere – by the Founding Fathers in the Continental Congress in the midst of the Revolutionary War.

Extract from Grant Thornton International

Alex MacBeath, global leader of privately held business services says, **"Whistleblowing can be an invaluable way to alert management to poor business practice within the workplace.** Often whistleblowing can be the only way that information about issues such as rule breaking, criminal activity, cover-ups and fraud can be brought to management's attention before serious damage is suffered.



"Privately held businesses can greatly benefit from introducing measures to accommodate potential whistleblowers within their organisation. Without sufficient measures in place, whistleblowers can be victimised as informants or traitors rather than a valuable early warning system which can save lives, money and reputations. The other, and perhaps greater and more prevalent, risk is that they remain quiet or leave the organisation and the underlying issues remain undetected."

Whistleblowing as a Dangerous Act of Civil Disobedience?

Though whistleblowers like Snowden and Assange might be applauded by many as courageously championing the truth and justice, civil liberty and working for the general good, there are some who perceive whistleblowers as self-aggrandising, irresponsible intelligence leakers deserving of the punishment they receive from corporations or governments like the US's Espionage Act. They view their behaviour as egotistical, one of betrayal and civil disobedience, sharing important – though not necessarily classified information – with people who should not know about it, especially when that information pertains to national secrets which could threaten national security. There are certainly mixed feelings, and strong ones at that, evoked by those who perform jailbreaks on information. One thing is true however, the more whistleblowers reveal, the greater the threat against them.



THINK:

- Should our right to free speech be restricted by our loyalty towards organisations to which we belong?
- What are some of the reasons for whistleblowing?
- What are some of the reasons why people condemn whistleblowing?
- When is a whistleblowing act no longer seen as necessary and good?

The Whistleblower's Quandary

NYTimes Opinion | Adam Waytz, James Dungan & Liane Young | 2 Aug 2013

IMAGINE you're thinking about blowing the whistle on your employer. As the impassioned responses to the actions of whistleblowers like Edward J. Snowden have reminded us, you face a moral quandary: Is reporting misdeeds an act of heroism or betrayal?

In a series of studies, we investigated how would-be whistleblowers make this decision. Our findings, to be published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, not only shed light on the moral psychology of whistleblowing but also reveal ways to encourage or discourage the practice.

In one study, we asked a group of 74 research participants to write a paragraph about an occasion when they witnessed unethical behaviour and reported it (and why), and we asked another group, of 61 participants, to write about an occasion when they witnessed unethical behaviour and kept their mouths shut. We found that the whistleblowers used 10 times as many terms related to *fairness* and *justice*, whereas non-whistleblowers used twice as many terms related to *loyalty*.

It makes sense that whistleblowing brings these two moral values, fairness and loyalty, into conflict. Doing what is fair or just (e.g., promoting an employee based on talent alone) often conflicts with showing loyalty (e.g., promoting a longstanding but unskilled employee). Although fairness and loyalty are both basic moral values, some people prioritize one over the other. Studies show that American liberals tend to focus more on fairness, while American conservatives tend to focus more on loyalty, which may help explain differing responses to Mr Snowden. To some he was defending the rights of all Americans; to others he was a traitor to his country.

Does such variation in moral values predict whether someone will decide to blow the whistle? In another study, we gave 83 research participants a questionnaire. Some questions probed their concern for fairness (e.g., "whether or not someone was denied his or her rights"), whereas others probed their concern for loyalty (e.g., "whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group"). We computed a "fairness score" and a "loyalty score" for each participant. We also asked questions about how likely they would be to report a stranger, an acquaintance, a friend and a family member for crimes of varying severity (from petty theft to murder).

We found that neither fairness nor loyalty alone predicted whistleblowing. However, the way people traded one value against

another — the difference between people's fairness and loyalty scores — did. People who valued fairness more than loyalty expressed greater willingness to blow the whistle, whereas people who valued loyalty more than fairness were more hesitant.

To test whether such whistleblowing decisions are susceptible to manipulation, we asked 293 participants across two experiments about their willingness to blow the whistle, but first we had them write short essays on the importance of fairness or the importance of loyalty. We compared whistleblowing scores between these two groups and found that participants who wrote about fairness were more willing to blow the whistle than those who wrote about loyalty.

In our final study, we sought to determine whether this writing exercise could be used to influence people's behaviour in a non-hypothetical situation. For our real-world test, we focused on Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online marketplace where users ("requesters") post tasks like proofreading and evaluating advertisements, to be completed by other users ("workers") in exchange for money. Reputation is paramount on Mechanical Turk, and users can publicly evaluate and even blacklist one another.

