



ZENITH 2016

This is a special compilation of the best ZENITH essays from 2010 - 2015, organised according to topics. In order to make this a useful tool for revision, do attempt to unpack each question thoroughly before reading the accompanying essay. You may even add on other points and illustrations you have thought of while reading the essay. Also, some of the facts and statistics in the essays may no longer be current as some of them were written up to five years ago, so do update them for your own benefit!

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 POC of the question you are answering. Lastly, do note that while the essays provide a convenient source of 'inspiration' for your own P1 assignments, as the great writer Samuel Johnson said, no man ever became great by imitation. You have been warned: do not attempt to copy these essays and hand them in as your own work!

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

The ZENITH Editorial Team

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'Women will never enjoy the same rights as men.' Do you agree? (2006 A levels Q6)

World War II, although a bloody reminder of humanity's capacity for violence, was also the spark of a more subdued and important revolution for mankind: a proliferation of women's rights. From the American housewives who were allowed to vote, to the creation of an all-women air brigade in the Soviet Union, World War II was an important catalyst for women's rights that has evolved to what we know and appreciate today. Hence, given the great progress in women's emancipation from the past to the present, I do believe that women will eventually enjoy the same rights as men.

Firstly, I believe that women will enjoy the same rights as men as both men and women have different political and social perceptions of women's rights and roles today. With the many women's rights movements that spawned over the 1960s to 2000s, such as the famous birth control and reproductive rights movement of 1968 to the Feminist movement now, both men and women have now come to realise that women are not the lesser being in the human race, but are of equal standing as men. Thus, misogynistic views that portray women as mere 'baby factories' or 'lesser creatures', that were once tolerated, or even celebrated by the public, are now highly scrutinised and condemned by both men and women alike. In addition, men's infamy for being male chauvinists was also debunked when both genders rose together against sexist bigotry. Hence, different political and social perceptions today assure that both men and women can sympathise with one another's difficulties and successes in life, and thus any sexist attacks on women can no longer distort men's view of women anymore. It is hence no wonder that a recent incident involving a male politician heckling a fellow female politician while she addressed the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly drew much protest from the Japanese, female and male alike. The heckler, Tokyo Assemblyman Akihiro Suzuki, eventually apologised for his inappropriate behaviour but nevertheless had raw eggs pelted at his office and his Facebook page flooded with harsh criticism of his shameful conduct. This illustration highlights the sea change in the Japanese's perception of women. Thus I do believe that women will enjoy the same rights as men due to the reason that a paradigm shift has already begun and is gaining momentum.

Secondly, I believe that women will enjoy the same rights as men as both genders have access to education today. After World War II, education became more widespread and in-depth to cater to growing public needs for skilled and highly-educated labour. Hence, women are now more educated than before, which empowers them to stand up for the rights they deserve. A great example is Malala Yousafzai, a Palestinian activist who was schooled by her father. This led her to fight against the Taliban's oppression of girls' right to education by blogging for BBC and going on the television. Although she almost lost her life fighting for her cause when she was just 15, this backfired for the Taliban as she rose in international fame, and is now a champion for women rights around the world, while showing just how vile the Taliban in Pakistan truly is. To boot, she was recently awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her fight for girls' rights to education. Therefore, with education, women now know how to wield the tools they need to ignite change for themselves and other women alike. In addition, this gives women social mobility, allowing them to fight poverty, caste or any other social markers that inhibit their freedom to fight for change. Hence, with better education for women, I do believe that they will eventually enjoy the same rights as men.

Finally, I believe that women will eventually enjoy the same rights as men as many women around the world are today given political suffrage. As social and political perceptions change from before, most countries give women suffrage as a sign of political maturity and equality for both sexes. Thus, as women are finally able to vote now, they are able to have their voices heard through their vote for their favourite politicians. Likewise, politicians must also take into account female voters' needs and concerns, such as employment and social equality, in order to earn their votes during the elections, since they now technically make up half of the votes. Hence, politicians voted into legislation nowadays are more involved in women's rights than ever before, as a way to reel in more female supporters. These elected politicians will then actively address the women's rights issues of his



or her voters tabling new policies, speaking on behalf of women in national debates and voting on policies, thus aptly representing their female voters' concerns. For example, Hillary Clinton, the former Secretary of State of the United States, has always pushed for equality for women both in America and internationally. One can never forget her scathing remarks about China's abuse of woman in the 1995's World Conference on Women in Beijing, or the criticisms on Taliban's abuse of women in Afghanistan in the 1990s. All these built her reputation as a champion of women rights in America. Hence, it came as no surprise that her political support is strong in the USA, especially amongst the female voters who are currently rallying for her to run for the presidential campaign in 2016. This thus shows that political suffrage empowers women to vote for who best represents them, who in turn address unfair policies and laws against women, allowing women to eventually enjoy the same rights as men.

Detractors of my view may argue that while most women do enjoy similar rights as men, job equality is still greatly lacking for many countries. For example, Korean *Chaebols* or business conglomerates rarely have any women taking on executive positions and even then their pay is still noticeably lesser than their male counterparts. Although this is true now, I do believe that this would not be the case for the future. One must understand that the female rights movement is a rather novel idea that has not run its full course. Hence, we have much room for improvement to reach perfect equality. A great example is none other than Japan, where Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently said that women are an irreplaceable asset in Japan's road to economic recovery and that the "glass ceiling in Japan shall be broken". This is in stark contrast to the infamous male-driven society Japan is known for. Hence, although most societies have work to do in this regard, most of them have and will put in hard work to bridge female and male income gaps and job opportunities, which in turn shows that in time to come, women will eventually enjoy the same job rights as men.

Some pessimists also argue that women in certain developing countries are still deeply oppressed by patriarchal societies, showing that women will never enjoy the same rights as men. For example, places such as India still suffer from a high incidence of sexual crimes committed against women, such as the infamous case where a woman was brutally gang-raped on a bus in 2012 in New Delhi and eventually died from her wounds. Another notable example is Saudi Arabia, where women are still campaigning for a seemingly basic right – the right to legally drive. Although this is true today, I still believe that all women will eventually enjoy the same rights as men. This is due to the widespread coverage and condemnation of such crimes internationally, such as the rape case in New Delhi stated above. This forces the governments of these countries to keep a closer eye on its people and enforce the law more strictly, so as to keep its dignity on a global stage. The silver lining for the 2012 Delhi rape case was the aftermath surrounding it, where the Indian government scrambled to catch and prosecute the guilty, while new laws protecting women were pushed out swiftly, all amidst the watching eyes of both the national and international press. Thus, with this pressure to treat women fairly by other countries, I believe that even patriarchal societies will one day succumb and give women the equal rights they deserve. Hence, I believe that women will eventually enjoy the same rights as men.

It has been sixty-seven years since the Paris treaty was signed by the Allied nations in 1947, and women have already come so far to forge a better and brighter future for themselves in the form of equal job opportunities, fair courts and social mobility. All these are the triumphs of women rights, all done in so little time, which gives me hope that in the next sixty-seven years, women rights will surely become equal to men's.

Goh Ting Qi 14S111

 **Review**

Excellent and current examples beef up soundly-reasoned arguments. The strong personal voice is used to good advantage to add a sense of personal conviction to the essay.

'The grievances of women are a thing of the past.' To what extent do you agree? (SRJCJ2PE13Q12)

In a Swedish kindergarten called *Nicolaigarden*, the most popular toy amongst the children is a set of dolls designed to teach children about emotions. Each doll wears a different expression but that is almost all they wear. Except for the knitted hats on their heads, the dolls are completely naked making it easy to see that they have no distinguishable gender. As times change and the world becomes increasingly globalised and modernized, it appears as if the feminist dream of gender equality is slowly but surely becoming a reality. The grievances that women once faced such as objectification, unequal treatment, unequal rights, or sexual crimes committed against them are gradually becoming a thing of the past because of the greater efforts made to recognize and to resolve the problem of gender inequality. However, it is all too idealistic and optimistic to believe that gender inequality and such grievances have been totally eradicated. Thus, I largely disagree that the grievances of women are a thing of the past.

As greater efforts are made to ensure and push for the emancipation of women by female activists and governments around the world, a notable amount of success has been achieved as over 70% of the female population has joined the workforce with an average of 20% taking on C-suite positions in the boardroom. Hence, critics may argue that the grievances of women are indeed a thing of the past. However, they fail to realize that these figures are calculated mainly based on statistics from developed nations, while many developing and traditional countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia are still ranked amongst the bottom few in the Global Gender Gap Report 2013 by the World Economic Forum. In the same report, which measured the political participation, economic equality and rights between men and women, it was found that 20% of countries have made no progress or are falling behind in narrowing the gap between men and women. Even in developed nations such as the United States, a woman only earn 77 cents for every dollar that a man makes doing the exact same job. Thus this shows that women are still not receiving equal economic participation and even if they are given equal opportunities for economic participation, they are still economically valued lower as compared to men. Hence the grievances of women of being given full work emancipation is not a thing of the past but still prominently exists all around the world be it in developed or less developed nations.

Furthermore, some chauvinistic males may point to the fact that efforts to improve or protect women's rights have resulted in more laws being developed or implemented not only to ensure that women enjoy the same rights as men but also for women to enjoy more rights than men. In many countries, Gender Courts have been set up to protect the rights of women. In the light of the tragic and brutal rape case that rocked India and the rest of the world in early 2013, the issue of rampant gang rapes in India was highlighted and rape cases are now fast-tracked to the Gender Court to ensure that justice is served to the victims of gender crimes. Thus, to a certain extent, women's rights are now better protected and the grievance of not receiving proper justice seems now a thing of the past. However, these critics are too quick to jump to that conclusion because they have overlooked the fact that there is still insufficient or no efforts yet being made to address the root cause of the problem of crimes committed against women, among these, the need for better enforcement of protection for women and more awareness of the severity of sexual crimes committed against women. In India, law enforcement is still rather lax and corruption among the Indian authorities is rife because very little has been done to increase transparency and change the ignorant attitudes of these Indian authorities towards gender equality. As a result, many sexual offenders especially the rich are still able to pay off officials with large amounts of "under the table" bribes and thus allow these criminals to escape scot-free. Unfortunately, this does not only happen in India but in countries such as South Africa, Ethiopia and Brazil too, where there are still many unresolved rape cases. Therefore the grievance of women is not a thing of the past even with increased efforts and more preferential laws to protect their rights because without proper enforcement, these laws are merely paying lip service

WHAT TERRIFIES
RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS
LIKE THE TALIBAN
ARE NOT AMERICAN
TANKS or BOMBS
or BULLETS..



IT'S A
GIRL
WITH A
BOOK.



to women and are practically useless.

Another reason why the grievance of women is not a thing of the past is because of the failure to change the mind-sets and attitudes of men in many traditional societies that women should be treated equally. Since the mind-set that men are superior to women is deeply rooted in certain cultures and have been the case for centuries, efforts made to promote equal treatment still face strong cultural resistance. For example, in tribal villages in Pakistan, women still suffer ritualistic and barbaric honour killings and there has been little success to change this custom practiced by these tribes. In a BBC documentary called 'India, a Dangerous Place to be a Woman', an Indian woman in her early twenties living in Britain is shown to travel back to India to visit her hometown after the infamous rape case that occurred this year in New Delhi and to come to terms with the conservative beliefs of both men and women in India with respect to women. In one scene, she visited a girl who suffered a sexual harassment attack after leaving a club as she was deemed as a "prostitute" simply for attending a friend's birthday party in that club. Even though she was dragged around like a rag doll and had her clothes ripped off her when she exited the club, the most appalling thing was that even the girl felt that she was partly responsible for the attack and blamed herself. This shows that even in modern times, both women and men still hold strongly to regressive, oppressive mind-sets about the position and treatment of women in society, especially where women have to live in fear of their own safety.

Another grievance that women have not been able to escape from is their own commodification. Whether in the eyes of the public or the media, women are still perceived and used as objects of desire. This is because of the commercialization of many businesses that use provocative images of women in their promotional advertisements, hence leading to the greater objectification of women. These suggestive images attract the most attention as they use the ideal body measurements of "36-24-36" for their models, measurements that most women crave to have for themselves and most men desire to have in the women they admire. It is an undeniable fact that many girls and women all around the world and from all walks of life struggle with this desire to have the "model" body. In fact, this objectification of women has even led to a series of protests called the "Miss America Protests" in which women burn their bras and go topless as a symbol of releasing themselves from the restrictions that the world has set for women. It may seem ironic for women to want to break away from being objectified yet flash themselves and bare their breasts – the very thing that is used to objectify women. However, it only goes to show the limited power that women have to command attention to this issue, hence having no choice but be objectified again to gain attention and bringing light to the issue in an attempt to eradicate the gender stereotypes that women are bound by. Thus, this proves that the grievances of women are still not a thing of the past as women continue to fight against stereotypes and prejudices that objectify them.

In conclusion, the grievances of women are definitely not a thing of the past even though greater efforts have been made to help women achieve greater gender equality. There are still many strong women out in the world fighting for the rights of women, aiming to empower women. Malala Yousafzai, the teenage Pakistani female education rights activist who survived being shot in the head by the Taliban for fighting for education rights for girls, concluded in a book that she recently published with the sentence, "I am Malala, the world around me has changed but I have not." Hopefully in the future the world will change for the better, granting women more rights and achieving greater gender equality such that the grievances of women will truly be a thing of the past.

Maira Woo Wai Kuan 12S414

 **Review**

A well-written and highly articulate essay, cleverly addressing the issues that still surround the debate of gender equality and women's rights, but at the same time, reasonably arguing that there have been some improvements over time.

**'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 defence 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.

'The family, not the state, is responsible for a child's well-being.' Comment. (MJCJC2MBT12Q5)

Our family defines us and tells a thousand stories with respect to the way we are brought up. Our parents are the ones who are responsible for shaping our characters and instilling moral values into our minds. The state, however, does play a supplementary role in being responsible for a child's well-being, through the policies it sets in education and other aspects that affect children's well-being. Yet the state is unable to provide a child with what a family can. Thus, it can be said that the state is responsible for a child's well-being, albeit to a smaller extent as compared to the family.

Notwithstanding the fact that the family has a greater responsibility in ensuring the well-being of the child, it is inevitable for the state to be fully responsible in particular cases. Orphans who have been abandoned by their parents or have lost both of their parents due to unforeseen circumstances are taken care of by the state, as they may not have relatives who are able to do so. In such cases, it is definitely the state's responsibility to take care of the child's well-being as no one else has the ability nor moral responsibility to do so except for them. Many countries' governments set up orphanages to take care of children who have lost both of their parents due to illnesses or accidents. These orphanages are fully funded by the government and they provide the orphans with every necessity they would require until they have reached the age of eighteen. In Singapore, children whose parents are absent due to serving time in prisons are either put in the care of orphanages or foster parents appointed by the state. The state is therefore, responsible for the child's upbringing in special circumstances where the family is incapable of doing so. At the very least, this will ensure that the child has his most basic of needs met.

Yet, a family is able to provide a child with a special something that the state will never be able to – love. Love ought to be regarded as the most crucial component that defines a child's well-being. A child that does not receive ample love in the course of growing up will find it hard to be as happy as another child who does. Orphans who are under the care of the state may receive shelter, food, clothes and other necessities, but they will never experience how it feels like to be loved by a family of their own, unless they have been permanently adopted by loving adoptive parents. Being clothed and fed by an orphanage or a temporary foster family is nothing close to receiving love, care and concern from one's own family members. It is ultimately, the quality and not the quantity that matters and the well-being of a child will inevitably be compromised when they do not receive the right quality of love in the course of growing up. In fact, those who break the law are often those who fail to grow up in a proper family. In studies conducted by American prisons, it was found that up to 75% of the prisoners in various US states had spent some part of their childhood in foster care away from their real families. Due to inconsistent attention and upbringing from foster parents, many of these people may fail to have proper moral guidance, eventually veering towards the wrong track in life. Even if the state intervenes to provide them with rehabilitation courses, it may not certainly be useful, with the possibility of it being ineffective as the mentality of these offenders has been moulded from a very young age. As such, the well-being of a child will inevitably be compromised when he has been deprived of the desirable quality of love in the course of growing up, which the family can best provide.





Furthermore, the family, not the state, is responsible for the child's well-being since the decision in bringing a child to this world lies in the hands of the parents. More often than not, parents choose to give a child a chance at life because they want to experience the joy of parenting as well as to have someone to carry on their family name due to customs and traditions. With many developed societies experiencing shrinking populations, governments of such countries may have come up with a slew of pro-natalist incentives such as baby bonuses or other cash incentives to attract couples to have more children. While some couples may thus be attracted to have more children due to the governments' incentives, nonetheless, the parents of this child are still held responsible for the well-being and upbringing of their offspring as they were the ones who made the decision to bring their little ones into this world. The family is thus responsible for ensuring that the child's well-being is met the moment he or she enters the world, and not the state.

Granted, it is true that the state is somewhat responsible for children's well-being as they have the ability and authority to shape policies that have a direct bearing on children, especially in education. For example, the Singapore government, through the Compulsory Education Act, has mandated that all Singaporean children residing in Singapore attend national primary schools until primary six at the minimum. Such a law would ensure that every child is sent to school and given an opportunity to receive education. Other education policies enacted by the state also have great impact on the child's well-being, for instance how education reform in Singapore has led to a wider spectrum of education paths in sports and the arts. Yet, this does not mean that the family should abdicate their responsibility for their children's education to the government entirely. Merely sending a child to school will not necessarily improve the child's chances to succeed academically; a proper support system needs to be established at home to supplement this. A child may be given the knowledge, but the application eventually lies in their own hands and the family plays an instrumental role in ensuring that this knowledge that has been provided by the state is being mastered, allowing the child to reach his fullest potential possible.

Although parents and families are the ones who should be fully responsible for the tutelage and well-being of a child, there is a high possibility that they are able to do a better job with assistance from the state. In Japan, subsidies are distributed by the government to alleviate the parent's burden of raising a child. This provides the parents with more finances which they can use to provide the child with better childcare, healthcare and education services. In many welfare states such as UK, single mothers are given housing allowances and income support allowances so as to help them to make ends meet, instead of having to work a few jobs to support their families. This would translate to being able to spend more quality time with their children, thus improving their children's well-being. However, of course, ultimately the onus is still on the family or the parent to make the best of whatever financial aid is given to them to help in child-rearing. Being the parent of the child, they would be the ones in control of how the money is best spent to improve the welfare of their children. If the funds are squandered, whatever aid is given by the state would have little effect on the child's well-being. This will then defeat the purpose of having such aid from the state.

In conclusion, the responsibility of a child's well-being should indeed lie mostly in the hands of the family instead of the state. Although the state may provide a child with the bare necessities they require in the process of growing up, they will never be able to provide the same quality of love, care and concern that a family does. Thus, the role of the state in ensuring the well-being of a child is merely secondary and it is highly consequential for the family to fulfil their role in ensuring that they are fully accountable for the child.

Tracy Tan Peck Hui 11A202

 **Review**

A thoughtful and well-argued response, with good critical analysis and awareness of issues. The essay could have been beefed up with more examples, but on the whole, it was an enjoyable read.

'The word failure should never be used in education.' Discuss. (07A1M1Q12)

Failure is an experience of one's inability to accomplish something one set out to do. As inevitable as life itself, one would have at some point of his life faced the prospect of, or experienced failure. Children, at young ages, would probably first encounter failure in schools, when sitting for their first tests or examinations. A humbling and sometimes painful experience, the use of failure in education has been lambasted for damaging young and fragile egos. Yet, I am of the belief that the use of failure is useful and should be used in education.

People often comment how the young are simply too vulnerable to be considered a failure. The education journey one takes begins at a young tender age, where one is still in the process of growing up. Being not fully mature, both physically and emotionally, many believe that children are too young to take the blow of being labelled a failure as they are still unable to cope with it and encountering such a scenario may lead to emotional trauma to them. Yet, seen from another light, failure can be the wake-up call for the need to strive harder and to do more. Of course, the experience of failure should be coupled with encouragement by teachers and parents to work harder and not as a form of discouragement and labelling. It is thus with this experience of failure that then motivates young minds to want to improve, so as not to go through the humbling experience of failure again. Thus the use of failure in education is an efficacious tool to drive students to improve on their studies.

Furthermore, without the use of failure, and therefore assessments in education, how would students get feedback on their performance in their studies? The word 'failure' is applied in education to indicate to students – and other stakeholders such as teachers and parents – whether what students have learnt from class thus far is correct. One cannot simply continue in one's learning journey without knowing one's gaps in knowledge, and failure in assessments becomes a clarion call for students to either plug their gaps, or improve on their methods of studying. 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 reduce the number of careless mistakes one makes. In language, by learning from one's failures in using subject-verb agreement or the subjunctive correctly, one would be able to successfully write in grammatical language the next time. Furthermore, a student's failure provides an indication to educators on the student's weak areas and hence allows them to be able to work on it to further develop and improve the students. Hence, failure should be used in education as an important tool for feedback.

Critics of the use of failure in education would then point out that assessments are not always an accurate gauge of one's ability and potential, disadvantaging late-bloomers. Such groups would advocate a system where assessments take place at later ages or not at all, so as to let children



develop to their full potential in that subject. Though this may seem a plausible suggestion, it clearly ignores that assessments exist for a good reason: to assess standards which obviously do exist. Failing a particular test or assessment is a clear indication that a student has not made the bar and is not ready for the next level. What, after all, would be a good substitute for measuring if a student is ready for the next level of difficulty, academic or otherwise? Students in Singapore for example, take the PSLE at the age of twelve to determine which streams in secondary school they will embark on. Such streams are to cater to the different standards different students have. Should there be no 'failures', students who are academically weak may be banded

together with stronger students, struggling their entire secondary school life with a syllabus that does not cater to their need for a slower learning pace. Students who are more able, yet banded with



weaker students who should have 'failed', find themselves bored in class when teachers dumb down lessons to cater to the lowest common denominator. The fact that no education system has abolished summative assessments and the use of failure speaks volumes of its importance for education.