In our study, involving 142 users of Mechanical Turk, we first asked the participants to write a short essay about the importance of fairness or loyalty. Then we made sure that all of the participants at some point during the study witnessed the substandard work of a fellow Mechanical Turk user. At the end of the study, we surprised the participants by creating a whistleblowing quandary: we asked whether the user whose shoddy work they witnessed had violated any rules and whether we should block that user from future tasks. When we compared the responses from our two groups, we found that those who had written about the importance of fairness were significantly more willing to report a fellow worker than those who had written about loyalty. Even a nudge can affect people's whistleblowing behaviour.

This does not mean that a five-minute writing task will cause government contractors to leak confidential information. But our studies suggest that if, for instance, you want to encourage whistleblowing, you might emphasize fairness in mission statements, codes of ethics, honour codes or even ad campaigns. And to sway those who prize loyalty at all costs, you could reframe whistleblowing, as many have done in discussing Mr Snowden's case, as an act of "larger loyalty" to the greater good. In this way, our moral values need not conflict.

Know these Famous Whistleblowers?

POLITICAL

W. Mark Felt, a.k.a 'Deep Throat': Leaked information using the pseudonym 'Deep Throat' about the Watergate scandal to *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. 30 years later, this whistleblower was identified as former FBI Associate Director Mark Felt and with subsequent intervention by the US Justice Department, Nixon was eventually held accountable for his illegal actions.



Erin Brockovich: The town of Hinkley, California's residents suffered from abnormally high levels of cancer. When Brockovich found out that Hinkley's water supply was contaminated with hexavalent chromium from the nearby Pacific Gas & Electric Company, she convinced her employer, lawyer Ed Masry, to file a lawsuit. Their actions led to the largest toxic tort settlement in US history with a pay-out of US\$333 million to Hinkley's 650 residents.

Julian Assange: 42 year old Australian activist who is the editor-in-chief and founder of WikiLeaks. Initiated website in 2006 in Iceland, using cryptographic code to hide leakers' identities while they spill the private data of government agencies and corporations. With WikiLeaks, Assange has published secrets on The Church of Scientology, private bank Julius Baer, US military purchases, Battle of Falluja, Guantanamo prison manuals and Malaysian politics. He has been granted political asylum by the Ecuadorean government in London since Aug 2012 and is #68 on FORBES List of Powerful People (2010).





Edward Snowden: 29 year old former CIA technical operative who leaked National Security Agency data exposing the extent of Anglo-American state internet and phone surveillance to the world. He fled to Hong Kong in May and has now received temporary asylum in Russia. His actions have since sparked an international discussion about privacy and surveillance.

"I really want the focus to be on these documents and the debate which I hope this will trigger among citizens around the globe about what kind of world we want to live in...My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them."

"The government has granted itself power it is not entitled to. There is no public oversight. The result is people like myself have the latitude to go further than they are allowed to."

Bradley Manning: Assange's biggest leak source seems to have been motivated by a genuine revulsion at US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Manning downloaded a trove of military and diplomatic information, including over 500,000 army reports and classified combat videos to WikiLeaks. One of these videos, a recording of a US Apache helicopter opening fire on a group of civilians in Eastern Baghdad has over 13 million views on Youtube.



Susan Lindauer: Former CIA asset personally witnessed and participated in the CIA's detailed foreknowledge of the 9/11 attacks. She exposed US and Israeli complicity in the 9/11 attacks and was indefinitely detained at a US military base in reprisal under the Patriot Act.

CORPORATE

Christopher Meili: A Swiss-American whistleblower who in 1997, whilst working as a night guard at the Union Bank of Switzerland in Zurich, discovered UBS officials destroying Nazi-era records of credit balances of deceased clients and books from the German Reichsbank which the bank required to return to heirs of the victims. After Swiss authorities sought to arrest Meili, he was given political asylum in the US.



The 'GE' Three: In 1976, three engineers Gregory C. Minor, Richard B. Hubbard and Dale G. Bridenbaugh 'blew the whistle' on safety problems at nuclear power plants in the US in 1976. They timed their statements to coincide with their resignations from responsible positions in General Electric's nuclear energy division, later establishing themselves as consultants on the nuclear power industry for state governments, federal agencies and overseas governments. They gained the attention of journalists and the anti-nuclear movement.