There is also the criticism that it is the prospect of failure in education and its use that leads to tremendous competition to excel in the education system, and consequently stress for students. Such stress is harmful and causes some to buckle under the pressure. Such critics cite how in countries like South Korea, China and Singapore, students committing suicide over poor exam results is not unheard of. To further add on, not only students face such forms of stress, but parents and teachers also do too. Parents desire their child to be successful in the future while teachers are accountable to the parents and schools about the results of the students. As a result, it creates much stress and competition on not only students but also the parents and teachers. However, we must understand that failure, competition and stress are a reflection of reality in many societies around the world. In fact, what students experience in the course of education is merely a small percentage of what they would experience during their working life, where people are willing to do anything to be the best. What they experience in their education life is therefore simply a preparatory step to face the cold harsh reality of the working world. Through failures, we are able to stand up more firmly to future obstacles as we are able to learn the fact that the society has high demands for us. Furthermore, committing failures and understanding the fierceness of competition during one's earlier years in school is much better than to do so during our work life, where the stakes are much higher, and failures less forgivable when it involves millions of dollars or even lives (depending on one's vocation). Hence, seen in this light, failure in education is but a way of better preparing the young for what they will eventually face in future.

Yet, having said all of the above, I must concede that there are subjects in education where the word failure should not be applied so stringently. Such are subjects that are relatively abstract and subject to differences in interpretation, for example in the arts and humanities. Using the word 'failure' in the education of such subjects is to apply a stringent criterion that would impinge, rather than encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. This would be detrimental to the student and eventually to society, when all the education system churns out are clones adept only at preventing 'failure'. This however is limited to certain subjects or higher levels of education where students are more productive when left to their own devices.

To conclude, failure is a phenomenon that we experience in our daily lives. Be it in education, working life or even in our social lives, failure is inevitable. After all, failure is the harbinger of success and without experiencing the essence of failure, one would not be able to achieve greatness in life. One should thus not reflexively object to the use of the word 'failure' in education.

 **Review**

Sensible stand coupled with strong arguments makes this an enjoyable read.

'The best thing that schools can give to their students is self-confidence.' Do you agree? (MJCJ2MBT2015Q8)

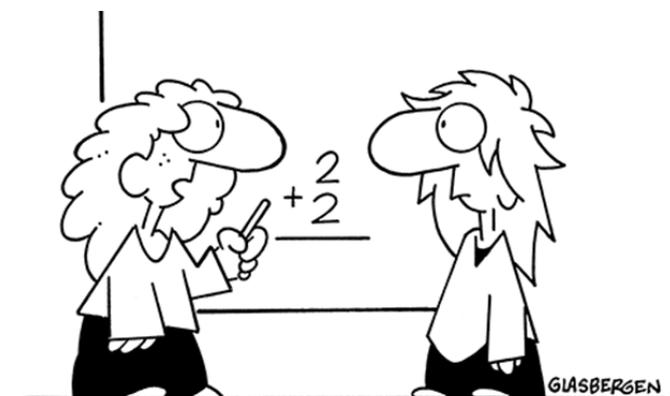
As British writer Samuel Johnson said, "Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings." This would explain why one would associate schools with being the primary institution to impart a feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities and judgement, so as to prepare the young person for his or her future. While building up students' self-confidence may be one of the objectives of schools today, it may not be best thing that schools can give to their students. After all, formal education seeks to equip students with relevant skills for their future, from which they can gain a true confidence founded upon true abilities.

While self-confidence can be said to be central to a child's success in future, without substantial knowledge backing an individual, self-esteem could seem misplaced, or worse, be misconstrued as arrogance. Granted, being able to express one's opinion naturally opens up more opportunities. Panels interviewing applicants look out for someone that stands out from the crowd, which translates

to self-assurance influencing one's career. This is even supported by the University of Melbourne's The Minority Report, which found a strong correlation between confidence and occupational success. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that employers are not trying to hire individuals who appear confident, but individuals whose confidence is representative of their ability. Self-assured individuals may merely be putting up a false, baseless facade of confidence that would inevitably be eroded by incompetence. In juxtaposition, this only highlights the importance of the primary objective of formal education being, first and foremost, to allow students to obtain knowledge and hone skills that would complement the faith in their abilities, and be applicable in the future. To be able to apply for a job, in the first place, one would need qualifications in the form of degrees and the like. From the very beginning of a child's schooling years, they are not only acquainted with solid foundations in core subjects like Mathematics and Science, but also the essential skills of reading and writing. As students progress with each level of education, their syllabus narrows down the number and broadens the scope of their subjects. Ultimately, these all serve as a basis and groundwork for the vocation people take up in future. While self-confidence is central to a child's future success, it would be worthless if it were not grounded on a solid foundation of vocation-related knowledge and skills.

Though self-confidence is important for one to assert oneself in social settings, merely possessing self-confidence is not sufficient to establish lasting and genuine relationships. One also needs to have the appropriate skills to get along with one's peers. An inability to interact with others would undeniably hinder one's working and personal relationships. A stilted conversation only serves to make the parties involved uncomfortable and seeking an excuse to escape the exchange. Moreover, an absence of emotional intelligence coupled with ignorant self-confidence would cause one to appear off-putting or arrogant in social situations. This is exactly why schools play such an important role in a child's development. Schools provide a nurturing and comfortable environment for students to learn to interact with their peers. Without the complexities of office politics, students can gain essential people skills such as cooperation and teamwork, which are not only relevant in the workplace, but in life as well. From the start of a child's schooling years, social hierarchy is inevitably established as part and parcel of social situations. These experiences and interactions would give students the chance to familiarize themselves with such situations and allow them to develop the confidence to navigate future social situations with skilful ease. Schools provide the advantage for students to gain such knowledge during their school lives, as opposed to them lunging into an unforgiving workplace environment. Emotional intelligence is of central importance to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Self-confidence may instead inadvertently be detrimental to one's success in the workplace if one lacks the emotional intelligence to read people and situations well, or work in teams effectively. Schools thus have the obligation to provide the avenue for students to cultivate these attributes that would be invaluable in future.

For schools and education boards, a belief that self-confidence is the best thing that formal education can develop in students may also lead to an emphasis on programmes with a high "feel good" factor, or policies that seek to be overly nurturing to students. Grade inflation or lax discipline policies may have the well-meaning intention to build student morale, they are but unrealistic depictions of a student's abilities. To do so would only be coddling students and short-changing them of the awareness of their own abilities. In the long term, this is extremely damaging to a student's welfare and development. The new normal of grades detracts from the accomplishment of earning good grades as an acknowledgement of one's capabilities and efforts and would only have disincentive effect on students. Weak-willed or just plain lazy students would not apply themselves as much to schoolwork as it would now be relatively easier to obtain distinctions. Misbehaving students would also disrupt the learning of their peers since the lenient discipline system would allow them to escape punishment.



"First they build up your confidence with simple addition and subtraction, then they slam you with algebra and calculus. It's quite a clever scheme."



In fact, self-confidence is just one of the many puzzle pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of education. One last role of formal education, even more important than self-confidence, is the impartation of values. One's confidence, practiced without a sound moral compass and judgment, would breed deviance, or worse, the undertaking of criminal actions without remorse. In Amos Yee's ignorant confidence in articulating his personal opinions, his gross disregard and disrespect towards Christianity and Mr Lee Kuan Yew caused a public uproar. His posting of a vulgar video publicly criticizing Mr Lee Kuan Yew's legacy as well as Christianity violated the Penal Code and he was subsequently arrested. Not only did he not express remorse for his actions, he continually flouted his bail conditions by posting more online content. His overt confidence in exercising his freedom of expression was irresponsible and only reiterated the importance of the very laws that he violated. Clearly, having a sense of self-assurance unbridled by other accompanying values is not desirable if we are to maintain a harmonious and safe society. Creating the narcissistic adults that lack regard of a society's value systems would have an adverse and damaging impact on society.

In conclusion, although self-confidence could be a favourable and advantageous quality to possess, there should always be other traits that serve as its foundation. Confidence should not be a weapon to wield only at job interviews, but the poise one constantly carries oneself with, that stems from the vast bank of experiences and opportunities one has been blessed with.

Rachel Ng Jie Ying 14S111



The writer possesses a good command of the English language and writes very fluently. The essay is a good demonstration of how the attribute of self-confidence is weighed vis-a-vis the other attributes schools should impart, addressing the evaluative requirement of this question well.

Should education be a profit-seeking business? (MJCJC2PE11Q10)

The role of education has always been to equip the youth with the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure their survival in the competitive world. Most countries in the world place heavy emphasis on it as its benefits are plenty, for instance, the Singapore government channels over 10% of its annual fiscal budget solely towards the education sector. These actions are also observed in other countries such as the United States and England along with countless others. However the results vary across the international boundaries, as Singapore has one of the most efficient world-class public schools whereas its counterparts in the America have been dubbed as a 'complete disaster.' As a result, premium schools do exist in America to meet the demand of those who desire a quality education. Quality education inadvertently comes at a price as they are considered as premium. Yet, if all education were to replicate the model of how premium schools operate by the following rules of the capitalist, it will definitely deprive the poor of their access to education. In this scenario, education has failed as it would tend to deny a large portion of youth their right to the knowledge and skills essential to ensure their survival in a competitive era.

As mentioned earlier, the main reason as to why education should not entirely be a profit-making business is that it would deprive the poor of having access to education. If the education system were to open itself to the simple law of demand and supply, the price for knowledge will be simply too high to pay, even for the majority in the middle-class. In the renaissance era, in the times of famous scientists such as Michael Faraday, education was then a profit-seeking business. Many people at that time were unable to acquire an adequate education as it was simply unaffordable. There were only a few exceptions whereby a few lucky ones were sponsored and given proper education. Learning from the past, it would seem that encouraging the education to take up a business model would obstruct our path of combating poverty. Education is deemed widely as the main tool used to alleviate the problem of global poverty, simply because it gives the poor the necessary tools to combat their wealthy counterparts. If education were to operate based on a capitalist model, it would lead to the deprivation of the poor to the tools they need to break free from the poverty cycle and it would seem that the less fortunate would be stuck in a never-ending loop of suffering. As a result, education should not entirely be a profit-seeking business.



Learning from the past, greed has always been an innate feature of the human spirit. Be it the white-collar scandals in present times, or even the piracy of the bronze ages: greed has always been present to witness it. However, what makes the human spirit so magnificent is our ability to suppress the inner desire and prevent us from sinning. By allowing education to be a profit-driven business, we would be exposing the system to the inner greed as education could be blinded by profit. As schools are mere motive-driven institutions, their aim could no longer be to educate the children proper but to earn more revenue for themselves. This will not only corrupt the schools, but also corrupt the values that schools stand for. In Singapore and Australia, there are cases whereby universities sell their college degrees for a nominal price. Such actions are frowned upon as education, in this scenario, is nothing more than the pursuit of a paper certificate through monetary means. Optimists, on the other hand, will argue that not all schools will give in to the temptation of money. However, who can assure us that the schools would persist on standing firm for the values they uphold? As we are being sceptical of the innocence of the education industry, we should not give it a chance to be corrupt, for education is the hope of our children's children.

On the other side of the spectrum, supporters of Thatcher economics would argue in favour of changing education into a profit-driven business as it would encourage efficiency. This is especially true after looking at the public schools in the United States of America whereby the staff are unmotivated and poorly skilled, and pass rates in reading and arithmetic are disgracefully low in the worst schools. By opening up education to the forces of the free market, it would unquestionably solve the problem of inefficiency in America's education system as institutions would be forced to buck up in order to continue attracting students. Yet, in doing so, the focus of educational institutes may turn to producing academic results that can be used to justify higher fees and attract more well-heeled students. This trend may then become detrimental to the holistic development of students, for other aspects like moral education, creativity, physical well-being may be ignored when no central ministry dictates how premium schools should be run since they are privately funded.

There are also reformists who argue in favour of changing education entirely into a profit-driven business model as it would then reduce its reliance on government funding. As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, a likely benefit of allowing education to be a profit-seeking business is that it enables schools to come up with their own capital to run their daily operation. This would encourage self-reliance of the schools and this can also allow government finances to be channelled elsewhere where it is required or even be used to reduce the tax rate of the citizens. This is true to a certain extent but we also need to understand the rationale of the government to fund public schools by subsidising the daily operations. The government is doing this as a form of investment – not just an investment on the youth but also an investment for a brighter future for the country. As education is deemed by many as a pass to a brighter tomorrow, governments all around the world will still set aside a vast amount of money for education purposes regardless of its tax revenue.

In retrospect, education cannot completely be a profit-seeking business as it will result in an unequal playing field for those who strive for a better future. Undeniably however, inefficiency in education systems will still be a problem that would linger on for the next few generations to come. Perhaps we should explore other means to solve these problems before coming to a hasty decision. The best way forward until then is for governments to allow the coexistence of elite schools who charge a premium for all those who desire a quality education, yet continue to heavily subsidise public schools, for this would ensure that no deserving individual is ever deprived of education.

Toh Teck Wei 10S402

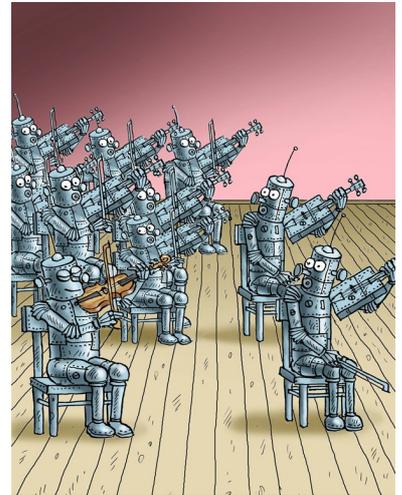
Review

Interestingly, the author differentiated public schools from privately-run premium institutes and argued for the complementary existence of both in the conclusion. On the whole, the points given were sound and examples, while they could have been more thorough and specific, were relevant. The language used displays a strong personal voice.

'Contemporary music has no artistic value.' Is this a fair comment? (2008 A

levels Q10)

When we hear the term 'contemporary music', what first come to our minds would most probably be pop music icons such as Lady Gaga or Rihanna, and chart-topping groovy hits like 'Happy' or 'Shake it off'. Contemporary music simply refers to the music of today's generation, whose production, in many people's perception, entails a great deal of artificial enhancement using recording technology. Furthermore, the present world that we live in has been made homogenous by the invasion of Western pop culture, and the music that we listen to is not an exception to this trend. Given both of these points, it is inevitable that contemporary music's artistic value is constantly being questioned. However, I strongly believe that regardless of how much our generation's music has evolved into a completely different creature from the past, it still holds, perhaps even greater, artistic value in terms of the artist's talents and skills, originality and social message.



A great number of music lovers from the generations of our parents and grandparents find contemporary music rather clichéd or formulaic due to the artists' tendency to follow the audience's popular preferences as well as their pervasive use of technology in its production. It is not uncommon for us to feel a sense of déjà vu when listening to a new song, because of its similar-sounding melody and even lyrics to other songs. That is why many people think that today's music has lost its originality, which is one of, if not the most, essential elements of aesthetics in music. However, let us remind ourselves that artistes make music to share with us its beauty and wonder – and it is not wrong for songs to follow a particular formula and tune if eventually, it helps the artistes to reach out to a larger pool of audience and allow more of us to connect with each other through music. A recent remix by a DJ named Gregory Todd of the six most popular country songs since 2011 has gone viral on the Internet. In fact, the cadence and rhythm of these six songs were so similar to the point that they can be mixed into one so seamlessly. Furthermore, according to many music enthusiasts, the hybrid tune and lyrics of this composite song even managed to encapsulate the spirit of the key global events in that year while sounding amazing. Hence, no one can call these songs clichéd for they belong to, as we all know, the music genre that places the greatest emphasis on meaningful lyrics and astounding instrumental melody.

On the other hand, the usage of technology in recording, editing and producing music actually unlocks the door to a world of "audio magic" and sound creativity that our artistes have never known before. In 2014, Daft Punk, a famous French electronic duo who is considered the techno-wizards of the American music industry, walked away from the Grammys with the most celebrated award of the night – Best Album of the Year. This shows that their music has been acknowledged by the most prestigious panel of music experts for its creativity and bravery to tread unknown paths, shattering any doubt that people may have for contemporary music. And who has not heard of classical artistes who have used music technology to give their music a unique sound – particular to their own interpretation of set pieces whether Brahms, Mendelssohn or Bach – such as the world renowned pianist, Maksim, the record-breaking virtuoso violinist, David Garrett, and the best-selling string quartet of all time, Bond? Even famous pop music cover artistes such as The Piano Guys as well as Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox, who have unabashedly used technology to revitalise their renditions of popular tunes deserve to be known for their abilities to give listeners a different, newer perspective of their favourite songs. As such, we should be thankful for music technology as it offers us a fresh musical experience.

Another familiar stereotype of contemporary music is that it is nothing more than a display of dance choreography and good looks, instead of a celebration of vocal talents, the latter being what we think music should be about. The pervasive popularity of Korean boy bands and girl groups in Asian



countries due to their dazzling appearance and professional choreography is the most prominent example supporting such a notion. Yet, contrary to the view that modern music's artistic value has become a thing of the past with its loss of emphasis on vocal superiority, the example of Korea's music industry, which is the second largest in the world, demonstrates clearly to us how modern artistes have redefined music on a more holistic and professional level. Artistry is a concept that must emerge from the hand of the creator and the mind of the beholder concurrently – in fact, it is a natural instinct for human beings to be drawn to things that visually appeal to us. By integrating the factors of appearance and dance moves intensively into their songs, many modern artistes now attempt to put up the most perfect performances – their relentless effort to refine themselves in other skills apart from vocal or instrumental ability have inevitably set a higher benchmark for audience's expectations, making it even harder for other artistes to succeed in such a competitive industry. The landscape of contemporary music has therefore changed the way we, as music lovers, celebrate musical talents. It is now on a more expansive scale, encompassing holistic skills that promise to give us the most worthwhile entertainment. Let us not forget that this phase of contemporary music was spearheaded by the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, who had revolutionised pop music of his era with his legendary dance moves and commanding stage presence. Contemporary music hence holds great artistic value in the way it shines its limelight on the most all-rounded talents.

Lyrics, another essential part of music, are the soul of the song, which when sung can evoke powerful emotions and be a reflection of today's human conditions. In comparison with John Lennon and his famous song, "Imagine", which has certainly withstood the test of time to become an icon of peace through music, our contemporary artistes do not fall short in making music that delivers impactful social messages too. Thus, music today is able to conserve an important aspect of music, which is its meaning. The song "I was Here" sung by Beyoncé, one of the most popular artistes of today's generation, speaks of her desire to leave a mark on humanity before she dies. As the song was performed on the United Nations World Humanitarian Day, Beyoncé's music thus becomes a vessel to channel her feelings to a billion people's hearts from all backgrounds, asking them to join her in making a change in the world for the better, which was the social cause the event wished to highlight. Likewise, the song "Gangnam Style" by PSY which took the world by storm in 2012, with a record-breaking 2 billion views on YouTube, is not just another commercial song popularised by a funny dance or humour. Upon deeper analysis of the song by lyricists, the audiences were impressed to find a subtle message about wealth, social status and value in the South Korean society, satirising the materialism that sometimes follows its people's aspirations to success. If commercial artistes like Beyoncé and PSY can make such meaningful music, we should get rid of our prejudices towards contemporary music and embrace the social messages that it presents to our society.

Indeed, I believe that music is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. It can touch our hearts, unite us as one, brighten up our days or even bring tears to our eyes. But most importantly, music can withstand something that human beings cannot: time. Music that allows us to celebrate originality, talents and social causes is one that has true artistic value. Where words fail, music prevails. If we are able to keep up the faith and love for contemporary music, I trust that one day, we will all be able to see that it can continue to inspire generations of humanity to come.

Trinh Vu Linh Chi 14S101



Good insights were provided by the writer and accompanied by interesting examples from many genres, highlighting her knowledge in this topic. While fluently written, the essay could have been more succinctly expressed though.

To what extent is it necessary for your society to promote the Arts?

(MJCJC1MYE12Q2)

The arts scene in Singapore is said to be largely underground, with little to no attention paid to local artists. Singapore is still lacking a vibrant arts culture that would allow the talented artists among us to shine. It is possible for Singaporean society to encourage participation and create greater enthusiasm about the Arts, but is this really essential? In my opinion, it is necessary for

Singaporean society to promote the Arts. However, this promotion must be done with discernment, and cannot override other pressing problems that our society has to face, such as poverty and income inequality.

I believe that it is necessary to promote the Arts as it exposes and challenges the flaws and inconsistencies in our society. The Arts have always served as a voice for the people; music, written works, visual arts, dance and other dance forms have been used to criticise our Singaporean society. Such criticism serves as a powerful tool to bring about social change, which can bring about a more positive Singaporean society. For example, Chun Kaifeng's 'He's Satisfied from Monday to Friday and on Sunday He Loves to Cry' exposes the repression of emotions in a normal office-worker's life, and reminds the audience of the view of the fallible human condition. Behind the neatness of the sterile office cubicle shown in this mixed media installation, lie sharp knives and weapons, which represent the hidden hurts and suicidal thoughts faced by ordinary people in Singaporean society. In the face of increasing competition and stress in Singaporean society, Chun Kaifeng's art piece criticises the stressful nature of society, and encourages people with mental health issues to be unashamed to seek help. Chun Kaifeng's art piece is one amongst many others which serves to raise issues concerning Singaporean society. The Arts provides a platform to raise a diverse spectrum of viewpoints about Singaporean society, and by promoting the Arts, we allow the voice of the people to be heard. This can help ensure a more progressive Singaporean society, one which does not shy away from confronting and examining its flaws. As such, promoting the Arts is indeed necessary in helping to address the flaws and inconsistencies in our society.