Jeffrey Wigand: Former Brown and Williamson employee gained national fame in the 1990s as a tobacco industry whistleblower. In court, in the *Wall Street Journal* and on *60 minutes*, Wigand took public his knowledge that tobacco companies had conducted extensive campaigns to conceal from the public their knowledge that cigarette smoking was highly addictive and caused lung cancer.





Dr. Peter Rost: A ex-senior executive Vice President of Pfizer, Rost publicly criticised the pharmaceutical industry over the price of drugs in 2004 and testified in the US Congress against illegal and criminal business methods of the pharmaceutical industry. He was then isolated at Pfizer and subsequently fired in 2005. Today, he is a blogger seeking to uncover wrongdoings and unethical marketing by Big Pharma companies.

Gwen Olsen: Former pharmaceutical sales rep working for healthcare giants including Johnson & Johnson, Syntex Labs, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Abbott Laboratories and Forest Laboratories. She offered insider's knowledge of unprecedented dangers in drugs sold to an unsuspecting public. Olsen was particularly moved to action after personally experiencing psychiatric medications and seeing how it altered her life, as well as the deep grief of having lost her niece – following her treatment with psychiatric medications – to suicide.



THINK

- *What sorts of tensions are raised between the individual whistleblower and authority?*
- *Consider the issues of cyber activism and vigilantism. How are they similar or dissimilar to whistleblowing?*

Find out more about Whistleblowers via NYTimes

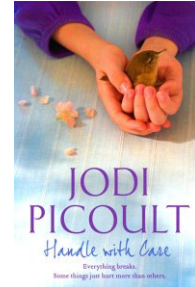
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/w/whistleblowers/index.html>

ZENITH Read & Review

Handle With Care

By Jodi Picoult

"Everything breaks. Some things just hurt more than others." As I read this from the cover of the book *Handle with Care*, I found myself drawn to it as I could not believe that a such simple quote could evoke so much feelings from within me. The book is an effortless masterpiece by Jodi Picoult that tells the story of Willow, a young girl suffering from osteogenesis imperfecta - a severe form of brittle bone disease. Her mother, Charlotte O'Keefe, who is struggling to make ends meet, is given the chance to save her family from financial ruin by suing her obstetrician (and best friend) Piper for a 'wrongful birth'. The story unfolds as Charlotte ends up in a dilemma between saving her daughter and saving her friendship,



As an individual who loves reading books with happy storylines, I found myself particularly emotional as I read this book. Picoult wrote the book in such a way that readers can put themselves in the shoes of the main characters throughout their time of struggle. I could not decide whose side to take in the book as I constantly considered the many perspectives of the lawsuit. On the one hand, I empathised with Charlotte as I believed she sacrificed her friendship out of a mother's love for her daughter. On the other hand, I felt sorry for Piper who was down in the dumps for being betrayed by her best friend. At the start, I often questioned if there really was a need for the lawsuit, but as my reading progressed, I learned to see the lawsuit in a different light. Instead of looking at the consequences of the lawsuit, I began to see that there were actually great things that came out of the proceedings and one of it was family love. Even though the O'Keefe family came under scrutiny because of the lawsuit and Sean O'Keefe testified against his wife Charlotte O'Keefe, the family still stuck through thick and thin together and the couple's love for each other gradually reignited.

This book has taught me to see things from different perspectives and to look on the brighter side of things as not everything is as bad as it seems. Just like the lawsuit, life is indeed unpredictable. We may have our ups and downs but if we can see the positive side of the down periods, then it would be so much easier to persevere and stay strong, just like the O'Keefe family. Life might be tough, but I draw strength from one of my favourite quotes, 'It may not be easy, but it is going to be worth it.'

After reading the book, I turned to the cover page again to reread the quote. "Everything breaks. Some things just hurt more than others." This is when I realised the true meaning of the quote, but I understood that no matter how hurtful things may be, if we tell ourselves to consider things from a different angle, perhaps we may begin to see life itself from a different perspective.

Handle with Care may not be the most exciting book or have the most intriguing storyline, but this book is definitely worth reading if you intend to take a breather from the usual clichéd fairy-tale-like novels!

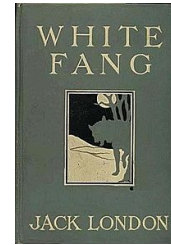
Star Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Reviewed by Seetha d/o Surash 13S502

White Fang

By *Jack London*

As an avid animal lover, I find my search through many libraries highly biased, in the sense that I am completely inclined towards books detailing the life of animals. It has become my habit, or my vice, to ignore all other genres. Not that they are boring, heaven forbid, but I just cannot bring myself to start on new genres. This is why, in my experience with an inordinate number of animal-related books, I feel that *White Fang* is an incredibly detailed and enrapturing journey following the life of a wolf in a world dominated by humans.