The subject matter of the Arts is not limited to current day issues; there are also numerous art pieces that are explorations of the past. The promotion of the Arts is thus important for Singapore because it serves as a historical record for the masses. The Arts serves to remind Singaporeans of events of the past, and how they have shaped the nation. For example, Liu Kang's Japanese Occupation sketches, which are displayed in the Changi Chapel Museum, serve to remind Singaporeans of the atrocities committed by the Japanese during their occupation of Singapore. This piece of art allows the younger generation to observe, in graphic detail, the hardships their forefathers had experienced under Japanese rule. This will allow Singaporeans to treasure the security that Singapore enjoys today. Without such pieces of art, it is unlikely that the masses will be emotionally engaged with the events of the past. This appreciation of Singapore's past is increasingly important today, as Singaporean youths are seen to be less aware of Singapore's history and the sacrifices of their forefathers. For example, after the death of Dr Toh Chin Chye, one of the founding fathers of Singapore and former Chairman of the People's Action Party, many news articles highlighted that young Singaporeans did not even know who Dr Toh was. This indicates that the younger generation lacks understanding about Singapore's history and an appreciation of the contributions of our forefathers. Indeed, there is a need to increase the historical awareness of young Singaporeans, so that the people and events that have shaped today's society would not be forgotten in the future. What better way to do this than through the Arts, a medium that is non-threatening, visually appealing and has appeal across generations? As such, it is necessary for Singapore to promote the Arts, as it serves as a historical record that is accessible to the masses, and thus is an important medium for Singaporeans to remain connected to the events of the past.

In pragmatic Singapore, many would not see the value of anything unless it has economic value. The Arts, contrary to detractors, has much potential to become a cash cow in Singapore, and the government and private sector should pay heed to helping the local Arts industry to grow. Art, for example, can be seen as a commodity, and arts trading, where traders buy and sell pieces of art, has been an increasingly lively business in Singapore. Recently, local artists have been commanding higher prices for their artwork. For example, Henri Lee KeZhen, a local artist, was recently paid S\$150 000 for a piece of Chinese calligraphy. A sculpture outside the shopping mall Ion Orchard, called 'Nutmeg and Mace' by Kumari Nahappan, was



Nutmeg and Mace by Kumari Nahappan



commissioned and sold to the shopping mall at a price of S\$500 000. As Singaporeans becomes increasingly affluent, more Singaporeans with a taste for Art are also investing in art pieces, whether for their homes or for investment. One should also not underestimate the amounts of money parents are willing to spend to provide an arts education to their children, whether in dance, art, drama or music enrichment classes. More Arts events like the Singapore Biennale or the Singapore Arts Festival can also provide more buzz to Singapore, an otherwise staid tourist destination, helping to attract more tourists and boost the local tourism industry. As such, promoting the Arts is necessary for an economic reason too.

Beyond its economic value however, promotion of the Arts in Singapore is also necessary to transform the nation into a truly global city. Already renowned as a global business and financial centre, an international hub of air and sea transport, and Asia's leading convention city, promoting the Arts is essential to create a lively cultural scene and strong cultural identity, which is another important prerequisite to be called a global city. In the light of this, in the new millennium, the Singaporean government has envisioned a new role for the city-state as a 'Renaissance City' and 'Global City for the Arts', with an arts district that rivals Beijing's 798 Arts District and South Korea's Heyri Art Village. More fundamentally however, with globalization taking place across the world, many cities have become homogenous with global brands and pop culture forming their identities. As a cosmopolitan city stuck between the East and West, we are in great danger of becoming yet another soulless city unless we invest in the local arts industry to help create a national identity unique to ourselves, and recognizable to others as uniquely Singapore, beyond kitschy Merlion symbols and infrastructural monoliths like Marina Bay Sands. It is imperative to remember that we are not merely a city, but more importantly a state. As such, the importance of promoting the Arts goes beyond adding another title of 'global arts hub' to our well-embellished list of accolades; it has to do with the creation of a cultural identity for our nation.

However, pragmatists argue that there are more pressing problems for Singaporean society to deal with. In the face of an ageing population and a widening income gap, where many poor and frequently elderly Singaporeans are still struggling to make ends meet and meet their basic needs, why should society indulge in the promotion of the Arts? Are there not more urgent issues to deal with? While I concede that Singapore does face pressing problems of income inequality that may overshadow the importance of promoting the Arts, addressing both issues need not be mutually exclusive affairs. The promotion of the Arts has the potential to serve as part of the solution to the problems of poverty and the income gap. Dance and music performances have always served as an integral part of charity shows on television, and these art performances can touch or impact the hearts of viewers, thus motivating them to donate to charitable causes. Recently, a competition organized by the Straits Times saw the artwork of primary school children printed on special boxes of tissue paper, with the aim of raising S\$12 000 for The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund through the sale of the tissue paper. Apart from bursaries and hand-outs to the poor, there are many ways to involve the Arts as part of the solution for Singapore's problems of income inequality and poverty, but unfortunately, the Arts has been largely been seen as independent from these problems in society and therefore, solutions targeted at reducing poverty often ignore the Arts. As such, the presence of such pressing problems reinforces the fact that there is a need to promote the Arts, so that it can fulfil its potential to be part of the solution to resolve the pertinent issues that Singapore society has to face.

In conclusion, promoting the Arts is indeed necessary for the Singaporean society. While it may seem that the Arts lack practical value, promoting it does bring about much good for us, and for that matter, any society. Indeed, Harry Broudy's words never rang more true – 'What a society deems important is enshrined in its art.'

Kan Ren Jie 12A301

 **Review**

The breadth of essays used demonstrates significant knowledge of the issue in the Singaporean context. A clearer distinction could be made between Art and the Arts but the point of contention of the question is otherwise well-handled. Language use is steady with a confident personal voice.



Do media reports on scandals do more harm than good? (MJC2MBT15Q3)

With the advancement of technology and new media, it is now very easy for information to spread around the globe, reaching millions of people worldwide. Scandals, in particular are a very common form of information that is widely circulated around the Internet. While scandals are often deemed as fodder for meaningless gossip, and said to do more harm than good, I beg to differ. As scandals serve a wider purpose to reveal the truth and also raise awareness on important issues, I am of the view that scandals do more good than harm.

Firstly, media reports on scandals can reveal the truth on salient issues in society. Many issues that plague society, such as corruption and violation of human rights require the media to report it in the form of scandals so as to reveal the prevalence of such problems. As scandals are often a favourite topic for gossip, presenting certain issues in the form of scandals can effectively shed some light on the issue. Without media propagation of the issue in the form of scandals, the issue will most probably be hidden from public knowledge, and the truth would never be revealed. For example, the plight of domestic workers in countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong are often unknown to the public. By highlighting their suffering in the form of scandals, such as the high profile abuse case of Indonesian maid Erwiana in Hong Kong in 2014, the issue received widespread attention from the public. Also, the corruption scandal of former Taiwanese president, Chen Shui Bian had also been revealed through media reports in the form of a scandal, which allowed the people to know the truth behind their corrupt government. Thus, media reports on scandals do more good than harm as they can uncover the truth, benefitting society at large.

Furthermore, media reports on scandals can bring justice to the victims of the scandals. Widespread reports of the scandal will make people feel sympathetic towards the victim, and thus seeking justice for him or her. Very often, many victims of scandals suffer silently, probably due to fear of public scrutiny or retaliation by the culprit. With the propagation of the issue by the media in the form of scandals, the public will be aware of the situation, and will often side with the victim. The culprit will be brought to shame and rendered helpless to the combined powers of online citizens, such as the unscrupulous owner of a shop at Sim Lim Square, Jover Chew, who made the headlines for fleecing foreign tourists. If the culprit actually violated any laws, the jurisdiction will be aware of his crimes and deal with him accordingly. One famous example would be Justin Lee from Taiwan, who was involved in a sex scandal involving numerous victims. Through media reports of the atrocities that he committed, the public felt outraged by his crimes and called for his immediate arrest. Through public pressure and scrutiny, he surrendered himself to the police. Another example would be that of the media reports on the Bernard Madoff scandal where he committed investment fraud amongst other financial crimes for decades before being convicted. Through the coverage of this scandal, the victims who fell prey to his Ponzi scheme were able to obtain some justice, closure and worldwide sympathy for their plight. It also helped in ensuring that they have hope in regaining their investment as their cases would not just be swept under the rug and forgotten due to the extensive media coverage of the scandal. As media reports on scandals have the ability to redress the wrong suffered by victims, I strongly believe that they do more good than harm.

Lastly, media reports on scandals can raise awareness on important concerns around the world. Through media reports on small issues in the form of scandals, it can often raise awareness of the major issue at hand. While it can be argued that many small scandals have no direct link to the main issue, it is true that if small scandals were left unreported, they can escalate into a catastrophe. For example, the scandal of tainted milk powder in China in 2008 brought to light the lack of food safety in China. The issue of contaminated baby milk powder may seem irrelevant, but without media reports, the severity of the issue might worsen, leading to more firms producing more poisoned food items due to the lack of media attention. Media attention on scandals, in this case led to more stringent checks on food quality. In addition, public anger forces firms to conduct more ethical practices. Another example would be in the form of the worldwide media coverage on the Foxconn scandal where several employees, of what was the world's largest electronics manufacturing company linked with multinational companies such as Apple and HP, committed suicide, bringing to light their extremely poor working conditions. These reports garnered the attention of several human



rights watchdogs and effectively raised awareness of labour conditions to the world. Hence, as scandals led to increased awareness on issues that plague society and the world at large, media report on scandals do more good than harm.

Critics might argue that media reports on scandals might leave a permanent psychological scar on the victim, thus media reports on scandals do more harm than good. While I concede that victims may be psychologically traumatised by the attention they get from media reports, I would like to bring up the point that the victim would have been worse off should the media not have reported these scandals. Without anyone knowing the issue, the victim will have to suffer alone. In the case of scandals such as human rights violation and abuse, the victim could have faced more harm by the perpetrators involved. While it is true that media reports can emotionally scar the victim, it is also true that the media and the law can shield the victim from further physical harm. This is especially true for the case of child trafficking. Children kidnapped in Malaysia are often sent to Thailand or Vietnam to work as child beggars. Separated thousands of miles apart from their parents, these children can only suffer with many of them having their limbs amputated to gain sympathy. Through media reports on these scandalous acts by ruthless criminals, international police have the means to crack down on this transnational crime due to increased public awareness. Thus, even though media reports on scandals can emotionally scar the victims in the short run, it can end the suffering of the victims in the long run. Therefore media reports on scandals do more good than harm.

Some critics against the propagation of scandals might argue that the media, being profit-motivated will fabricate scandals to gain profit, shaming innocent parties involved. While I agree with the fact that the media is indeed profit-motivated, I disagree that they will fabricate scandals merely to sensationalise certain issues. First of all, the parties involved in the scandal can engage in legal actions against the media for tarnishing their reputation. Fear of legal repercussions will deter the media from coming up with scandals. Also, fabricating scandals will affect the reputation of the media as well. If the media is constantly reporting fabrications just to increase viewership and readership, in the long run nobody will bother reading their articles as it will be very dubious. One example would be the Singapore Press Holdings. Publishing many forms of new media, such as magazines and newspapers, the Singapore Press Holdings ensured that their publications are accurate and true. Even though they do publish scandals in some of their magazines, they remain trustworthy as they want to secure long term readership. Therefore, media report on scandals do not do more harm than good, as the media fears legal actions and loss of readership should they fabricate stories.

In conclusion, the list of pros and cons of media reports on scandals are non-exhaustive. While there are many viewpoints that can be contested as to whether media reports on scandals do more harm than good, I am of the viewpoint that media report on scandals do more good than harm, and it is in fact relatively harmless. Even though there are downsides to media report on scandals, such as leaving emotional scars on victims, I believe that the good outweighs the bad. Hopefully in the near future, scandals can be reported with minimum damage to the victim yet effectively exposing the culprit at the same time.

Chua Ru Xin 14S101



Review

The essay was fluently written with salient arguments. The examples used were relevant and well explained to support the arguments made.

To what extent does social media pose a challenge for governments? (MJCJC2PE13P1Q1)

In today's world, rapid change is currently afoot. Not only have we innovated, revolutionised and brought about radical paradigm shifts in technology, we have also developed our thinking and reordered the status quo. People now desire greater freedom, and this is perhaps best manifested in the ubiquitous prevalence of social media in just about every aspect of our lives. With social media reinventing the role of the common citizen, governments all over the world are forced to rethink their own. While the impacts of social media can be mitigated, avoided, or even used to confer benefits with the appropriate approach, I firmly believe that social media largely poses a very real challenge to governments.

Firstly, it is difficult to dispute the fact that the common citizen has been empowered by social media to such an unprecedented extent that it can challenge the legitimacy of a government. This is especially true in the developed world, where social media can be accessed just about anywhere and at any time, allowing citizens to express their perspectives freely and facilitating their interaction with people of similar views. Should citizens share a common dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of the ruling party, social media can provide an open platform for the people to unite and form the beginnings of a revolution. Such movements, which can explode literally overnight via quick-share micro-blogging sites like Tumblr and Twitter, challenge the authority and power of a government. Consider the recent chain of events in the Arab world. Dubbed the 'Arab Spring', oppressive authoritarian regimes such as in Egypt and Libya were successfully toppled by the common people, whose deep-seated anger over their mistreatment by the government acted as a unifying force. However, unlike demonstrations of the past, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter played a critical role here as an indubitable catalyst for the rebellion, providing a real-time medium for demonstrators to coordinate their efforts and rally for more support. Through hashtags, retweets and instantaneous updates, word soon reached the international community, who were quick to send aid. Since then, a whole slew of demonstrations and movements have tapped into the burgeoning power of social media to promote insurgent agendas — Taiwan's student rallies, Turkey's clashes in Taksim Square, Ukraine's bloody protests against Russian influence. Indeed, social media has proven to empower citizens with the ability to effect radical change in governance, and governments now face the threat of being deposed or their sovereignty compromised should they grievously err in their governance.

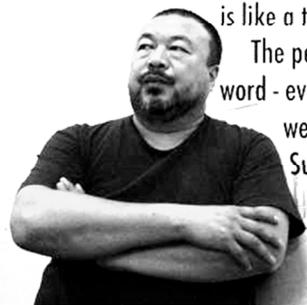


Social media also poses a threat to governments by having the potential to disrupt social stability. It is difficult to contend with the fact that people often feel more secure and less inhibited in their use of social media due to the anonymity they enjoy, leading them to assume that their words carry little weight and that their actions are of no consequence. In truth, with its prevalence and interlinked nature, social media is a metaphorical tinderbox, where online comments can spark conflict and fuel animosity, threatening to permanently rend the fabric of society. For instance, infamous Malaysian bloggers Alvin Tan and Vivian Lee caused an online uproar with their derogatory and racist remarks on their social media accounts, which caused outrage in the largely Muslim nation, and lingering grievances against the Chinese to once again break the surface. Despite legal action taken by the authorities, Malaysia's social stability has been disrupted as tension continues to brew along racial lines. Furthermore, social media enables rumour and panic to spread like wildfire among the people, which is clearly a challenge for governments to manage. In August 2012, unverified pictures of mutilated bodies started appearing on Indian mobile phones, Facebook and Twitter accounts, warning that Indian Muslims were threatening to attack non-Muslims from India's northeast region. This triggered nationwide panic, resulting in tens of thousands of people fleeing from some of India's largest cities by the bus load, even after the federal government's efforts to quell rumour-mongering on tweets and Facebook updates. It is therefore evident that the reckless use of social media can impact the cohesion and stability within a country and this poses a massive

challenge for governments as it is their inherent responsibility to resolve internal strife and ensure peace among the citizenry.

In addition, social media makes it extremely difficult for governments to maintain their power, when so many opposition voices are taking to these online platforms and making themselves heard. This virtual town square poses a grave problem for governments when the commentary is vitriolic, mocking and not in their favour. With social media indisputably playing a prominent role in today's social interactions, a government now faces the added complication of navigating such a tenuous, arbitrary space, making the job of garnering votes even harder. Take for example the 2011 Singapore General Elections, which saw a sharp upward trend in social media channels such as YouTube playing a key role in propagating the views of opposition parties or discontent citizens, as the more conventional forms of media restrict political discourse. Rallies and manifestos, once broadcast mainly on television and radio, were streamed live on politicians' Facebook pages. Candidates fielded questions from the citizenry not in interviews or panels, but by Twitter replies. Some even opened up personal accounts to allow people a glimpse into their everyday lives. By leveraging on the behaviour and interests of younger voters on social media, the opposition parties gained considerable traction on the ground and posed as serious contenders to the current ruling party for the first time in a long while. This unprecedented phenomenon could be attributed to the role social media plays in encouraging political participation, thus showing how it can be a threat to a government's power.

Nevertheless, critics contend that social media does not pose a challenge for governments, especially authoritarian ones, who have a host of draconian instruments of control and censorship. The enactment of strict laws for engaging in online dialogue or swift action in clamping down on any potential uprising can also be accompanied by intimidation tactics, and the identification and harassment of dissenters. For example, the Chinese government acted with haste to suppress calls for a similar 'Jasmine Revolution' which rallied for support online. Suspects were rounded up and detained for interrogation and the rebellion never came to be, as the government was watchful of such misuse of social media. However, I believe that in spite of the government's attempts, social media is notoriously difficult to suppress, due to the international nature of the Internet. Despite their best efforts to establish internet censorship through the 'Great Firewall of China', pockets of social media remain and its mere presence may be sufficient in challenging the government. Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei's scathing social commentary and criticism of government policy on Weibo and Twitter provided the world with an honest and untainted glimpse into the poor living conditions and neglect of the people by the government — before he was arrested and his blog shut down. While he never reopened his blog, Ai's work still continues to be circulated online in retweets and shares. This shows that even though censorship laws can be enacted to limit the influence of social media platforms, their almost infinite reach ultimately means social media is able to both publish and preserve sensitive information, posing a great challenge to governments.



"Censorship is saying: 'I'm the one who says the last sentence. Whatever you say, the conclusion is mine.' But the internet is like a tree that is growing.

The people will always have the last word - even if someone has a very weak, quiet voice.

Such power will collapse because of a whisper."

-Ai Weiwei

Others also point out that social media could instead be used by governments to aid in their governing of the state. With governments realising the prevalence and potential of social media in today's world, they now have little choice but to be proactive and involved in social media in order to reach out to the current generation of digitally savvy citizens and gain a sense of the current state of affairs at the grassroots level. Other than ministry accounts used to obtain feedback, social media can be used to engage hard-to-reach communities, as seen in PM Lee Hsien Loong's efforts to connect with Singaporean youth via Facebook, or in Obama's continued interaction with the American public on his massively popular Twitter account. However, while I do acknowledge that social media can be used to a government's advantage, we cannot deny that a whole host of social problems can be found on social network websites, which makes managing social media a formidable prospect for any government. Child predators, sexual grooming, and online bullying already place the young in danger, let alone larger problems like credit card fraud, identity theft

and terrorist networks which threaten an even bigger portion of the populace. Even as law enforcement agencies are creating fake accounts to entrap criminals, far more accounts are being set up for undesirable activity — sometimes even faster than they can be tracked and taken down. While authorities may manage to trace IP addresses and digital signatures, proxy servers are becoming increasingly sophisticated, allowing offenders to use complete online anonymity to their own advantage. Furthermore, any sort of censorship or restriction on a social media network, like Turkey's recent bans of Facebook and Twitter, is frequently seen as a direct challenge to the freedom of speech; a move that draws much flak from the largely democratic international community. It can therefore be said that for all its boons, the management of social media is a monumental task for governments around the world.

To sum it up, social media possesses the double-edged potential to either benefit a government or topple one. However, given that while its impacts are not necessarily deleterious, social media has proven its propensity to be used — or misused — by the citizenry to such an extent that it is becoming nearly impossible for authorities to keep a handle on online social activity. It is thus my strong belief that social media does pose a great challenge to the governments of today.

Chiang Ian 12S413

Review

Arguments clearly and consistently addressed the point of contention throughout the essay. An impressive range of examples was used to effectively illustrate points made. Clear linguistic markers and a range of sentence structures made for a well-structured and coherent essay.

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

(MJCJC2MBT2013Q11)

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 mind-sets 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 mind-sets. 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 the like. 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.



'The world would be a better place if everyone spoke the same language.' Discuss. (2006 A levels Q7)

With English being dubbed as the universal language of our contemporary world, the interesting question of whether the world would be a better place if everyone spoke the same language has become more pertinent than ever. Common sense tells us that this, clearly, could ameliorate the condition of our world, as the cumbersome language barrier can be overcome, vastly improving communication for the human race. However, I argue that homogeneity in spoken language worldwide does not promise us a finer world as we may imagine, due to the problems of prejudice, differences in thinking, cultural dilution and decreased creativity.

Before embarking on a defence of my point of view, I must first admit that language homogeneity could benefit the world in terms of communication. It decreases misunderstandings caused by the dreaded language barrier, and has the potential to improve the quality of life for many as it increases efficiency in daily tasks. From a practical viewpoint, this uniformity in language could be of potential help to others. In Georgia, USA, some Hispanic immigrants receive substandard healthcare due to being inept in English, and worse, few hospitals have Spanish translators. Such a situation could be circumvented if everyone spoke the same language, alleviating the suffering of vulnerable groups of people like immigrants. I do concede that such daily inconveniences could be minimised if we all spoke the same language, but in our present world where simple translations can be done through simple hand-held technological devices, it would be hard to claim that speaking the same language would bring about that much benefit.

On a larger scale, there are those who argue that language uniformity can help to solve conflicts between countries caused by miscommunication. For instance, during World War II, the dropping of the Fat Man and Little Boy atomic bombs was triggered by miscommunication. When the allied leaders called on Japan to surrender, the Japanese Prime Ministers' reply, "no comment" was mistranslated into, "not worthy of comment". At this, the Allies were enraged by Japan's arrogance, and decided to take action, and the rest is history. Named by linguists as, "the world's most tragic translation", this incident could have been avoided if the countries spoke the same language, preventing the nuances in meaning from being lost in translation. However, such a view has its limitations in the present day context. Given the numerous diplomatic exchanges between countries, and the availability of translators, such a scenario would no longer pose such a problem. This incident could thus be dismissed as a one-off occurrence, and hence the benefits gained from having a common language are at best minimal or rare.

Language homogeneity is indeed a tantalizing idea, yet, the above benefits would likely not be reaped given the deep-rooted and fundamental problems that persist in our world. There are still the problems of prejudice, and the different ideologies that people cling to, and these have consequences despite the same language being spoken. For example, Eric Garner (an Afro-American), clearly said, "I can't breathe" when the police put him in an illegal chokehold, yet they did not release him, resulting in his death. Although a great majority of Americans speak English, not everyone's quality of life is improved, nor is there necessarily peace and fraternity as we all would like to believe. There still is underlying prejudice and discrimination towards minority groups. Also, conflicts still occur even though countries may speak the same language, due to differences in ideology or standpoints. There have been many brutal conflicts between nations and regions that share a common language, such as in North and South Vietnam, in Northern Ireland between Protestants and Catholics, and between various factions in Somalia. Therefore, language uniformity does not necessarily make the world a better place, as long as prejudices and differences in thinking continue to exist.

A universally spoken language would also raise the issue of cultural dilution. When everyone speaks the same language, it could lead to a loss of cultural diversity, and possibly cultural extinction, due to the lack of usage of other local languages. In Singapore, some teenagers mostly converse in English, and neglect their mother tongue, which correlates with the increasing disinterest towards



their own culture's customs and celebrations. Another example would be India, where over 400 distinct tongues are being phased out in favour of English and Hindi. As a result, many of India's languages are on the verge of dying out and this is culturally devastating, as the ability to comprehend local medicinal knowledge, ecology, environment, spirituality, art and mythological histories, is lost. Knowledge is extremely vital for the advancement of humankind, and when this knowledge is lost due to linguistic extinction via cultural dilution, it is a real pity. Depriving the world of potential ground-breaking discoveries from the unique knowledge of different cultures, making everyone speak the same language does not help in improving the world's condition.

Lastly, with linguistic homogeneity, our creativity and performance suffers. Studies have shown that speaking multiple languages is beneficial academically. Students who studied a foreign language develop greater cognitive skills, such as mental flexibility, creativity, divergent thinking and higher-order thinking. By having everyone speak the same language, we would not be allowing ourselves to fully develop and utilise our cognitive capacities, affecting our productivity and advancement as humans. In addition, the concept of linguistic relativity states that the structure of a language affects the ways its speakers conceptualise the world. For instance, a very commonly used phrase in Thai translates to mean "never mind", which encapsulates the Thais' easy-going mentality and way of life. If everyone were to speak the same language, our world views would be restricted and similar, as speaking another language would actually allow us to see things in more varied perspectives. Limited world views negatively affect our creativity, and this drains the colour out of life, and it might even mean that we miss out on wonderful new pieces of art or scientific trains of thought. Thus, everyone speaking the same language does not make the world a better place as it does not allow us to develop novel ways of thinking.

In conclusion, contrary to popular belief, linguistic homogeneity does not necessarily make the world a better place. It does admittedly allow for some practical benefits such as improved communication and understanding, but it does not vastly make it better as we may think because of the above-mentioned drawbacks. I think it is not worth the sacrifice and the world would be better off preserving the diversity of its spoken languages.

Yeo Bi Xuan 14S502

Review

This is a well-organised and balanced essay, with use of clear signposts. A good range of apt illustrations that are well developed was also provided, making for an interesting read.

'A picture is always more powerful than mere words.' What is your view? (2006 A levels Q2)

'A picture is worth a thousand words' is an oft-banded maxim which depicts the power images hold to convey messages, ideas and opinions to people. Since the dawn of mankind, pictures have been used to communicate, a classic example being the Palaeolithic cave paintings our prehistoric ancestors used to create. With the advent of modern technology, pictures today take a multitude of different forms. The creation of new methods of capturing a moment in time on canvas has become even more complex and intricate and the invention of cameras has paved the way for an entirely new form of pictures in the form of photographs. With such technological advances in the ability of pictures to purposefully deliver content and convey thoughts, it does seem like a picture can be more powerful than the spoken or written word. However, this is not always the case as words are also undeniably an important form of communication that is ubiquitous throughout the entire world.

A picture can be more powerful than words in a sense that the former is more effective at stirring emotions within people, invoking thought and subsequently provoking action. Pictures have the power to convey messages with great clarity where sometimes words fail to do so. Although there are over half a million words, some things are simply ineffable with sufficient impact to stir an audience's emotions. For example, in their fight to increase humanitarian aid to impoverished countries, activists often use pictures of malnourished children because such pictures or photographs are able to convey the feelings of hunger, pain and suffering these children

experience to the audience at a glance. Words on the other hand may not be as evocative as it is difficult to convey emotions with enough depth to fully move people to action. Thus, I feel that a picture can indeed be more powerful than mere words at times as it delivers thoughts and ideas with great clarity and depth, and in doing so, has a greater influence on people than words.

Another reason as to pictures' power over words lies in their ability to be understood and internalised by a greater number of people, regardless of their origin or the language they speak. No thanks to the evolution of languages, there are more than six thousand languages in the world today, each with its own vocabulary of thousands of words and complex grammar rules governing the way it is spoken or written. This makes communication between people of different linguistic backgrounds highly difficult with words, unlike pictures which have a universal ability to be understood by anyone all over the world regardless of what language they may speak. For example, when travelling to a foreign country, everyone will be able to differentiate a male and female toilet if such direction was conveyed through pictorial signs with the classic blue male and pink female symbols. However, the written words for male and female may not be so effortlessly deciphered if they were written in a language one is not familiar with. This shows that pictures are able to reach out to a wider audience all over the world despite disparities in language. Hence, in this regard, pictures are indeed more powerful than words in their accessibility to any audience.

Lastly, from a different perspective, pictures are indeed more relevant to us than mere words because of the simple fact that the human brain thinks in the form of pictures. We as humans inherently perceive the world around us through pictures and not words. The fact that we struggle to search for the right word to express a thought and how pre-verbal infants are capable of thought shows that thought processes are not carried out through words. Even though information may be fed to us in the form of words from an intellectual standpoint, these words are eventually translated into pictures by the mind. Everyone thinks in pictures and words function more like a second language to our brain. Humans will therefore be better able to connect with pictures or images on a more intuitive level because of such a phenomenon. Thus, pictures would seem to be more powerful than words as our human cognitive processes are more accustomed to visual thinking rather than through words.

Although pictures are more stimulating to the human mind, some detractors argue that, the spoken word is a more powerful tool of communication than pictures. The main reason for this can be exemplified by various speeches given by prominent orators such as Barack Obama or Martin Luther King, who were able to win the favour of their people through the influence of only their words. Another example critics may cite is the emotion that courses through one when listening to lyrics in songs. I do acknowledge the fact that although we may be captivated by words delivered through passionate speeches or with the backing of good music, on a deeper level, it is not the words themselves that intrigue us but the way in which they were delivered. It is through the passion and charisma of the speakers that really explain how we feel and react towards their words. In fact, it is their passion of delivery of the message that inflames our souls, not the actual words themselves which are merely a medium for them to do so. Hence, words may hold little meaning if delivered to an audience without flare and passion. Thus, the power of words is limited by the way it is delivered.



Nevertheless, the power of pictures to communicate and evoke does not entirely dilute the importance of words. Pictures are still and no one would hold a conversation or communicate a long message solely through pictures. To illustrate, even movies must be accompanied by dialogue for easier communication of a message to the audience. Unlike pictures, words are interactive and are therefore used to engage in conversation and other forms of communication. Words do have a superior ability as compared to pictures in its power to allow for on-the-spot feedback, clarification and interaction. After all, this explains why our daily conversations with one another are expressed in words and not pictures. Two-way communication through pictures would not be feasible, especially for the artistically-challenged, as one can see from the farcical scenes in the game show 'Win, Lose or Draw'. As such, words are just as, if not more, important than pictures in situations which involve interactivity.



All in all, it is difficult to say which form of communication is always more effective. Thus, both words and pictures coexist because their usage together will help us convey messages better than if just one medium was used to do so. In fact, the popularity of cartoons, comics and Internet memes today also hints at this: if a picture is worth a thousand words, pictures with words are worth much more.

Ashley Anil Saran 12S305

Review

An interesting read! While the points could be clearer and more thorough at parts, the writer has shown the ability to reason well for an abstract topic.

Are certain types of writing superior to others? (2009 A levels Q3)

We live in a world of words. Whether they be the magazines we browse in a bookstore, the news reports that flash across the television screen, or that certain poem that one deeply relates to – the variety is massive. Through the ages, these forms of writing have and will always continue to serve various functions to many audiences. It is also, undeniable that certain types of writing, such as political commentaries or speeches, are prized for their influential abilities, whilst the aesthetic qualities of literature and poetry have and will endure the test of time. In any sense, it is my opinion that these various types of writing are all of equal value, for they after all, serve different functions and cannot be compared fairly.

To write is to express or convey meaning or information for a certain purpose, hence different types of writing all have differing functions. This is exactly why no single type of writing can prove superior to others. After all, can different functions really be measured and weighed on the same scale? The intense emotions of empathy and sorrow felt through a poem on human disasters can never be related via a news report on the aftermath. Conversely, no person in his right mind would turn to the poem to sift out important details on the casualties and collateral damage suffered in the disaster. Hence, functions differ in obligation, not value – so long as a piece has fulfilled the function it was intended for, it is a brilliant piece and cannot be compared with any other type of writing.

One could argue that certain forms of writing are far more prized and ranked higher than others on the basis that they are considered more beautiful and aesthetically pleasing than others. The multi-layered nuances of poetry and intricate imageries of narratives may vastly outshine those perceived of lesser artistic value, such as staid reports. But as deep and majestic prose and poetry can be, beauty will always be in the eye of the beholder. Simple, minimalistic phrases, such as a plain 'I love you', can amplify as much meaning as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet 43, especially if the person it is intended for barely understands the rich but difficult undertones of the poem. In this vast world of writing we expose ourselves to everyday, aesthetic value is very much a subjective opinion of the recipient of the message. Aestheticism is therefore an unfair criterion in judging the superiority of various types of writing.

The influential ability of certain types of writing may also seem indisputably more impactful than others, thus making it a criterion which with to judge the superiority of a piece of writing over another. The legendary "I Have a Dream" speech by the late Martin Luther King Jr., or the inauguration speech of President Obama have both stirred many hearts and etched deep memories on numerous people. In this sense, one may be inclined to prize such types of writing at a higher position. However, it is important to note that it is not only the content of these prized speeches that constitute their influential prowess; rather, the context in which they were delivered and intended for plays a bigger role. To illustrate, King's speech is famed as a testament of the efforts of the civil rights movement during the fight against racial discrimination in the US in the 1960s, while Obama's speech is seen to herald a symbolic milestone for the African-American population and racial equality in American history. In a nutshell, the context of these writings has an important part to play in its ability to influence – and hence no type of writing can be said to be superior to any other, when it is not the writing per se, but the specific setting and context of it that determines its power to influence.



Lastly, no form of writing can relate to all audiences, nor is it meant to. No one piece of prose or poetry can be of equivalent value to all groups and types of people – as reflected by the variety of genres of literature we see in our everyday lives. The vivid imageries in fantasy and children's books, the inspiring and life-changing accounts in autobiographies, and even scientific reports in full analytic detail all hold dear to varied audiences, of varied age groups, interests, demographics and personalities. Generation Y may have grown up with JK Rowling's Harry Potter series, but millions of other readers would gladly pick up a copy of the daily newspapers for a good read. Hence, all works tend to different crowds, and thus none can be deemed superior to each other on a level playing field.

"The pen, is mightier than the sword." As the old adage goes, it is certain that our writings, through their specific functions convey messages and accounts to the masses, at the same time inspiring others, educating many, and creating various movements amongst the global population. The value of all types of writing should never be doubted, and though many may never be in the limelight of popularity, each type of writing lives for its specific function and audience. Therefore, it would suffice to reiterate that no type of writing is superior to another, for each of them is a masterpiece in its own right.

Christopher Toh Yi 10S209

 **Review**

The writer has taken an interesting approach and stand to a challenging question. Credit must be given for the strong sense of personal voice displayed, but arguments can be made clearer.



Consider the view that mathematics possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty. (2012 A levels Q7)

Mathematics is not something alien to us. Rather, it is something that is always around us and something that we use daily, whether we know it or not, from buying food at a restaurant, to the circuits that reside in the recesses of our computers. While there is no doubt that mathematics is highly pervasive and useful, we fail to ask the more philosophical question as we go about our daily lives: Is mathematics beautiful? Is mathematics truthful? To both questions, I would argue that not only does mathematics possess truth, it possesses a beauty supreme to all others.

First and foremost, the very nature of mathematics itself causes it to be truthful, as the well-defined rules and logic of mathematics result in very little ambiguity and room for debate. Three plus eight will always yield a value of eleven in our conventional decimal system, but in the case of the less often used octal and binary systems of counting, the yielded answers of thirteen and 1011 respectively are still equal to what we know in our minds as "eleven". In contrast, in other disciplines such as literature or philosophy, or even in the more theoretical portions of physics and chemistry, arguments for every possible opinion can always be made, resulting in a myriad of conflicting answers. What message did Shakespeare want to convey when he drafted *A Midsummer's Night Dream*? Do we have freedom, or are we just living our lives in an endless unchanging cycle according to Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence? The answers to those questions can be debated for as long as one desires, but mathematics possesses an absolute truth in the fact that a problem, a question, always has a set of well-defined solutions.

Those opposed to my point of view would no doubt argue that mathematics does not always possess truth as it has been frequently exploited by organisations and individuals for their own selfish purposes. Banks frequently hide behind a veil of innocently small numbers, concealing the fact that a compounded interest on a loan may become larger than a loan itself. Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme involved the lure of great exponential returns, while he himself profited immensely by using the money of new investors to pay off his pre-existing ones. While I do admit that mathematics can indeed be used for untruthful purposes, I would refute any claims that mathematics itself is inherently untruthful. In these cases, mathematics was simply a tool, while the actual deception laid in the fact that people failed to read the small print or were lied to outright. Hence, such untruths were more a result of human activity and influence than the fault of mathematics itself.

I am also of the stand that mathematics possesses a beauty supreme to all others as it has a certain elegance in the way that its principles, methods and results come together to form an aesthetic whole. Neatness lies in the way that if vectors are able to form a proper geometrical shape from head to tail, their resultant will come to nothing. Finesse lies in how a simple equation like the Euler's identity, $e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$, can succinctly capture all five fundamental mathematical constants while reflecting numerous other mathematical principles at the same time. Hence, I argue that mathematics possesses supreme beauty in the way that the questions posed by it and the answers given by it form a complete and refined whole.

Another reason why I feel mathematics possesses true beauty is the fact that Nature itself follows a mathematical pattern. The Fibonacci sequence, generated by adding the two previous terms to form the next, is simplistic and instinctive enough to derive. Does it come as a surprise, then, that the growth of branches on trees and leaves on stems adhere to this pattern? Even the rose, too, a symbol of love and beauty, grows its petals according to this simple yet elegant pattern. Humans are not exempt either from having an unconscious preference for this pattern. Scientists have found that faces conforming to specific proportions following the Golden Ratio (which, coincidentally, is derived from the Fibonacci Sequence), were thought to be more attractive than other faces. Accordingly, some icons who exhibit these features are celebrities admired for their looks, such as Marilyn Monroe and Brad Pitt. This only reinforces the fact that the aesthetics we admire in nature



and even in our fellow human beings follow some mathematical rule or other, and it is this elusive form of patterned order that makes it obvious that mathematics possesses supreme beauty.

Those opposed to my views on mathematical beauty may argue that there is no beauty to be found in mathematics as it is highly technical in nature, requiring complex and specialised knowledge of the subject. On the surface, it is true that some aspects of mathematics, such as Russell and Whitehead's proof that one plus one equates to two, may look like a hellish mishmash of symbols to the untrained eye. However, I argue that the perceived lack of beauty is due to the majority's limited interpretation of mathematics. The layman's understanding is usually restricted to what they have been exposed to in school and what practical uses mathematics has for the most part, such as in finance and economics. In such a coldly practical context, mathematics seems to possess no beauty. However, in this case, we fail to realise that mathematics encompasses a much larger domain, including the simple yet hidden aspects of mathematics in nature that all can appreciate, to the complex, logical proofs that are valued by numeracy connoisseurs. The practical elements of mathematics are but a tiny slice of what it has to offer and what the layman fails to know or understand of its ability to inspire beauty, should not simply be dismissed as absent.

Mathematics has been serving mankind for many long years since its inception centuries ago. With this, it is easy to forget the beauty of mathematics as it has been relegated to merely just another of mankind's problem-solving tools. However, it does not take a cerebral mind or an esoteric taste to appreciate the beauty of mathematics. Think about it – what could be more beautiful than a machine that sits quietly, that runs like clockwork throughout the ages, which never fails to provide a correct answer? Perhaps, this quiet efficiency is the most beautiful of all the other traits of mathematics.

Wong Jin Jye 13S212



Review

This is an eloquent and knowledgeable essay, whose strength lies in the simplicity and clarity with which it delivers its arguments.

Consider the view that the study of mathematics is intellectually satisfying, but of little practical use. (2005 A Levels Q10)

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

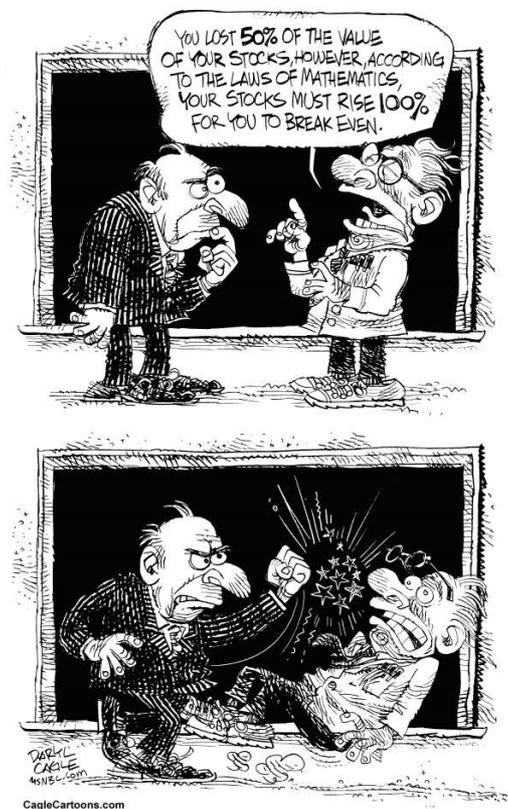


Electric Sheep

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.** (2006 A levels Q4)

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!



'History is unreliable, being based more on opinions than on facts.' How far do you agree with this statement? (MJCJ2MBT14Q6)

“What is history? It is but a lie agreed upon!” declared Napoleon Bonaparte, the oft-invoked, skilled military commander and two-time French emperor who himself made a mark on history through his fiery conquest of Europe. Indeed, with the advent of advanced communications systems, the masses can now tell whether or not an event or perspective is a fabricated ‘lie’, and are empowered to decide whether or not to ‘agree’ with it. Despite the fact that great men like Napoleon may have manipulated historical facts to suit their needs, that the details of events are reduced to varying accounts or that concrete happenings evolve to become quasi-mythological stories, history has its inherent truth. None can deny that inalienably real events and personalities were the genesis of History and that opinions have been the main drivers of historians’ quest for truth. I contend that it is precisely because of the existence of myriad opinions that history is made more reliable through experts’ greater need to seek out the facts.

Those who eschew history may argue that it is altogether unreliable due to their belief that countless events’ details are so endlessly disputed over, and that personal opinions have dictated and distorted actual facts. As a result of Time’s debilitating effects on a people’s memory, the squabbles over minute details have descended into debates over fundamental truths. Instances include disputes over the validity of the authorship of hadiths, part of the canonical religious literature of Islam, second only to the holy Qur’an. This collective work comprising the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad had been ‘narrated’ by various prominent individuals in the years following his death, and many Muslims have questioned the authenticity of several narrations. As a result, even such details concerning early Islamic history are influenced by individual opinion on issues of legitimacy. Similarly, events surrounding the life and death of Russia’s greatest Tsarina, Catherine the Great, are also plagued by unfounded rumours. The transformation Russia underwent under her reign gave rise to urban legends which cast her in an unfavourable light. Their circulation for a while warped much knowledge on Catherine, which had then been marred by the motives and opinions of her slanderers. I concede that history may seem to be totally unreliable if we are to be at the mercy of such baseless claims, and our inability to validate them compels us to treat history with caution. Yet, at the heart of the matter, it is the element of varying perspectives that have motivated historians to seek out what is real, and spurred them to sieve through the haystack of opinions to uncover the needle of truth, rendering history reliable after all.