In the book, *White Fang* is the name of a wolf born in the wild with a full-blown natural wolf as a father and a feral wolf, formerly of human domestication, as a mother. The story, as told in a third person's perspective, follows *White Fang* from his birth onwards.

The thing about most animal books is that they are full of meaning inspired by animals. In this case, the meaning is almost always about how humanity, in the form of compassion, is seen even in animals. However, for this book, there is little humanity. Themes reign supreme in the book, and the most ubiquitous of them all would be that of the unquestioning cruelty of nature. Beginning with a little introduction on merciless Mother Nature at the start, the Darwinian theme of 'survival of the fittest' not only manifests itself in characters throughout the book, but also as the guiding rule that shapes *White Fang* into a remorseless beast of the harsh and untamed wild. Another theme would be that of the difference between humans and animals. Regularly in the book, man's inventiveness and creativity is contrasted against *White Fang*'s instinct and unquestioning thinking towards the world, making us question our standard criteria for 'intelligence'.

For those who feel turned off by the pitiful notion of an animal's painful struggle for survival, fear not. The cold lack of humanity only exists in the first two parts of the book, serving to juxtapose sharply with the warm compassion felt in the latter half of the book. The bitter storm pouring before the sweet sunshine makes those rays of light so much sweeter. I promise you (readers of this review), that you are in for a heart-warming surprise in the last part of the book.

And, I can gleefully say that this book has a happy ending!

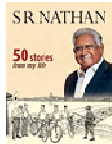
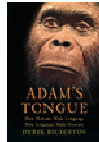
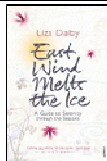
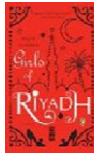
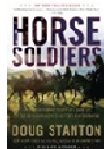


Star Rating: ★★★★★

Reviewed by *Lee Zheng Da 13S111*



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<p>Title</p> <p>50 stories from my life Author: S R Nathan with Timothy Auger Publisher: Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2013. Call No.: 959.57 NAT Summary: This book is a simpler version of former president S R Nathan's memoirs, An Unexpected Journey: Path To The Presidency, made easier for readers.</p>	
<p>Adam's tongue: how humans made language, how language made humans Author: Derek Bickerton Publisher: New York: Hill and Wang, 2010. Call No.: 401 BIC Summary: How language evolved has been called "the hardest problem in science." Linguist Derek Bickerton thoroughly integrates the story of how language evolved with the story of how humans evolved.</p>	
<p>East wind melts the ice: a guide to serenity through the seasons Author: Liza Crihfield Dalby Publisher: London: Vintage, 2008. Call No.: 818.54 DAL Summary: In this collection of essays, Liza Dalby takes the 72 seasonal units of an ancient Chinese almanac as seeds, and grows them into a year's journal, entwining personal experience, natural phenomena, and ruminations on the cultural aesthetics of China, Japan, and California.</p>	
<p>Girls of Riyadh Author: Rajaa Alsanea; translated by Rajaa Alsanea and Marilyn Booth Publisher: New York: Penguin, 2008. Call No.: SAN Summary: A bold new voice from Saudi Arabia spins a fascinating Scheherazade-like tale of four young women attempting to navigate the narrow straits between love, desire, fulfilment, and Islamic tradition.</p>	
<p>Horse soldiers: the extraordinary story of a band of U.S. soldiers who rode to victory in Afghanistan Author: Doug Stanton Publisher: New York: Scribner, 2010. Call No.: 958.104 STA Summary: Horse Soldier s is the dramatic account of a small band of Special Forces soldiers who secretly entered Afghanistan following 9/11 and rode to war on horses against the Taliban.</p>	
<p>Human : the science behind what makes us unique Author: Michael S. Gazzaniga Publisher: New York : Harper Perennial, 2009, c2008. Call No.: 612.823 GAZ Summary: One of the world's leading neuroscientists explores how best to understand the human condition by examining the biological, psychological, and highly social nature of our species within the social context of our lives.</p>	
<p>Your flying car awaits : robot butlers, lunar vacations, and other dead-wrong predictions of the twentieth century Author: Paul Milo Publisher: New York: Harper, c2009. Call No.: 909.82 MIL Summary: A delightful mixture of science fiction, utopian vision, and just plain crazy ideas, Your Flying Car Awaits is a hilarious and insightful compendium of the most outrageous and completely ridiculous predictions of the 20th Century.</p>	



ZENITH Read Up!