The crux of my argument is that it is precisely because of Man’s natural tendency to provide differing opinions, accounts and perspectives that has induced historians to unmask and lay bare the cold hard facts. The sheer multitude of opinions have frustrated yet intrigued and motivated historians for centuries to find a satisfying and therefore ‘reliable’ version of events. Since classical antiquity, this has been the case; myriad accounts of the Greco-Persian Wars and differing stances on whether the gods played a role in human history led to the composition of ‘The Histories’ by Herodotus of Halicarnassus, a seminal work of historical study that cemented its writer’s place as the discipline’s founder. Although chronicles and sparse records existed before, they were inclined to exaggerate, were based on personal perspectives and were mythologised. Herodotus was the first to systematically categorise such disparate information and collate them into a coherent narrative. The Hegelian dialectic has also been a reaction to such vastly confusing opinions, and has sought to be an answer to the problem of reconciling opposing views into more acceptable explanations with a factual basis. Its thesis-antithesis-synthesis model has frequently been employed to rationalise the interactions between historical forces and agents. Thus, history is not necessarily unreliable because it is sometimes disfigured by opinions, as these may provide the impetus for finding ways to ensure that reliable facts are being presented.

Still, detractors from my thesis may posit that history is unreliable since actual events and facts can be downplayed to fulfil vested interests or the personal opinions of dominant powers. In a disturbingly Orwellian circumstance, it seems as though much of history has been re-written by members of the ruling class to ensure that what they opine as being the ‘real’ version reaches the masses. This has been the case during the Reconquista, where Castilian monarchs of the 16th century sought to portray the Moors as bloodthirsty and uncivilised heathens. Historical records continued to

perpetuate such a view until analysts realised that 800 years of Muslim rule in Spain had actually brought a flowering of the arts and sciences, with Andalusia becoming an intellectual centre of Europe and paragon of religious tolerance in a continent ripped by sectarian violence. Maoist China repeatedly espoused the rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party being the saviours of a nation harrowed by oppression of the bourgeoisie, feudalism and foreign hegemony. In actual fact, Mao's reign brought greater untold sorrow to the Chinese as millions died as a result of his disastrous projects. Furthermore, their propagation of the idea that the proletarian revolution was a natural part of human development as per Marxist theory reveals the imposition of their opinions on how history ought to unfold. Although I concede that history is written by the victors and in their terms, history is yet merciful to the defeated. In due time, history exonerates the works of the noble and the truth is made known, such as the case of statesman Zhou Enlai, who was vilified in the Maoist era for his economic pragmatism and liberal ideas, and Chinese history textbooks reviled him as such. Yet, it was only recently that a top-down revision resulted in him being hailed for what he truly was – the architect of China's economic miracle. Thus, the risk of opinion marring facts lies only when a strong, biased one is held by the ruling order that is powerful enough to rewrite history and sustain its own version. Otherwise, history itself does nothing; it is rulers who may make history unreliable by choosing to dilute it with their opinions on how things should have been.



Realists may also suggest that history is rendered unreliable by the fact that historians look at historical epics or legends for knowledge of the past, often coloured with the partial opinions of proud chroniclers. They argue that since these works are romanticised versions of history, they cannot be trusted and are instead based on iffy details and pure fluff. This is seen in national epics like the Persian *Shahnameh* or 'Book of Kings' that chronicles the development of Persian civilisation from the morning of the empire up to its Islamisation. The epic relates tales of heroic warriors and mighty emperors who shaped the course of history with the agency of magic and special powers. Yet, historians have taken this, along with ancient Greek sources, as viable references when studying the rise and fall of Persia, despite Ferdowsi's hyperbolic bias against the nation's enemies. The same is the case with the Arthurian legends, which tells tales of knights-in-shining-armor rescuing damsels-in-distress and recounts the adventures of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Filled with fantastic episodes, it apparently seems an unlikely candidate for a reliable history of mediaeval England. Au contraire, I maintain that history's reliability is unassailable despite all this due to the element of truth these tales contain, in spite of them being watered down by personal opinions – hence historians' interest in them. For instance, archaeological findings at Fort Canning would have told us nothing of Singapore's glorious 700-year historical legacy, had it not been for the *Sejarah Melayu*. This quasi-mythological text narrates the tales of Malay kingdoms and empires, and is replete with fairy-tale-like elements, yet its account of the Kingdom of Singapura is rich fodder for historians who are studying the island's history. Similarly, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, a farcical novel by Miguel de Cervantes is widely considered Spain's national epic and despite the author's satirisation of the Church and aristocracy, it is still an interesting documentation of 16th-century Spain, a society in flux. Therefore, due to the factual elements held in such opinionated and mythologised texts, history is still reliable even if drawn from legends, once the narrative embellishments are trimmed away.

Finally, history is reliable owing to the fact that it is after all a retelling of undeniable, plainly unmistakable events. The truth is that history is largely drawn from irrefutable happenings that are too patently clear, too universally acknowledged and too well documented to run the risk of being adulterated by opinions or censored. In the case of Nazi Germany, no one questions the fact that millions of the disabled, homosexuals, Jews and 'inferior races' were slaughtered, due to widespread reports and the existence of concentration camps with facilities capable of executing such atrocities. Despite the risk of figures being exaggerated by Allied accounts or Zionists lobbying for



sympathy, this is generally a fait accompli. Events like the French Revolution have had such far-reaching impacts in reshaping Western philosophical and political thought that its occurrence is never disputed, even though its circumstances would have been unusual if not unbelievable for its time. Phenomena such as these, widespread enough to negate the opportunity for individual opinions to alter its factors and details, stand a great chance of being remembered as they were. Thus, affairs and incidents can survive as facts if they were sufficiently prevalent and history constitutes many of such episodes. Therefore, as certain occasions in history are simply undeniable due to the sheer scale of their effects, it is ultimately reliable and not always based on opinion.

History bears witness to the maturation of humankind across the ages. Despite endless personally driven debates over the tales it tells, its ruthless disfigurement by usurpers and power hoarders and excessive embellishment in folk legends, one should never doubt its sacrosanct place as being a superior force, as perennial as Fate. Even Bonaparte would agree that history lives on and will always speak the truth through the many monuments – including those he himself built – that today stand, as Tagore put it, “like a tear, suspended on the cheek of Time”.

Muhammad Faris Bin Joraimi 13A301

 **Review**

The essay shows off the writer's impressive knowledge of history. Written with passion and conviction, the essay offers salient arguments which are well-supported by excellent examples. Well done!

Should crimes that were committed many years ago simply be forgotten? (2006 A1 vs Q5)

Kaing Kek Lev, or better known as Comrade Duch, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2010 by a special Cambodian court set up to prosecute war criminals from the horrific Khmer Rouge era. The head of the infamous Tuol Sleng (S-21) prison camp, where thousands were systematically tortured and executed, he had fled Cambodia in 1979, and was only discovered only two decades later, living under the guise of a different name. From this example, we ask ourselves whether it is right for crimes that were committed many years ago to be erased entirely from our memories and amnesty be granted to those implicated, after the passage of a designated period of time. Yet, as some may raise their hands meekly in support of forgiveness in order to allow the perpetrators to move on, many more would still cry out for the tenets of justice to be upheld and criminals to be brought to justice. I, for one, firmly believe that crimes that were committed many years ago should not simply be forgotten as it would be erroneous to disregard the injustice dealt to victims and allow the likes of murderers to walk away scot-free as if they had done no wrong.



Not all crimes committed are as serious as the war crimes committed by Comrade Duch of course, which may lead some to argue that it is unwise to harp on petty crimes that have occurred many years ago as the efforts and resources used to bring the relevant perpetrators to justice could be better utilized elsewhere. Instead of dealing with a theft case after more than a decade, the judicial system could be put to better use by dealing with more current cases since there is a greater chance of apprehending those responsible, especially if such crimes are of a greater magnitude and concern a larger number of victims. It would also be harder for courts to determine the severity of the crimes after a long period of time has lapsed, considering that social values in a society vary over time and it would be unfair for criminals to be subject to punishments that are reflective of a time very much different from the one in which he committed his crime. However, I beg to differ. By deliberately ignoring petty crimes that have occurred many years ago, we would be sending out a wrong message that dilatory tactics can be used to absolve a criminal of all blame. Consequently, this would attract more criminals to be more daring in their unlawful endeavours since they are now confident that if they evade arrest for a sufficient period of time, they would be granted immunity against the law. This is as good as giving the criminal a license to commit crime, so long as they do not get caught for a minimum period of time. And parallel to that, forgetting crimes that were committed many years ago, in whatever form such forgetfulness may take, would simply encourage criminals to reoffend, and a greater number of crimes would occur, undoubtedly costing the state even more in resources over the long term.

Some people would also argue that crimes that were committed many years ago should be forgotten and not rehashed or held against the criminals because some of them have already paid the price for their acts. These convicts have served their jail terms and it would be unfair to continue discriminating against them and faulting them for something that they have done in the past but are now deeply repentant of, such detractors argue. Doing so often deprives them of a job or a chance to find a solid footing in society again, which very likely drives them back to their familiar habits of transgression out of a sense of hopelessness or of being abandoned by society. Therefore, these more generous members of society even feel that it would be of no great consequence for old criminal records to be wiped clean or not brought up at all. However, on this point too, I beg to differ. Criminal records exist for the purpose of allowing the state to keep track of past offences for the



protection of the rest of society. There is no certainty or guarantee that someone who has paid his dues in prison is definitely rehabilitated and repentant, and it is a well-known fact that those who have committed crime before are more likely to reoffend than the average person. Therefore, in the interest and security of the rest of society, it would be foolish to allow old criminal records to be wiped clean. For example, while the USA allows for the expungement of criminal records not only for youth offenders but of misdemeanour offenders (crimes that are considered less serious than actual felonies) through the Second Chance Act, this is hardly something practised by many other countries around the world, suggesting that few other countries in the world see wisdom and value in doing so. The possible cost imposed on the rest of society should the criminal go on to commit more crimes and the inability of the state to then have greater information on the criminal is too great to bear. In fact, there are other ways for criminals to be reintegrated into society without having the rest of society's safety threatened by the expunging of criminal records, as shown by Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project, which helps to raise awareness amongst society of the need to give ex-convicts a second chance, while helping these ex-convicts to find employment and providing them with counselling. Thus, even as these criminals have paid the price for their crime, such payment does not warrant the erasure of their records, and reintegration into society can be done in other less risky ways.

Some may also argue that crimes committed many years ago should be forgotten in the interest of the victims, because continually recalling the crimes would disallow the victims and their families from moving on and result in the continuation of tension between opposing parties. It can be argued that by forgetting crimes committed many years ago, victims would not be reminded of the injustice dealt to them and ensure that they would be able to continue on with their lives. The grudges borne against others will result in them experiencing bitter relationships, especially if the crimes in questions are those committed on a large scale against a whole community, or even a whole country. For this matter, I concede that forgetting some crimes committed many years ago would make it easier for criminals to be forgiven and for societies to move on. For example, in South Africa, the younger generations are encouraged by the government to forget about the misdeeds and grievances of the Apartheid era, when racial discrimination was institutionalised. This has allowed the current South African population to live in relative harmony, as compared to decades ago, and this was marked by the successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, a global footballing spectacle that heralded a complete re-integration for South Africa into the international community. Thus, in view of the greater need to move on, I do acknowledge that forgetting crimes of the past may be advisable. On a side note however, it is worthy to note that while one can choose to forgive, forgetfulness is not quite something within one's control but is part of the way the human brain processes and stores information. One cannot deliberately forget; one who claims he has 'forgotten the past' has merely repressed these memories.

Granted that the horror of such crimes that were committed many years ago should be forgotten and let go of by the individual victims and their families, I am of the opinion that it is still beneficial nonetheless for society to remember the lessons learnt from past crimes, especially those that were committed on a larger scale against entire communities, because doing so has value to the guidance of policies and relationships in the present day. A famous example would be the systematic attempted extermination of the Jews by Hitler during World War II. While few would condone the family members of the Jews whose lives were taken clinging on to a decades-old grudge against anyone who is German, there are valuable lessons that have been learnt from the Nazis' crimes, such as that of not giving in to bullies and dictators on the international stage, and the value of moderate politics, as opposed to extremist ones. Such values strongly govern the world, its politics and its international relations to this day, showing how there is reason to remember constructive and hard lessons learnt from crimes that were committed many years ago. In another example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to invite perpetrators of violence to give testimonies and request amnesties from civil and criminal prosecution. The decision to not completely forget the serious crimes committed against the majority of the population was a huge step taken by the government to help heal the nation of South Africa and begin the process of putting aside the hatred that has been accumulated over centuries. Ironically, making the effort to remember such crimes and dealing with such memories appropriately in a restitutive manner is what allows entire communities and countries to move on and grow. Therefore, ultimately, I still firmly believe that crimes that were committed many years ago should not simply be forgotten, and the memories should in fact be used to good and restorative effect.



Furthermore, remembering crimes that were committed many years ago is in itself a way of showing respect and regard for those who were harmed by the crimes. Erasing all traces of the crime from individual or collective memory can be seen as desecrating the memory of those who have suffered in the hands of society's deviants. Remembering that such crimes were committed, even if nothing can be done in this day and age to right the wrong, can give significance to the victims and comfort to the families who have had to suffer as well. This is the very reason behind commemorative sculptures that are erected in the name of victims of large-scale crime, similar to how Ground Zero, where the Twin Towers of the New York City World Trade Centre once stood, has been set aside solely for the purpose of remembering, and is also the lesser known and acknowledged reason behind why old newspaper reports and records of crime are kept. Remembering crimes that were committed long ago is sometimes the more uncomfortable but human thing to do, and I believe that it is neither right nor fitting to do the opposite.

In conclusion, I believe that crimes committed many years ago should not simply be forgotten, especially those of a greater severity. It would be unfair to the victims if criminals are not punished duly and that they would suffer for nothing. Also, it would be better for the criminals as they would be reminded constantly of the need to toe the line and abide by the law. Most people would not feel safe and secure ever again if crimes committed in the past are simply forgotten. Would anyone be able to accept the likes of Hitler and Gaddafi walking with their heads held high on the streets of Germany and Libya, as though they had never committed a single crime or killed a single person? Would anyone feel comfortable living in a society that is able to discard memories of tragedies and traumatic incidences as if they never happened? I certainly would not.

Terence Yeo 12A101

 **Review**

The essay brings up several interesting and complex arguments with a number of appropriate examples given too. The writing displays a strong personal voice but can be presented in a more succinct and focused manner.

Should the police have unlimited powers when dealing with crime?

(02AlvIQ7)

The police are like medicine. They are not people you would be particularly fond of but, you know you need them, especially when you are a target of crime and need assistance. Unfortunately, unlike medicine, you cannot increase the dosage that you take or use a more potent formula when faced with a greater threat. The police have rather defined constraints, like limited resources, or the need to be answerable to people and the government. What if, though, all these constraints were to be taken away? You could say that without these constraints, the police would be able to deal with crime even more effectively — or would they? I think not. While I accept that the police need certain access to resources, authority and autonomy, they should never be given unlimited power to deal with crime — because that in itself would be a crime.

Before delving into arguments about that, we must first consider the role of the police and the impact of a crime. The police in a country are instituted for the sake of protecting the citizens; they are meant to provide an internal security to the people and nation, and to ensure that social order is maintained. They are of course, not an army, which is why they are supposed to be less aggressive. Crime threatens the citizen and, on a larger scale, society as a whole. In other words, any action that can significantly hurt a human or the society can be considered a crime. Overcoming a crime will then ensure that society is functioning well and orderly and citizens are safe and have no need to fear. If the police can achieve this with unlimited power, why not?

The fact is: the presence of unlimited power for the police could well achieve the opposite of the above. Firstly, unlimited power inadvertently brings about misuse and abuse of that power. Upon realization that they have access to everything and have no need to answer to someone, people tend to turn megalomaniac. As proven time and again by famous dictators throughout history, and even by the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment, people with such power have the tendency to do as they please, sometimes to the detriment of others; and when questioned, they would use their

own perceived, maybe even flawed, logic and reasoning to justify themselves. Since they do not have to be answerable to anyone, no one can condemn or restrain them should something go wrong, and this essentially means that they get away scot-free. The same would happen to the police if given such power. All too often, when given authority and autonomy, such organizations tend to run amok. The Gestapo, KGB and Kempeitei were police forces (albeit secret police) that carried out indiscriminate arrests and killings on grounds that the arrested were 'threatening' the 'stability of society'. The result of all this was people living in fear, which of course is not a good thing. Hence, in the name of societal welfare, the police should not be given unlimited power.

Moving on to less radical regimes, it is commonly heard that the police are allowed to apprehend an offender by any 'means necessary'. Arguably, removing such constraints and limits on what the police can do can allow them to resort to more extreme means to stop the criminal and as a result the criminal would be stopped with more promptness. Either that or being granted such power provides greater access to places, which leads to a faster way of solving crime cases. On television, it is not rare to see a glorified cop using unorthodox, even controversial methods to solve a crime (think *The Mentalist*), often succeeding where others have failed. This perhaps would shape the thought that through unlimited power, things would be better. We must consider a few things though. Firstly, 'unlimited power' bequeathed upon the police is specific only to that instance, targeted at that particular crime only. It does not apply to every single crime the police have to stop or solve. Beyond that case, their level of power reverts back to the standard that is set for the force in general. In that sense then, that 'unlimited power' is really a temporary license, and is not exactly unlimited. Secondly, at the end of the day, the police still must answer for their actions to their superiors, and this necessary accountability means that the temporary license is further limited. Hence it can be seen that no one society actually gives the police truly unlimited power, and for good reason.

The type of crime and criminal, then, which warrant such increases in power and authority also has to be carefully defined in order to justify these increases. Increases in their level of power are only necessary and warranted when ordinary levels of authority have been proven to fail, and when prevailing standard procedures have proven inadequate. No doubt, there are crimes which are complex in nature and which involve criminals with immense influence and networks of their own. In addition, crimes which concern life and death decisions to be made in an instant also warrant action that may breach standard protocol because standard protocol may prove to take too long, and even impede the course of justice. Examples of these include crimes committed by the mafia, whereby perpetrators are adept at escaping the law because of their particularly unscrupulous means or their vast resources. Only such immensely complex, tricky or urgent crimes should warrant the increase in power.

If I were to reuse the analogy of medicine, one can liken unlimited power to an increased potency of a drug. It might be useful and effective in appropriate doses, but when used without inhibitions, hurts. The use of powerful drugs may treat the disease, but it comes with dreadful side effects, such as a suppressed immune system and things like that which makes the body weak. The same goes for unlimited power to the police. As a result of the increased forcefulness in dealing with crime, it might force criminals to greater extremities to prevent themselves from getting caught. These extremities could affect the bystander and society as well, should the crime be something organized and far-reaching. This is especially evident in the Mexican drug cartel wars which escalated exceedingly, bringing harm to the people in the country. Hence, despite the short term benefit of unlimited power, in the long run, it only serves to hurt, and thus the police should not be given this power.



In conclusion, given the levels of crime in most developed countries, it can be seen that the police already has enough in its arsenal to deal with even the most heinous of crimes and so there is no

need for any more power to be given to them. Hence, apart from all the arguments above against the unlimited power for the police, there is really no need for the unlimited power in the first place.

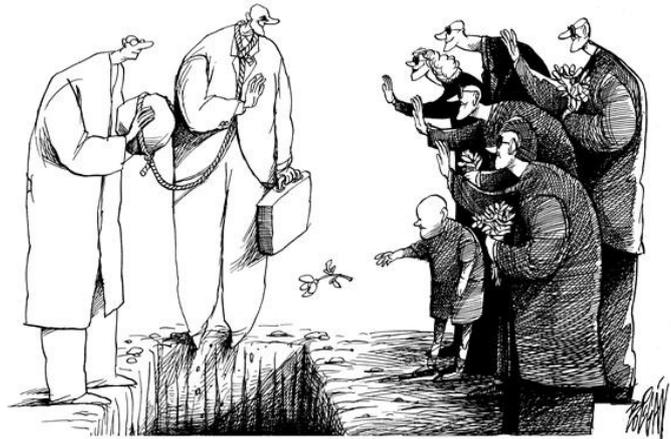
Tan Jian Xin Hansel 10S204

Review

This is an excellent essay with very insightful arguments and limitations set to them. There is a nice flow in the essay, which is achieved with the intelligent use of linking phrases and signposts and a personal voice distinctive to the author.

Can the killing of a fellow human being ever be justified? (MJCJC2MBT11Q8)

No man in his right mind would fail to condemn an act of indiscriminate killing of a fellow human being, save for those perhaps still living in primitive societies where fighting and killing is seen as sport. It is clear then that killing for malicious self-interest is considered murder by societies at large and never justified. However, to say that the killing of a fellow human being in *all* circumstances and contexts is never justified, is far too extreme a view. While I recognize the sanctity of human life, I am of the opinion that there are situations where killing humans can be considered justifiable, provided certain conditions are met.



Of course, the most commonly held view across modern-day societies is that the killing of a fellow human being is unjustified. Thus this explains the laws against murder, genocide, and even involuntary manslaughter. Such laws reflect the ethical view that a human's right to life is sacred, and to be protected as far as possible, regardless of race, religion, age, gender or status. This is the most fundamental right a human should have, for it determines not just the future of the individual, but whether one even has a future. Also, this right forms the basis of what makes human societies human: a respect for each other's ability to live out his natural life to the fullest. Thus, I would concede that these are valid reasons for why the killing of a fellow human being is generally unjustified.

However, the very fact that the right to life is so important to an individual, also means that it is important to another, whose right to live may be threatened by the former. Simply put, in such you-or-me situations, an individual has to kill, or be killed. And the choice is a no-brainer: killing is therefore justified for self-preservation. As such, the first condition to be met in order to justify the killing of a fellow human being is that one has been left with no other options but to kill. This explains why those who have been proven in court to have killed someone in self-defence are not charged as murderers. On a broader scale, the condition of having no other option too justifies why countries enter into war, with the full knowledge that enemy soldiers would have to be killed. Conversely, when there are viable alternatives to killing that are as effective and have not been exhausted, killing a fellow human being cannot be justified. A young unmarried woman cannot claim to have 'no other options' but to abort her unborn child, when giving the child up for adoption is an option. States should not claim that capital punishment would better protect societies from dangerous murderers when life imprisonment fulfils the same objective. Thus, because life is important and sacred, only when killing is the last option available, can it be considered justified.

Killing a fellow human being is no child's play where 'robbers' can get up again after being shot 'dead' by 'policemen'. Death is, after all, irreversible. The killing of a human being must be deeply considered and weighed before it is carried out for there is little room for regret once the action has taken place. Documented cases of women suffering from life-long depression as a result of previously aborting an unborn child are not unheard of. Mistakes that have to do with life and death are permanent, and no amount of guilt or penance can bring the person back to life again. This is



also why I am also of the opinion that killing in the context of capital punishment is objectionable, for a 'proven' murderer cannot be brought back to life after being hung, should there have been a miscarriage of justice. As such, killing a fellow human being can only be considered justified, when it has been deeply considered and weighed. In countries that practise euthanasia and assisted suicide, people do not get the leeway to commit suicide as they wish. Nor are doctors freely allowed to kill any of their patients according to the latter's' wishes. The Netherlands, for example, only allows terminally ill patients, who have no chances of recovery, and whose suffering has been prolonged, to opt for euthanasia after they have gotten assessments of their condition from at least two independent doctors. Killing is no laughing matter, and given its irreversibility, can only be justified when it has been deeply considered for all its implications.

The act of killing another human being can thus be justified if it has been weighed and shown to have greater benefits than harms to the action. Alternatively, the act may also be justified if it has been shown that retaining the status quo (not killing), would lead to greater pain or suffering. Carrying out abortions if a pregnancy endangers a woman's life cannot be seen as murdering an unborn child. Assisting a terminally-ill patient in great pain to kill herself under controlled conditions after approval by a medical council does not render the doctor culpable for manslaughter. Even the frequently criticised pre-emptive airstrikes carried out on terrorist bases can be justified when seen in the light of how there will be even greater eventual loss of life, had there not been action to kill these marauding evildoers. Edmund Burke once said: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." As such, when killing a fellow human being can be proven to bring about greater benefits than harms, it is justified.

The killing of fellow human beings can too be seen as justified if the act can be shown to bring about benefits to the larger society, the masses or even the world. In simple absolute numbers, since the benefits to large numbers of people would outweigh the harms that would come about to one or a few individuals that would have to be killed, killing is justified. Examples once again abound. Putting aside the debate of whether embryos are considered humans, embryonic stem cell harvesting for the uses of medical research is justified for its potential to discover cures to diseases and conditions that we still have no way of preventing or curing, the likes of cancer and spina bifida. Assassinations of genocidal dictators or terrorist leaders, seen as unsavoury and underhand, can be seen as justified for the greater good of the societies they terrorise. The abominable atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though at the expense of the lives of 140,000 in the two cities, can be rationalized to be just when seen in the light of forcing Japan to end a costly World War Two that had dragged on for five years, and killed millions. As much as killing is violent and objectionable, it can be justified when the actions brings about greater benefits for the masses.

To conclude, the justifiability of killing is evidently a grey area that divides societies. Even one morally opposed on all grounds to killing, may one day find himself forced to eat his own words for there will always exist situations where killing a fellow human being is a lesser evil. Thus, what we can do as a humane society is to weigh carefully if the conditions listed have been met: no other options, benefits outweighing costs, benefits for the larger society. Only then can we kill our own kind, and yet claim to be beings that live by a moral code, unlike all other animals.

 **Review**

This is a competent response to a difficult point of contention which is not driven by areas or examples. A good demonstration of how essays should be driven by sound reasoning rather than examples.



'A good leader must always look beyond the needs of his or her own country.' Do you agree? (2003A1vsQ2)

Some names are inscribed in history with golden letters: religious icons, fathers of nations, people who changed the way we lived – people who were termed as 'good leaders'. What is more important to be examined is what these people did to be labelled in such glorious terms. Did they live and die surrounded by the thoughts of their own nation, meticulously improving upon their own little corner of the universe? Or did they set upon a more onerous task – that of looking beyond their nation's needs and leaving a legacy for an entire world to ponder upon? While both paths have been well-trodden, I believe that a good leader is one who is grand in his or her ideals and perspective and can consider more than just the needs of his or her country.

In this age of globalization, this quality in a leader is all but a necessity. Gone are the days when the aphorism 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas' can be thought of as a realistic motto. Today, each and every country is so interlinked by ties of trade, politics, research or even tourism that truly enough, a butterfly's wing flap in one corner can stir up a storm in another. A good leader for our times must realize this fact and work not only for one's designated areas of space but rather for everyone who touches, or is touched by, one's country, which in our age refers to the entire world. For example, the Eurozone and its current financial crisis gravely highlights the importance of collective action on the part of countries and a leader looking beyond one's own country – even sacrificing some benefits – for the sake of the greater good. As it is, Angela Merkel has not only emerged as Germany's Chancellor but also as the European leader, working feverishly behind the scenes to stabilize the European economy. It is painfully clear that in this global village, we prosper together, or conversely, fail together. A good leader will ensure that it is the former and thus looking beyond the need of one's own country is important for this cause.

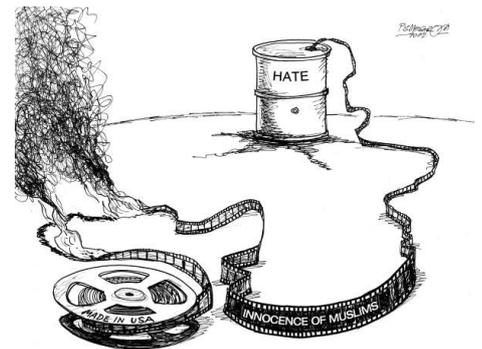
Looking at the needs of other nations also aids the leader in establishing good ties with other nations. This can be mutually beneficial, leading to cultural, technological and political benefits from forming multiple cooperative links. For a small nation, helping other nations meet their needs can buy goodwill and allies, ever so useful in times of trouble. This is what Singapore, once termed a 'little red dot' by a former President of Indonesia has done in the ASEAN region, contributing financial aid and disaster relief generously to her neighbours when they are stricken with the occasional natural disasters, for example helping the Indonesian government with post-tsunami building efforts in Aceh. However, how about larger nations then? Surely they would not need goodwill and allies when it is other nations that need their assistance instead? It is without a doubt that the leaders of large nations too benefit from looking beyond their nations' needs as they build their stature in the region and the world, and can further the causes of their countries on a global scale instead. The leaders of China, for instance, have increased her presence in several African nations, pledging US\$20 billion to these states for infrastructure and agriculture in the next three years, also offering training, scholarships and medical aid. It is not coincidental that China's aid to Africa has expanded rapidly in the last decade as the continent has become a major source of natural resources, such as oil from Sudan and Angola, and copper from Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. China's aid packages are part of a larger effort to ensure her energy security as the nations of the world compete for increasingly scarce natural resources. While much can be said about Singapore and China's pragmatic approaches to diplomacy, it is nevertheless undeniable that prudent leaders can appreciate that looking into others' needs will be reciprocated on the international stage.

A good leader must also work towards furthering humanitarian and liberating causes beyond one's own country. In the world of perfect information – where we know exactly how many children are hungry in Africa and how many people are being martyred for freedom in the Middle East – a leader who merely sits and cites these as 'somebody else's problem' is not a leader at all. The United Nations Charter and almost all constitutions of the world place the responsibility of ensuring happiness, justice and equality on the broad shoulders of such leaders and they must rise up to the occasion. True enough, world leaders have stepped forward whenever the situation called for it. A notable example in world history is how the UN General Assembly passed resolutions condemning

South African apartheid policies, leading to international sanctions and sporting boycotts against the nation, which eventually isolated her. After decades of fighting such sanctions, South Africa eventually ended apartheid policies in 1990. More recently, at the call of the suppressed people of Libya, NATO leaders stepped forward to end the authoritative regime in the country with military intervention. They also provided good offices for a smooth transition for the country into a democracy after the capture and death of dictation Muammar Gaddafi. It is important for every good leader to aid such causes that ensure the betterment of humanity regardless of whether such causes take place in one's backyard or others'. After all, such is the moral obligation of one man towards another, not to mention those who have greater authoritative influence, and therefore a greater responsibility to act in the best interests of humanity.

Some political realists might point out that the endeavour to look beyond the needs of one's own country holds little personal reward for the leader as one is mostly supported by the local populace and therefore should only cater to people's needs. I find this view somewhat myopic, if not selfish. A good leader will leave his or her mark via the policies implemented and ideologies adopted, which will stand against the test of both time and space. For example, the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi worked well in India – his own country – but he also urged other countries, particularly Germany, to follow the same in his many letters to Hitler. His interests in the needs of Jews from the other countries established him as a respected figure in Europe. Similarly, Karl Marx's historical materialism was developed in Europe in the backdrop of many revolutions but he also appealed for the well-being of workers in other countries in Asia. Therefore his ideologies live on and he remains a revered leader in socialist countries. True leaders have long-lasting and impactful influence through their ideologies and beliefs, only then can they be remembered as good leaders long after their time.

It is also said that such endeavours hold little rewards for the leader's country, to which his first obligation lies. Therefore looking at the needs of other countries may be done in leisure time but should have relatively lesser importance for the leader. In the light of recent events, this is a naïve viewpoint, as can be seen through the examples of two different policies taken by the same country – USA. USA ignored the consideration and needs of many Middle-Eastern nations and inspired much ill-will through incidents like not censoring incendiary media, for example the recent short movie "the innocence of Muslims", or allowing the heretical defacing of the Koran in their military camps in Afghanistan. As a result, anti-Americanism is rampant in this region and populations are reported to have been largely polarized in favour of the extremist forces that have caused much grief in US itself. On the other hand, USA also furthered the cause of democracy in Myanmar at the call of the people. Today when the country has finally transitioned into elected governance, American firms have been rewarded with the first-mover advantage in Myanmar for mutual benefit of both parties. This proves the fact that the needs of the other countries and responses to them are important for a country's own sake as well. A good leader will be able to have the long-sightedness to predict rapidly shifting realities and move in ways to maximise the benefits for everyone involved in the situation, including their own countries.



In the end, the question is simple: who is a good leader? It is someone who works for the betterment of people – leading them to a more just and equal society. He is someone who understands the value of collective action and can foresee the consequences of any actions or inactions towards others. He is someone who understands the changing nature of our world and the roles that individuals and countries play in it. All of these points to a singular quality: he must be someone who must always look beyond the needs of his own country.

Navya Sinha 12S103.

Review

Well-stocked with examples, this essay demonstrates the importance of reading widely in order to write cogently. While some arguments may sound a little repetitive and heavy on the examples at parts, the arguments are nevertheless very sound and insightful.



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.

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

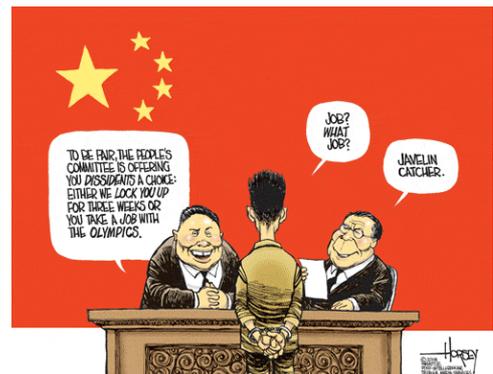
Thomas Jefferson, in one of his most eulogized moments of wit, once said that "the care of human life and happiness, and not its destruction, is the first and only object of a good government." While the drafter of the Declaration of Independence did not allude to what motivated such a daring promulgation,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

**Can small countries have a significant voice in world affairs? (2004 A levels**

Q7)

“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 that 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.



Is interdependence among nations really beneficial? (2014MJCJ2MYEQ12)

“I am not an Athenian, nor a Greek, but a citizen of the world,” proclaimed a Greek philosopher at the end of a gruesome war. The Hellenic world grew in might and stature as a result of mutual cooperation and assistance despite its fragmented nature. It established itself as a model civilisation in the ancient world, an exemplar for others to emulate. Yet, in this day and age where the political landscape is so characterised by interdependence between states, one questions the benefit of such a prevailing system. With the loss of individual autonomy and national sovereignty for the sake of the greater good of the international community and the shambolic economy resulting from overdependence, should states still cling to this paradigm? I still believe that it really is beneficial in spite of all its shortcomings. It enhances military power through multilateral alliances, brings about material wealth through provident economic unions and gives nations a louder voice in international dealings. Although extreme, unmanaged interdependence can be more harmful than beneficial, it is still a useful principle for nations to exist by.

Interdependence among nations, especially militarily, is truly beneficial in increasing the chances for countries to achieve their highest priority – existence. Multilateral alliances have been key in allowing states to aggrandise military power despite their own individual constraints, to meet the demands of self-defence. In pooling their resources together, countries are better equipped to fend off security threats and attacks by foreign expansionists. Bringing back the example of the Hellenic city-states, this point is clearly expressed in their resounding victory against the Persians in the Greco-Persian Wars of the 5th century BC. Divided, quarrelsome and puny, the independent nations of Greece were easy pickings for the covetous Persian Empire. Yet, uniting their men, arms and wits through the formation of the Delian League, the tiny democratic allied states managed to repel the attack of one of the largest armies assembled in ancient history. Their mutual dependence, not individual effort, allowed them to achieve such a feat and avoid the existential threat. This is seen today, with nations still sharing intelligence and weaponry in functioning military alliances. The Five-Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) is a military alliance binding Great Britain, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Formed in the 1970s, the alliance is meant for the more battle-hardened and experienced troops of Britain and Australia to provide expertise and assistance to the other members in the event of an attack. Thus, interdependence among nations, if viewed from a purely military dimension is indeed beneficial to states, giving them added muscle and a better fighting chance in a world built upon considerations of realpolitik.

Nationalists, on the other hand, may shun interdependence for military purposes as it leads to countries being embroiled in unnecessary conflicts they were not initially involved in, for the mere sake of assisting an ally. In most inter-state alliances, agreements are built upon a clause where an attack on one is an attack on all, making countries legally bound by treaty to assist allies in their disputes. Public opinion resents this, as it compromises a nation's sovereignty in forcing it to help others in potentially destructive wars that do not concern it in the first place. Peace in pre-war Europe was built on the Alliance System, in an attempt to deter aggression that had scourged the continent for centuries. Yet, as bilateral disputes arose, it implicated even far-off nations in a regional conflagration. World War I saw armed struggle between Austria and the Serbians involve the Russian Empire, Germany and later even Great Britain, as they joined in defence of their allies. This demonstrates how even a spark in the Balkans was able to create a general European war as a result of mutual alliances. Interdependence, therefore, can do more harm than good if the countries unaffected by a rising threat, being forced to come to the aid of their confederate, do not stand to gain from the alliance but in fact, by being burdened with obligations to defend the coalition, become worse-off. However, if limits are imposed, such risks of interdependence may be mitigated. Such can include ensuring that only if the threat in question endangers all the confederate states should the spirit of the alliance be invoked. This was the case in the World War II – the US remained in isolation from a conflict that appeared to exclusively involve its European friends, until she was rudely awakened to the realities of her own danger by the attack on Pearl Harbour. Only then did she provide help to her dependent allies Britain and France. Hence, interdependence that is measured and limited can still increase a nation's defensive options without dragging it into its allies' squabbles.

Pragmatists may also decry the notion of economic interdependence that seemingly plagues the world today with its added risks and structural flaws. The portent saying “when America sneezes, the whole world catches a cold” is no child-like adage. It very realistically encapsulates the dangers of overt interdependence in the global economy. Today, countries are more vulnerable to changing conditions in overseas markets – a workers' strike in China raised prices of iPhones worldwide last year as output was affected. Unbridled currency speculation and the subsequent bursting of the property bubble in Thailand caused the region-wide Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. The reversal of one nation's free trade policies like low tariffs can mean the loss of markets for another nation's exports – as it was in the late 1970s, when American-imposed protectionist measures like restrictive import quotas and Voluntary Export Restraints hurt Japanese exports to the US. Thus, it really may outwardly seem as though economic interdependence is an unforeseen curse that stifles countries into the same yoke of vulnerability, and I concede thus. However, despite this, there is no question that aside from occasional episodic economic meltdowns that have borderless ripple effects, throughout history, inter-state commerce has brought prosperity to many nations. Economic globalisation in the last few decades in particular, has linked countries through production, trade and consumption, moving capital and jobs to developing countries, and resultantly led to the acceleration of economic growth and the drastic reduction of poverty in these countries. As a case in point, China's phenomenal economic growth since 1978 has been nothing short of an economic miracle, its once paltry GDP growing at an annualised rate of 9%, surpassing US recently to become the world's largest economy. On a more global scale, the economic interdependence that ties numerous economies today, when combined with prudent national economic policies, has undoubtedly translated to global economic growth and the reduction of global poverty rates by half from 43% in 1990 to 21% in 2010. Such benefits are undeniably linked to economic interdependence and one should not miss the forest for the trees merely by focusing on the occasional recession.



Of course, economists sound the warning bells about uneven economic growth across nations, and how economic interdependence only benefits some nations, but not others. However, before we allow these economists to preach gloom and doom about the dangers of economic interdependence, we should perhaps take a look at history. Human history is littered with the gold circulated between every manner of human political organisation – between great kingdoms and maritime republics as well as from one humble mountain village to another. The modest merchant is witness to how economic cooperation has brought about enhanced material wealth, and that autarky is impractical as such a nation will be doomed to exhausting its own resources while consumer demand grows stagnant. The Hanseatic League is a prime example of historical economic interdependence – a collection of unremarkable market towns on the Baltic seaboard that, through the trading of furs, timber and herring dominated maritime trade in northern Europe. They enriched themselves by securing the passage of these goods and through collective military power, defended their interests and those of their merchants. In recent history, the establishment of multinational institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and World Trade Organisation is a sign of greater economic interdependence. They preserve the international economic order as a community of free-trading nations that benefit from one another. Acting as an authority against those pursuing economic exclusivism while providing financial help to nations opening up to the forces of global trade, these modern ‘merchant guilds’ symbolise the spirit of economic interdependence. Leading the reformation of the global economy after the Second World War under American auspices, they brought the world into a Golden Age of Capitalism. This was a period of free trade, high growth and unprecedented wealth that lasted three decades. Thus, economic interdependence should not always evoke images of unemployment, rising debt and other woes it may sometimes cause, as the colour and variety it adds to societies touched by an exchange of goods with far-off regions far outweigh its potential risks.

Another reason for my support of interdependence among nations is the advantages it brings to them on the international stage. ‘Nations’ – being a collective term to refer to any group of people that share a common culture – may not necessarily be states but components of wider political entities. One then wonders why they have chosen to remain in formal unions with other nations



instead of acting independently. The fact is that nations have a greater voice if they collude as part of a regional organisation or – in extreme cases – amalgamate to form wider states. This gives them greater diplomatic influence in the form of added bargaining power at negotiating tables. For instance, the political cohesion of six Native American tribes of the north-eastern Atlantic seaboard into a united Iroquois Confederacy created the most formidable challenge to European colonisation of the Americas. Where superior political sophistication of the Europeans was able to undermine squabbling native communities through a policy of divide-and-conquer elsewhere, the Iroquois, through their hold over vast swathes of territory and informal hegemony, were able to compel greater concessions from the Europeans. They played the British, French and Dutch against each other and survived the tide of colonialism longer than less cohesive tribes. In modern times, the European Union has rallied together countries including those that used to be part of the former USSR to vote on issues like human rights and animal welfare. By holding a seat as an observer in the UN, it gives a chance for lesser European states to have their agenda and interests heard on an international level. Therefore, interdependence is indeed beneficial as it gives smaller states – and indeed small nations – a chance to air their concerns by standing together as a larger and more imposing political entity, in the global arena.

In the rough and tumble of international affairs, might is right. No nation can stand alone without reaching out to its neighbours for assistance and receiving help in return. Few are the nations today that can afford the price of isolation, especially in so integrated a world. Thus, interdependence is imperative to ensure the long-term viability of all states.

Muhammad Faris B Joraimi 13A301



The writer certainly possesses a strong and engaging personal voice. This is coupled with valid points supported by an astonishing range of examples, all of which make this essay an excellent read. Keep it up!

How far is a world without conflict a realistic aim? (MJCJ214MBTQ1)

Former US President John F. Kennedy once said, in one of his most eulogized moments of wit, that “Mankind must put an end to war before war puts an end to Mankind.” The exhortation by the great statesman makes perfect sense to all, yet is near impossible to achieve due to the irresistible lure of power and the endless stream of men who lust for it. In fact, I am inclined to believe that a world free from the scourge of aggression amongst man is a distant, optimistic notion at best. This essay hence contends that man’s clear but feeble attempts at reaching the ideal of world peace will forever be beleaguered by our obstinate reluctance to give up and let go of things like historical baggage, which entrap men in a world rife with bitter conflict.