Here are some useful facts and statistics collated from the Economist. For a more comprehensive compilation, please download from MJC AsknLearn/General Paper Practice & Revision/Workbin/Statistics from the Economist (2013).

Did you know that:

- ☐ The highest number of people who died due to organised internal conflicts in 2012 was in Syria (72 900), Libya (30 800) and Mexico (25 400). [Both Syria and Libya are fighting/fought a civil war and Mexico is fighting a drug war].
- ☐ Though China has reduced the number of crimes that it punishes by death, more prisoners are executed there than in all other countries combined.
- ☐ Japan has both the highest number of universities in the top 100 in Asia and the top-ranked Asian university overall, the University of Tokyo.
- ☐ If female employment rates matched those of men, GDP would increase by 5% in America & 9% in Japan by 2020.
- ☐ More than one-third of all homicides of women are committed by a current or former partner. And nearly a third of women report having experienced violence at some point in their lives, either physical or sexual, at the hands of a partner.
- ☐ Same-sex marriage is now legal nationwide in 11 countries, including Argentina and South Africa.
- ☐ Completing high school generates an extra \$4,000 in net income a year on average, and completing college should give another \$12,000 on top of that.
- ☐ Over 14.7m tucks, peels, jabs and lifts were performed by licensed plastic surgeons in 2011. Plastic surgery is most commonly performed in South Korea, Greece, Italy and US.
- ☐ Considered on a cost per patient per day basis, Americans spend more than four times as much on hospital care as many other countries.
- ☐ Hepatitis kills more people than HIV in most countries.
- ☐ Since 2008, daily newspaper circulation in America has fallen by 15% to 41m while advertising revenue has plummeted by 42%, accounting for three-quarters of the global decline in advertising revenue in the same period. However, circulation in Asia has risen by 10%, offsetting much of the decline elsewhere.
- ☐ More Chinese people live outside mainland China than French people live in France while some 22m ethnic Indians are scattered across every continent.
- ☐ By the end of this century, the average person will be a little over 42 and newborns can expect to live to 81. The world's population will have stabilised at just over 10 billion.
- ☐ Apple remains the world's most valuable brand and is worth US\$185 billion.
- ☐ Iraq has suffered from the most terrorism attacks, including 11 of the world's worst 20. Iraqis comprised one third of deaths from terrorism between 2002 and 2011.
- ☐ America creates the swiftest millionaires, and also the most (around 5m households, or 4% of the total).
- ☐ Global defence spending fell by 0.5% to \$1.75 trillion last year. The top military spenders are US, China and Russia.
- ☐ The world's richest people have a combined wealth of \$25.8 trillion. America, home to 3.4m very rich folk, Japan (1.9m) and Germany (over 1m) account for more than half of the world's wealthy.
- ☐ Bribery is most widespread in poorer, badly run parts of the world in Africa and the Middle East: the highest rates are reported in Sierra Leone (84%), Liberia (75%) and Yemen (74%).
- ☐ Tokyo is the world's most expensive city to live in, followed by Osaka, Sydney and Oslo.
- ☐ Nuclear power is in decline ever since the Fukushima crisis, although 31 countries still generate nuclear power.
- ☐ The world is getting warmer. Globally, the ten hottest years on record have all been in the past 15 years.
- ☐ Solar energy currently provides only a quarter of a percent of the planet's electricity supply,
- ☐ Global consumption of primary energy has grown by 30% over the past decade. But almost all of that growth has come *outside* the rich world. In four of the past five years, energy demand has fallen in the OECD, despite GDP growth in three of those years.
- ☐ The world's religious make-up: Christian (31.5%), Muslim (23.2%), Unaffiliated (16.3%), Hindu (15%), Buddhist (7.1%), Folk/traditional/others (6.8%)



ZENITH Notices

Call for Contributions 2014

The ZENITH 2014 series is always looking out for interested writers to contribute their writing and reflections on issues and topics of relevance. The editorial team is calling for contributions for 2014:

Meridians Write

Both seniors and freshmen are welcome to submit entries on topics of current relevance, issues that interest you or even creative pieces of work, such as book reviews, poems, short stories or even cartoons or other illustrations relevant to GP or Literature. You may also select from your best pieces of writing from the work you engage in, both in and out of class. You can submit your writing through your GP tutors or directly to the editor.

Please submit all completed works to the Editor *any time* throughout the year. (NB: ZENITH is published in March & August yearly.)

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