Pacifists often argue that the world is made a safer place by dramatic advancements in technology, citing the age-old paradox that the best way to prevent war is to prepare for war. The timeworn example is often given of the development of nuclear technology for military purposes, which famously gave rise to the doctrine of mutually assured destruction. By ensuring that any aggressive act would be met with retaliation, this doctrine saved the United States from decimation on a nuclear level at the height of Russo-American Cold War tensions. While the influence of such technology in skewing countries’ decision-making calculus is undeniable, equally inevitable is the progress of science and technology in our world. To claim that such doctrines will continue to hold water and stop conflicts eternally is predicated on the assumption that science will never progress beyond its current level – a foolish claim at best. The balance of terror upheld by the bipolar 20th century superpowers relied on each state’s possession of second-strike capabilities - no state would be foolish enough to launch a first strike offensive if retaliation was possible and expected. Such capabilities have since been diminished by weapons that are quicker and harder to detect, making it increasingly viable for technologically advanced countries to launch crippling attacks with little fear of reprisal. As intellectual discoveries inevitably reach greater heights, the limits placed upon man’s aggressive tendencies slowly vanish and his ability to incite bloodshed only increases. On another far more insidious level, the acquisition of technology cannot be contained to states that act logically. Increasingly and alarmingly prevalent today is the trend of sophisticated defence technologies falling into the hands of terrorist organisations. Surely the same principles of deterrence

do not apply to the very fundamentalists who have recurrently proven themselves crazed enough to die for their causes by perpetuating the horrific 9/11 attacks and other jingoistic instances of organised terror. The concept of mutual destruction does little to faze them, and can even arguably be said to represent their modus operandi. This paradox of preventing war by preparing for it is hence just that: a paradox. The unfettered growth of our technological capabilities not only renders old principles invalid, but also treacherously weaponises manic groups that never abided by our logic to begin with, scoffing at the very notion of a world without conflict.

The rising militancy of fundamentalist groups leads us nicely into the next reason that the scourge of conflict is here to stay, namely that of religion. Far too often, our allegiance to the divine has shown itself incompatible with peace. Historically, the Crusades were perpetuated by Catholics who sought the propagation of Christianity and the extermination of Pagans. In fact, one does not have to look past this century to find instances of discord sowed by differences along religious lines. The Jasmine Revolution in Bahrain witnessed the Sunni Muslim monarchy crushing its Shi'ite opposition with columns of tanks, in a manner reminiscent of the Tiananmen incident. The Machiavellian Assad family in Syria, of the Shi'ite Alawite sect, has itself been quite ruthless in its use of chemical weapons to systematically quell its Sunni dissidents. Given all this in the context of burgeoning tensions between regional powers Saudi Arabia and Iran (of Sunni and Shi'ite majority respectively), and we have a toxic concoction for a long and bitter turmoil that will bedevil the Middle East for years to come. Of course, one might suggest that a secular world would side-step the quagmire of religious conflict, yet we can never be free of religion in the world today because of our innate need for it as a source of comfort and solace. It is ironically this special place it holds in our hearts that gives religion its divisive power, and is precisely what ensnares man in a world of strife, especially that which is motivated by fervent religious zeal, shattering any frail hope for the eventuality of world peace.

The next, and perhaps more tangible, aspect of human existence that causes and indeed justifies acts of aggression is the weight of historical baggage. The annals of history are brimming with uncouth and morally abhorrent human injustices, which we as a human race are obstinately unwilling to let go of. This creates simmering tensions which in a flash can erupt into violent disputes. The massacre of Arabs in Israel by the Jewish , motivated by their (religious) conviction in the idea of 'Eretz Yisrael' or the Jewish promised land, has not been forgotten by Israel's Arab neighbours more than half a century later. Israel continues to be the pariah of the Middle East, her diplomatic

overtures met with cold nonchalance by regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The wars that have been fought to this end have been, and will continue to be bloody, brutal and barbaric in the violence meted out. This will only entrench tensions further, creating new baggage for future generations to deal with, ensnaring us in a vicious cycle of grisly revenge and payback. Even well-meaning efforts at restitution to ease hostilities arising from bad blood have shown themselves only capable of worsening matters. Rwanda's bitter colonial past embroiled her in a gross genocide after independence, which the government has attempted to fix via affirmative action policies like quotas in parliament and colleges for the historically victimised Tutsi ethnicity. The artificial favour placed on one race over another in the name of equalising opportunities has done more to create tension than rectify old ones. Such policies are not peculiar to Rwanda, with strikingly, and regrettably, similar results being noted in such countries as India and Malaysia. The burden of history hence poisons peace, and there seems to be no real effective way to reconcile this without complicating the situation further. The mistakes of our forefathers will thus continue to have violent repercussions for decades to come, keeping the dream of a world in harmony a distant fantasy.





Despite these harsh truths, optimists often put forth a more naive notion of war, arguing that the most grievous conflicts in history were results of political ideologies that were diametrically opposed, and since the world is far less binary today, wars should cease to be reality. While it is true that democracy has triumphed, leaving Marxism and fascism in its dust, the dominance of one ideology is again problematic, as it tethers dangerously towards imperialism. America mistakenly sees itself as the enforcer of democracy around the world, falsely believing that the varied freedoms enshrined in its own Constitution to be unilaterally beneficial ideals, with a myopic lack of consideration for individual countries' unique demographics and other traits. This blind ideological fervour has motivated violent incursions in Afghanistan, among others, which in turn propagates rhetoric like 'western imperialist pigs' and other emotive lines that fuel the fire of fundamentalism. As one ideology seeks to dominate, resistance, of the bloody kind, becomes inevitable, replacing old conflicts between states of polar ideologies with new conflicts, between states (particularly the United States) and militant organizations. Hence while the age of the Cold War and the two Great Wars have long ended, optimists should not be too quick to take comfort as the embers of ideological conflict still burn, an ever-present threat against the temporary illusion of global calm

The Geneva Convention, the Charter of the United Nations, and the Nuremberg Principles, all point toward man's progress in efforts to eradicate conflict. We have come a long way, and our endeavours are laudable. But it is a long road ahead. The threats to peace that bedevil us today are not only numerous but completely uncertain: religious fundamentalism, tensions accruing from historical baggage and ideological differences. In closing, it is fit to scrutinize US President John F Kennedy once more. In spite of his lofty exhortation to peace, Kennedy was ironically no pacifist. In his short tenure as president of the world's most powerful country before his assassination, tensions between the US and USSR came to a head with the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis taking place. This would tell us as much – a world without conflict is far from attainable.

Teng Boon Hwi, Gerald 13A301

 **Review**

An eloquent and persuasive piece, using a strong blend of language and factual knowledge to drive your points across. Be wary of excessive rhetoric though.



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 banquetting 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!

Are the poor an inevitable feature of any society? (2004 A levels Q2)

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!



'Poverty is the fundamental cause of crime.' To what extent do you agree? (2010MJCJ2MYEQ2)

Crime can be defined as an infraction against the laws imposed by a country or state. There is a large variety of types of crimes, ranging from property crimes such as theft or robbery, to violent crimes such as murder or rape. Criminals too can have widely varying profiles, from different social backgrounds and have many different motivations for the crimes they have committed. As such, it is therefore safe to say that there is no singular cause to crime, and crime cannot be explained by poverty alone. However, whether poverty is a fundamental cause of crime, meaning the root cause or most basic explanation behind many other causes of most crimes, is the moot point. In my opinion, while poverty cannot possibly explain every single cause of crime, poverty very often is linked to other factors that cause crime, and therefore can be considered a fundamental cause of crime.

It is without a doubt that poverty does lead to crime in many ways. The desperation of being poor and having to find some means to support oneself or one's family provides sufficient motivation for many poor people to resort to a whole panoply of crimes such as theft, robbery or worse crimes like selling their children into prostitution or even drug trafficking. For example, in the United Kingdom, more than half of all foreign women in UK prisons are Jamaican drug mules found to have been carrying small packets of drugs in their digestive systems. These women, due to their impoverished circumstances in Jamaica, were lured by drug cartels trying to import drugs into Europe. Another way in which poverty eventually causes crime is due to the deprivation of education opportunities for poor people and subsequently, opportunities to pull them out of the poverty cycle. For one living in desperate poverty, crime that can feed one or their families or offer them an outlet from poverty seems to be an attractive proposition one can scarcely turn down.

However, it would seem like poverty becomes motivation for a poor person to commit crime if in the first place, the potential criminal has little moral scruples to begin with. The more fundamental cause of crime for such a criminal would be greed or avarice, wanting more, and not poverty. After all, it is true too that not all poor people turn to crime; many try ways and means to eke out an honest living, such as poor Filipinos who live in the squatter community of Smokey Mountain in Manila, a huge rubbish dump, who make their living from picking through the rubbish at Smokey Mountain. Granted that that is true, it is nevertheless undeniable that unlike a normal greedy person, a poor person faces far more desperate situations, such that turning to alternative means (in other words: crime) to meet their daily needs seems more than justifiable and cannot be dismissed as a simple matter of avarice alone.

Poverty too has a close link with dysfunctional family backgrounds and one's living environment, other common factors often cited to cause crime. A dysfunctional family with absent parents or criminal parents can lead children astray due to the lack of parental guidance. However, it is also commonly proven that such dysfunctional families are often poor, and such children do grow up in impoverished backgrounds. Living in a neighbourhood where crime flourishes also normalizes the existence of crime for the young, who are socialized into seeing crime as a way of life. Yet again however, such neighbourhoods are not surprisingly poor too. When a young child from an impoverished background is forced to live in squatters and slums where crime networks flourish, this makes him more susceptible to negative influences from a young age. Such examples can be found in slums all over the world, from the notoriously dangerous *favela* of Petare, Argentina to Kibera in Nairobi where street urchins typically grow up into hard-core armed criminals, not knowing any better alternatives to life. For one growing up impoverished in such areas, crime becomes normalized as a way of life and is not seen as a simple issue of the lack of moral scruples.

Lastly, crime can also be caused by lax enforcement of laws. However, if one examines closely such countries where this takes place, the governments of these countries are often hampered by poverty and a lack of government funds to hire more law enforcement officers or upgrade their judicial systems. Is it then no surprise that crime rates are much higher in poor countries than in rich? Furthermore, a poor government may see crime as a viable way for their people to survive, and turn a blind eye to the crimes being committed on the ground, for example allowing a black market to thrive. For years, the Chinese government did nothing about intellectual property rights violations in

China, only choosing to act in the last decade after powerful MNCs exerted pressure on the Chinese government to do so. More extreme examples include the Taleban (who ruled Afghanistan before the Americans deposed them in 2001), who encouraged the growth of opium and the processing of drugs. In fact, Afghanistan was said to have produced 90% of the world's opium supply at its peak. Another extreme example would be poor South East Asian countries like Laos and Cambodia who do little to stop the trafficking of young women and children across borders as indentured labourers or prostitutes. It is clear that governments, who cannot or choose not to crack down on crime, do so primarily because of poverty.

As such, it can be clearly seen how poverty leads to crime on many levels, and explains how other commonly cited causes of crime have their roots too in poverty. Governments and help agencies should take note, for the solution to eradicating crime lies in first eradicating its root culprit – poverty.

 **Review**

While most writers for this question chose to disagree with the proposition and evaded the keyword 'fundamental', this writer however neatly addresses the keyword throughout the essay. The wide range of examples employed also well illustrates the points.

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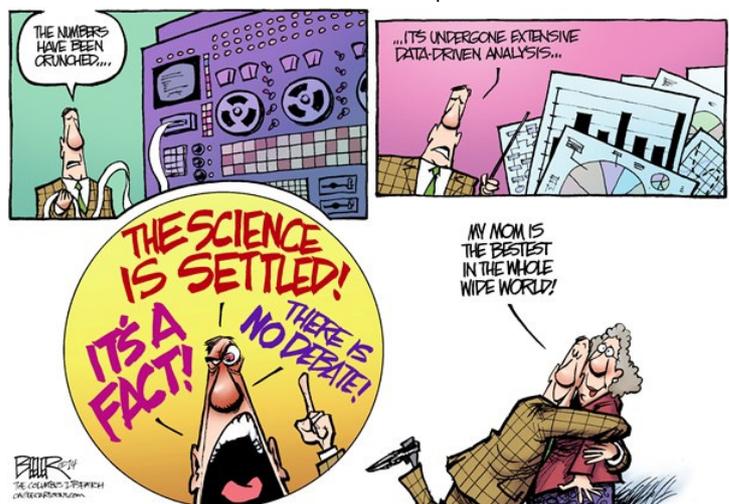


'Science is unreliable, being based as much on theory as on fact.' Is this a fair comment? (2011 A levels Q12)

How did the world come into being? That is the question scientists are perpetually trying to answer as they probe more into the mysteries of the globe and risk coming head-to-head with opposing fundamentals such as the Big Bang Theory and the notion of Creationism in Christianity. Yet, even as scientists continue to discover irrefutable evidence that ostensibly supports both theories, the public may begin to wonder exactly whose "side" the scientists are on and become sceptical about such hard evidence. With theory and fact coming together to form a composite field called science, what or who can they truly believe? Even if theories are corroborated by facts and statistics drawn from scientifically and logically designed experiments, there is still so much in science that remains unaccounted for. Therefore, is science unreliable, since it depends on both theory and fact? I believe that this is not the case. Even though concepts in science are composed of theory, I would have to argue that it is rather unfair to label science as a completely unreliable field.

Firstly, science has produced many wonderful gadgets and technology that serves to better our lives so much so that its successes in many different areas lend support to its reliability. From various areas of science such as robotic surgery through which doctors can remove tumours with more accuracy and fewer risks or cutting-edge prosthetic limbs that allow war and landmine victims to walk and even run, there is hardly any area of people's lives now that is not touched by the results of scientific experiments and discoveries. Indeed, one can say that today's world is now in a digital age where science is at the forefront. Even if some of them are just theories, scientists who have been able to build on facts and theories to come up with revolutionary technology prove that science is still reliable. To corroborate this argument, several examples that seem to come straight out of a science-fiction book and which are now real and practical forms of technology can be cited. Optical fibres function based on the theory of light being able to bend and be reflected so that terabytes of information can be transmitted at high speed. Lasers, on the other hand, were constructed based on the idea that light consists of discrete particles that can emit light used for medical purposes. Scientists have been able to use both theories, which have their own supporting evidences, to create these technologies that have played a significant role in the digital age today, showing that even if both theories are not fully fleshed out in explanation, they can still be used to make practical objects. Therefore, science is reliable since its successes can be qualified by real world situations and can compensate for the lack of certainty in the form of both theory and fact.

Secondly, it is precisely theory that makes science reliable. Scientists and researchers who devise theories have to conduct experiments to prove them, and if they are disproven, even more will appear out of the woodwork, awaiting corroboration. It is this very rigorous and stringent scientific method that enhances the credibility of science, since theories that are disproven can still shed some light on particular scientific concepts. As scientists continue to debunk theories and delve deeper into various subjects, they will glean deeper insights from their mistakes and gradually edge closer to the truth as more theories are put forth. Science thus becomes increasingly reliable as researchers eliminate inaccurate theories and suggest more defensible ones that can explain a natural phenomenon or occurrence, bolstering its credibility. For example, when J.J. Thomson first published the 'Plum Pudding' model of the atom in 1904, many scientists came forward to question it and after only five years, it was completely debunked by scientists Hans





Geiger and Ernest Marsden. Using their ground-breaking 'gold foil' experiment as a demonstration, they proved Thomson wrong. Hence, in learning from the disproven theories to formulate even better ones, science's reliability only increases.

Sceptics may claim that there are scientists and researchers who use their laboratory results from singular studies to extrapolate to the whole scope of nature, and in doing so, assume that all species closely related to their results adhere to them. This would render science inaccurate and unreliable given the disparities and differences in the world. However, to be fair to scientists, it is impossible to demand a concrete concept from science – the world is enormous and to collect sufficient evidence that proves one theory to be undeniably true is a Herculean task. Therefore, owing to the vastness of the universe, its biodiversity and properties, it is inherently impossible for science to completely break away from theory to be underpinned by plain, indisputable fact. Scientists can only satisfy themselves with partial factual substantiation due to the immense difficulty in finding all the evidence and samples that they need. One example is the evolutionary theory. Try as they might, biologists are likely to be unable to cement the theory as fact owing to natural occurrences that time and again defeat their efforts. The causes of evolution include natural selection, which scientists can easily monitor over generations, but also constitute phenomena such as biased mutations and genetic drift. Scientists are unable to predict when there are genetic malfunctions that cause a species to defy the theory and develop mutations or gene disappearances that set it apart from the other species of its ancestral family. Facts are not watertight because change is a constant, but science is able to follow these changes and remain current – thus it is as reliable as it can be.

Those in the detractor camp may also claim that the volatility of science and the fluidity of its theories make it unreliable since theories are not concrete. They are always changing, nuanced and adapted to suit the subject of study. Therefore, science cannot be credible since it never stays the same due to its inability to be a plain, unchangeable fact. Yet again, however, this is a far too myopic view. The phrase 'change is always constant' is arguably the most accurate maxim that describes our world. Things are always adapting, morphing, transforming according to their environments and circumstances, and thus science can never be based on solid, unchangeable fact. Therefore, this argument against the reliability of science is not tenable as it is a demand that science will never be able to meet due to its very arbitrary nature. One note-worthy case study is influenza, which is notorious for its perpetual mutations and developments such that there are so many unique strains of the illness that there exists three different types of vaccinations for influenza, namely the Type A subtype H1N1 and subtype H3N2, as well as type B vaccine. Type A may see a new addition to its list of subtypes: H5N1. Hence, it can be seen that the world is never constant, and thus, science and its theories which study the world can never be fixed and rigid. In fact, it would be all the more reliable if theory accurately changes according to the metamorphosis of the facts of the universe.

Critics may also declare science to be unreliable due to the many assumptions made during its hypothetical stages. They may point to the various assumptions that many branches of science employ in their study so that their results can tally with their theories despite there being no ideal situation in this world. The many assumptions involved in scientific study will never hold true no matter how hard scientists attempt to recreate ideal situations because they are what they are – assumptions that bear uncertainty. Such critics may refer to the example of Economics, an area of study that may be undergoing a radical change in direction as economists today are locked in a battle over the existence of *Homo Economicus*, which all the fundamentals of economics are built upon. *Homo Economics* – the economic human – has perfectly rational faculties and fixed desires, therefore he is assumed to make decisions, whose impact on the market can be predicted by economics. And yet, economists are now claiming that he does not exist, for consumers neither carry out such deep thinking into their market decisions nor use careful cost-benefit analyses. Furthermore, peoples' wants are notoriously fluid. Therefore, science is unreliable, they say, due to all the assumptions employed that make it so ideal and so impractical in reality. However, it is these theoretical assumptions that make science reliable, for without them, probably nothing can then be tested or explored. In fact, contrary to my critics' beliefs, assumptions are to deal with the inconsistencies in the real world and do not significantly impact the basis of theories. Many will find that the reliability of science is enhanced and not debilitated by the existence of assumptions because when the inaccuracies are accounted for, theories will fall into place. Therefore, theory enhances fact and increases the reliability of science.



Fact and theory are characteristics of science that cannot be separated. Even if they seem to contradict each other, they actually support each other to explain the various phenomena of the world. This is very visible in the field of psychology, where there is a plethora of theories employed to explain human behaviour, such as drive theory, self-verification theory and terror management theory. They are adapted comprehensively instead of separately in explaining social behaviour. The deluge of theories in science is unlikely to stop. That may not be a bad thing after all.

Lee Hui Ying 12S101

Review

This essay deals with highly complex and abstract concepts in the most concrete way possible with relevant examples and case studies, as well as current insights into the world of science today. A commendable effort indeed!

To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the skill levels of people? (2010 A levels Qn6)

In the article, "Is Google making us stupid?" Nicholas Carr mentions that, "I feel as if I'm always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle." Has technology dumbed us down to such a great extent that our skills have plummeted to such drastic levels? Certainly, technology seems to have weakened us in some ways in its ability to simplify tasks once onerous to us. Yet, to claim that technology has had a negative impact on our skill levels is unfair. In fact, as technology advances, it brings a positive impact on our skill levels.

Luddites would claim that reliance on technology for everyday conveniences leads to a lesser need for basic survival skills. The basic skill to survive in the world like starting a fire, finding food to eat, even the simple ability to sew a button is disappearing. According to those critics, such rudimentary skills have become entirely mechanized and therefore foreign to modern folks. They would safely conclude that technology has completely banished the need for basic skills and hence that would be the negative impact on the skills levels of people. Yet, the above viewpoint ignores the fact that these basic skills are redundant today in the light of how technology frees us from manual work and unnecessary work. No one person living in modern times today would see the loss of primitive hunting skills employed by our ancestors as a great loss to mankind. Nor would women bemoan the loss of the ability to sew when new clothes are plentiful and cheaply available. Hence, a loss of such basic skills cannot be seen as a negative impact, when there is no need to return to such basic chores with technology being able to replace manual labour. Technology cannot be said to have ruined people's skills levels if the skills being lost are redundant in the first place.

In fact, the widespread use of technology in the modern world today translates into a need for people to learn new skills of how to live with technology and tap on it, which can be seen therefore as a positive impact. While it may seem basic to us in the modern world, learning how to use information and communication technologies like newfangled smartphones, software and online social networks is nevertheless an important skill this generation of humans have acquired in order to communicate, work and even play. Even driving a car or learning to navigate the complex transportation systems of cities can be seen as survival skills modern humans have newly acquired, 'new' when seen against the entire timeline of human history. Technology may have made skills which require manual labour redundant, but has also led to humans having to acquire new intellectual skills to use it. Technology has in essence only translated into a shift in skill sets relevant to the current era and therefore cannot be said to have had a negative impact on people's skill levels.

Some critics may argue that the use of technology to mass-produce so as to attain economies of scale has rendered skills of artisan craftsmanship obsolete. They may cite occupations like traditional tailoring, pottery and shoe-making which are experiencing a slow death. I concede that there is some loss of traditional skills but one must understand that technology can be amalgamated with such skills so as to retain these skills in the long term. For instance, Thailand's traditional gem and jewellery industry workers are prospering by combining their renowned skill in production and design with cutting edge technology and internationally recognized testing facilities, clearly proving that a



blend in traditional skills and new skills will benefit the individual and the society. Artists are now able to use sophisticated CAD software to show potential buyers realistic designs that can be custom-created to suit their tastes. Such designs are preserved and ensure the longevity of the design too as it is stored in the soft copy. Thus, the skills artists possess are not wasted and are instead preserved using technological means. In light of this, the impact of technology on our skills level can even be said to be positive.

Furthermore, the argument that technology has a positive impact on our skills level holds truer in view of how it allows us to refine, recreate, research and to practice the existing skills we already possess. A good example would be the use of online e-learning platforms to encourage students to engage in independent research and learning, currently employed by schools in Singapore. In that way, learners are able to set their own goals, manage the pace, process and content of learning, therefore personalising their learning experience to enhance their skills. Most e-learning programs even provide immediate feedback on learner assessments. Another example would be the use of flight simulation programmes to train student pilots, which is certainly a much safer, yet just as efficacious method to improve on pilots' flying skills. Thus one can thereby conclude that technology, in helping us practise and refine our skills, has a very positive impact on our skills levels.

Finally, technology can also become the platform where skills are shared and views exchanged by professionals on how to improve on ways of doing things, in that way allowing for people to learn and improve on their skills level. In social networking sites like LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network, an individual is able to get contacts that help him to exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals. Technology does not stop with allowing the sharing of skills among professionals but also allows one to share skills on interests and past-times like cooking, making handicrafts and even hobbies, all of which are various forms of skills too. Forums and blogs on speciality interests like photography or cooking, for instance, allow one to learn more than the fundamental skills, or even to share one's personal tips with other like-minded fellows. As such, the positive impact of technology on people's skills level is undeniable.

To conclude, Nicholas Carr may have imagined himself to have lost his skills on deep reading but he should be able to see that his reading in an e-book format can now be accompanied with relevant sounds, images and "wiki-comments", making reading a multi-sensory experience. Skills are inherent in an individual and cannot be destroyed by external factors unless he himself decides to sacrifice it. Technology merely enhances our skills, giving us a new dimension to our already existing skills. If anything, technology has led to an enhancement, rather than deterioration of our skills level.

 **Review**

A convincingly written essay with careful attention paid to the subject of 'skills level'. Examples used are relevant and current.

'The more science advances, the more religion will decline'. To what extent do you agree? (2008 A levels Q3)

Science and religion appear to clash in almost every period of history known to Man whether it is in terms of the conflict between beliefs and values or even how it affects the way we think or act. And as science continues to push boundaries and challenge religious teachings that are rooted in faith, it seems as though that the more science sheds new light on many issues, the more we begin to question our faith in religion because of the new questions and doubts science has raised. However, I am inclined to disagree with the statement because both science and religion serve hugely different purposes to us and share a common goal even though they appear to conflict on the surface.

The opposition mistakenly believes that as science debunks the mysteries of faith and sheds light on how religious truths are not supported by facts and evidence, people begin to doubt and question the legitimacy of religion to such an extent that religion as an institution of faith loses the confidence of its followers. Indeed, science gives us factual answers in life and answers our queries about how the things around us comes about while religion provides similar answers that sometimes have no



scientific basis. For example, science explains that monsoons are seasonal occurrences in tropical areas and are a natural phenomenon whereas Hinduism interprets it as the manifestation of the wrath of their many gods. Since science has now proven that the religion is supposedly 'wrong', who do thousands of devotees still pack places of worship? The answer is because even though science has proven some explanations of religion to be false, religion on the whole still unites people in worship and gives them hope that there is something larger than life to believe in. Despite unprecedented advancements in medical science, doctors are still baffled by healing miracles that defy any scientific explanations such as the complete healing of a nine year old boy suffering from terminal brain cancer through prayer, Billy Burke. Thus, it is not true that the more science advances, the more religion will decline because of the deeper, more intrinsic value religion has close to our hearts.

Dissenters of my stand also can say that in an age of science, religion will fall into a decline because it is simply not realistic to sustain a belief in the supernatural in the modern age. Science exposes the many hoaxes and fake 'miracles' of things such as spirit communication, exorcism and such. Given how religion and the supernatural are inextricably linked, one cannot help but suspect that religion might be another sham, especially with numerous new-fangled ones popping up such as the New Age, Scientology, Eastern Mormonism and more. In view of this, I would like to highlight that there is a fine difference between religion and the occult. Science is what helps us identify the truth from the untruths. While it has proven that some miracles are indeed staged and there are scams who use religion as a cover, science has also given us proof that some religions have been speaking the truth based on the discovery of ancient Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures, the Dead Sea Scrolls and other historical artefacts that serve as evidence of what the particular religion preaches. As such, it would not be fair to conclude that the more science advances, the more religion will decline as they could in fact complement each other in certain aspects as explained above. Hence, the statement does not reflect the true relationship or differences between science and religion.

In fact, particularly in this day and age of in which conflicts seem to occur as frequently as ever or even more so, religion will not progressively decline as science moves forward because it provides comfort and solace which science as a study, is unable to give no matter how advanced it may become. Religion serves as spiritual comfort to our souls by providing us with promise and hope for an inner peace especially after worldly affairs make us weary. This is evident from how Muslims around the world specially take the time off their busy schedules to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, the centre of Islam, at least once in their lifetime. The comfort provided by faith is only experienced by heart and is indescribable by words. How can science, which is based only on hard facts and statistical figures, be able to explain feelings of hope and comfort that are emotions which cannot be properly conveyed without personal experience?

Also, no matter how science improves and breaks boundaries, religion will not decline proportionately because it is also part of our way of life. It influences the way we think and act and also provides a collective conscience to guide us. For some cultures, their religion is what defines them and gives them a social identity. The Jehovah's Witnesses, or Jews, are still guided by their religious customs to this day. It is compulsory for them to visit the synagogues on Sabbath Day and when they come of age, they will be allowed to read from the Torah, the Holy Scroll, as a symbol that they have come through the rite of passage to adulthood. Science, on the other hand, rarely features in our personal life as a routine or memorable event. Science may help us gain superiority or an advantage over others by making our lives easier and empowering us through the use of gadgets and machines but, unlike religion, science only deals with the physical and perhaps the mental, but does nothing for our emotional and spiritual well-being.

Furthermore, humans have always been curious about the supernatural and the afterlife. Science cannot provide any clear explanation or offer insights about the afterlife because scientifically speaking, a person's life ends once his heart stop beating. There is no soul or spirit to speak of in science, but it is a human need to know that life does not end in this present world which can be very empty and demoralizing at times. Conversely, almost every religion distinctly expresses its ideas about the afterlife and this is comforting knowledge to those who are curious about what happens after we pass on. Buddhism talks of Nirvana, Roman Catholicism describes Heaven, Hell and Purgatory while Hinduism and Taoism feature reincarnation. The hidden advantage of these beliefs is that because they are all mainly based on the logic that you reap what you sow, religion, in a sense,

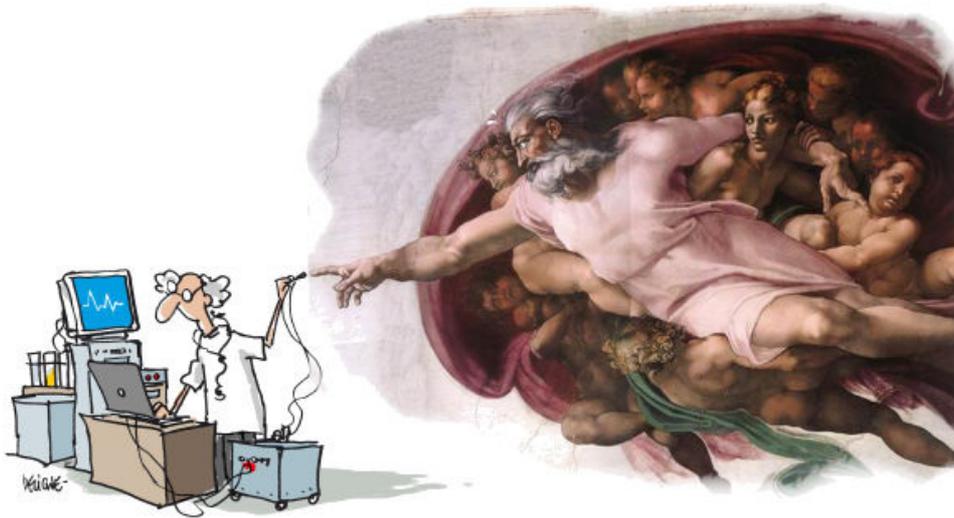
governs our acts and deters us from doing evil in this life for the fear of punishment in the next. Science, often believed to be devoid of conscience, as its live subjects are not of its concern, will have terrible repercussions on the human race if left to advance without any regulation by our own conscience that is guided by a softer force, religion. Thus, religion can be argued to be providing us a safe direction for us while we pursue scientific advancement.

In conclusion, even with science's advancements, it is unlikely that religion will progressively decline since that they are not only complementary in certain aspects but also serve hugely different functions. Perhaps a more accurate relationship between science and religion is not one that is inversely related, as assumed in the statement, but rather one of balance. Like the balance between good and evil, the clash between science and religion will continue to spur us on to ask questions and seek answers for our self-improvement and provide the distinction between ethics and intelligence.

Dorothy Tan 09S417

 **Review**

An excellent essay that addresses a challenging question well. An impressive range of examples used.



Should everyone be expected to donate suitable organs after death?

(2012 A levels Q9)

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 market. 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



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

Should research into expensive medical treatments be allowed when only a few can afford them? (07A1V1Q11)

It is known that medical research into experimental cures can come up to millions of dollars due to the expertise involved and the amount of time and money spent on numerous experiments and clinical trials. With such high costs, the question arises as to whether such research is worth the effort and financial investment when most people cannot afford to pay thousands of dollars for it. Yet, even the pragmatist would be hard-pressed to disagree with the view that medical research is a necessary cost society must take on for the potential of life-saving cures. As such, in my opinion, while it seems a waste of money and resources to allow costly research on medical treatments that very few can afford, it should be allowed for the many benefits that can result.



For one, experimental medical treatments do not remain prohibitively expensive permanently. As with any new product, the initial costs are high, but eventual economies of scale in production and competition between pharmaceutical companies will bring down the prices of such products. Furthermore, drugs are largely expensive due to the patents pharmaceutical companies hold on the production of such medicines. Once a drug's patent expires, usually after twenty years, the original company that developed it will be compelled to manufacture a generic version of that medicine, or allow other companies to produce generic and cheaper versions of such medicine. This explains how important antiviral drugs to treat HIV have become more affordable over the years, allowing more HIV patients to delay the onset of the full-blown symptoms of AIDs and therefore live longer lives. Thus, it is myopic to argue that medical research that seems to produce expensive cures in the short run should be halted.

Moreover, if the price of medical treatment is exorbitant as a result of mercenary pharmaceutical firms who hold patents preventing other drug companies from producing the similar generic drugs, this does not detract from the fact that the medical treatment is effective. If so, it is the government who should be subsidizing the costs of such treatments or such research, rather than trying to restrict such beneficial research in the name of 'high costs'. After all, it is the onus of the government to ensure good healthcare for its people.

One could easily argue that the amount of money spent on such costly research could be better spent on other areas such as subsidizing existing treatments which will benefit the masses instead of coming up with new-fangled expensive treatments which benefit only a few people. Also, a related opposing argument would be that not only is research into medical treatment expensive, the results of research are uncertain and it would certainly be a waste of money if it turns out futile. However, both opposing views are counter-productive to the progress of medical science. It is the duty of the medical and scientific community to continue to work on newer and better cures, as humans grow immune to drugs that have been overused, or simply to pre-empt viruses for which we yet have neither name nor cure. Not doing so would mean the halt of medical progress, and the beginning of scientific stagnation. It is essential to continue researching and improving because no one knows what great discovery lies around the corner. Failed medical research, contrary to misconception, can still yield important information. For example recently, when surgeons experimented with the use of electrodes in the brain of an obese man to try to reduce his appetite, the result was the stimulation of memory circuits in the brain, which instead allowed the patient to remember events long forgotten. The medical team is now using the same approach on patients with Alzheimer's disease as a therapy to boost degenerating memory circuits. Hence in the name of scientific advancement and human improvement, research into expensive medical treatments should still be allowed.

Critics might also argue that research into expensive medical treatment be disallowed on the basis of the resulting medical treatment being elitist. This is especially dangerous if pharmaceutical companies are diverting their attention from developing cheaper drugs for illnesses which largely afflict poor nations to expensive treatments for developed countries to maximise their profits. For example, between 1975 and 1997, out of the 1,223 new drugs developed by pharmaceutical companies, only 1% of them were used to treat tropical diseases. The reason for the research gap is clear: drugs for tropical diseases are not profitable for drug companies. The pharmaceutical industry seems then to be focusing their investment to meet the needs of people living in wealthy countries and increasingly funds research devoted to lifestyle diseases which will be more profitable. Yet, on deeper analysis, if a resulting medical treatment is too costly and unaffordable, the clientele for such a product will be small. There is therefore no need to discuss if such research should be allowed since profit-driven firms will then have a disincentive to perform such costly research. Thus if research still proceeds, firms must have calculated its potential to be worth the high costs, meaning there are enough people, and not just a few, who will pay for such treatment. Ultimately, the decision to continue with expensive medical research should lie with the company if there are clients ready to finance such research and treatment. Such research is an economic decision out of the hands of the government and no group has the power to 'allow' or 'disallow' such decisions.

In conclusion, research into expensive medical treatments should be allowed as it will be truly beneficial. It might be too costly in the short run but it will benefit the masses in the long run, thus



such research is highly worthy of investment. Who knows? No matter how expensive, the cure for AIDs or a vaccine for cancer may just be round the corner.

Review

Logical arguments were given, with well-researched and appropriate examples. The writer addresses the point of contention of the question thoroughly.

To what extent do medical advancements complicate our lives?

(MJCJ2MBT2015Q6)

The advent of modern medicine has greatly transformed the way many humans live. Minor illnesses like influenza no longer pose a major problem for us – we simply take our medicines to avoid complications, and rest. However, things may not be as straightforward as it seems with medical advancements. There are those who criticise doctors for further complicating our lives with ever more complex medical procedures and routines, some of which come with further medical issues. Granted that the progress of medicine might have complicated our lives a little, my personal opinion is that the benefits it has brought thus far, far outweigh the complications it might have caused.

It is undeniable that modern medicine has brought us countless benefits, and has made our lives, overall, less complicated. Recent developments have let us find out about our possible health problems in future long before the problems actually start affecting us. While most common medicines we use in our day-to-day lives focus on curing symptoms, like paracetamol as an analgesic and antipyretic, some aspects of medicine also look into the early detection of problems as many major or serious illnesses are much easier to treat (and are more likely to be successfully treated) when treatment starts early. Alternatively, some conditions like allergies can be detected even before the person experiences an allergic reaction due to allergic triggers. In both cases, it can mitigate discomfort and reduce the time spent resting in bed or in the hospital, which no doubt makes our lives easier – just think of all the catching up one has to do after one returns to work or school after a few days of sick leave. Examples of this include genetic sequencing to find out, for example, which illnesses – like Alzheimer's – or allergies a person might have, by looking at key genes (or their absence) and seeing if the person has a specific allele of the gene that is faulty or is otherwise known to cause illness. If potential issues are found, then action can be taken to prevent the issue from actually affecting the issue in future. Another example is nuclear magnetic resonance imaging (nMRI) – commonly known without the first word in the name – and positron emission tomography (PET) scans, which use certain properties of substances in our body to see what is inside us – like an X-ray, but more specific – and detect things like cancer early, before they are even visible through other means. All this helps us prevent issues in future, ensuring that we never have to face serious illness, greatly simplifying our lives.

Medical advancements have also allowed us to, when we do fall sick, overcome the illnesses quickly and with less discomfort. Most of the drugs we take for granted today, including paracetamol, mentioned earlier, and other common ones like pseudoephedrine, used to remedy runny or blocked noses, or guaifenesin, used to remedy coughs, were discovered only in the late 20th century. More recent developments include Tamiflu, which is an antiviral drug used in serious cases of influenza. These medicines all help us recover from diseases by either aiding the immune system in removing pathogens – antibiotics and antiviruses – or remedying our symptoms to reduce our discomfort. Being able to recover from illness faster means we spend less time sick at home and more time working or doing what we want, bringing ease and convenience – the same as before, but that is the ultimate aim of medicines used to treat sickness after all. There are also vaccines, which help our immune system create antibodies against pathogens before they even affect the body and cause illness. This may seem similar to nMRI and PET scans mentioned earlier, but they are very different – nMRI and PET scans detect problems that already exist, and genetic sequencing looks at potential problems; vaccines, however, are preventative measures that do not aim to detect but simply prevent. Either way, however, they ultimately make our lives less complicated by ensuring we rarely, if ever, need to have our lives disrupted by sudden illness.



Not all medicine is used to treat illness, of course. Some medical advancements help us to alter or modify our bodies to get what we want – a questionable thing to do, but at least the option is there. In researching and discovering more about the human body to aid in recovery from injuries and illness, we have also – inadvertently or not – discovered how to change our body surgically, to for example alter our facial features or physique. This is known as plastic surgery, of course, and while it can be controversial, by at least giving us the option to attain a physique or appearance that we are otherwise unable to, it allows us to fulfil desires that would otherwise be impossible to fulfil. Another more reasonable use of medicine in a similar fashion is the creation of prosthetic limbs to replace lost limbs. This reduces the inconvenience that those who have lost a limb have to go through, and allows them to lead a normal life – or as close to one as possible – making their lives easier as they do not have to go through the pains of living with only one arm or one leg.

The greatest benefit of modern medicine definitely has to be the improvement in our health due to all the other things it brings. With less illness and less disability, we are generally healthier and this leads to some improvement in our happiness and our quality of life as we are able to go about our daily lives not having to worry about being killed by the next plague or major disease. This is exemplified by the great increase in our average lifespans, especially in developed countries with advanced medical systems – just look at Japan, where the average lifespan of a human at birth is well over 80 years. Compare this to an average human just a few centuries ago, who might have lived for only 40 to 50 years. Living longer means we get to experience more in our lifetimes, and be more fulfilled by the time we have to leave. More importantly, it means the people around us do not have to worry that we may pass away at any moment; we can make plans far into the future knowing that the people involved will still be around then. Our lives are simplified as we can focus on enjoying life rather than ensuring life.

Detractors to my view will argue that medical advancements have complicated our lives through introducing an increasing number of ethical concerns that arise with the development and use of new medical technologies. As a case in point, gene editing holds the promise of curing serious genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis, thalassaemia, Huntington's Disease, and some forms of Alzheimer's disease. Unfortunately, many, including the world's most prestigious scientific journals, argue that it is unethical because it will have unpredictable effects on future generations and may lead us on a slippery slope toward designer babies. These are clearly ethical implications which complicate our consideration on what is acceptable and what is not. Nevertheless, ethical debates arise with every new discovery and technology and it is futile to criticise the rise of a new technology for its ability to raise ethical issues concerning its use. Should we go down this path, no scientist nor technologist would dare to embark on new discoveries and inventions for fear of further 'complicating our lives'.

Another trivial comment off heard is that for everything medicine has brought us – medicines, check-ups, and the like – our lives have been made inconvenient as we now actually need to pay attention to our health and go for annual check-ups at the dentist, deal with ancillary things like finding medical insurance, and even taking whatever medicine we are prescribed daily. There is no way to argue against this – it has to be conceded to, for it is true. If modern medicine did not exist, we would not have to do any of that at all. Yet, which rational human being would gladly sacrifice a longer and healthier life in exchange for not having to care about when our last dose of drug was, or whether our medical appointment in future will clash with something else? One cannot fail to see that all of the above petty inconveniences are but a slight price to pay for good health.

Medicine undoubtedly has made our lives simpler. Of course, it has also brought drawbacks and controversies that, although may not affect most of us directly, can complicate the future progress of medicine. Let us not tie the hands of medical researchers and doctors; instead, let us give them the credit due to them for making our existence a much easier one.

Tee Hao Wei 14S101



Review

An excellent essay which makes a concerted effort to address the PoC of the question 'complicate'. Many good examples were given, demonstrating how well-read the writer is. Keep it up!

Examine the claim that the world is too dependent on oil. (2005A1v1sQ7)

It is often said that "money makes the world go round". In this day and age where manufacturing industries of all kinds of products make up the bulk of the driving force for economic growth, this common belief may very well change soon. As oil serves as a necessary lubricant for the gears of global development and progress, its importance is increasingly equated with that of money in the lives of individuals, corporations and the government. Our over-reliance on oil and its various forms has manifested in its high prices and conflicts between and within countries owing to oil-related disagreements. Although there exist countries who are turning to alternative sources of energy to ease their dependence on oil, and developing countries that are seemingly 'less reliant' on oil compared to developed countries, the majority of the world is largely dependent on oil and the hands of time are unlikely to change the circumstances for the better anytime soon.



A clear indicator of our over-reliance on oil is one which is observable by many, and in many areas of our daily lives – the escalating price of oil. Economic theory suggests that when there is a shortage of a good whereby the quantity demanded for a good exceeds the quantity supplied, there will be an upward pressure on price as consumers are more willing to pay to express their greater need for the good. In other words, when applied to the context of oil, more oil is needed in the world than there is to go around, and this has indeed resulted in increasingly high prices, skyrocketing to as high as US\$140 per barrel in 2008. This heightened need for oil is primarily due to the emerging industrializing economies importing increasing amounts of oil from oil-rich states to fuel industrial and commercial activities such as manufacturing and public transport. China, for example, has had a 30% increase in oil imports from African states and Venezuela in the past two years. If the supply of oil ran out globally, the global economy would virtually grind to a halt. This was most evidently seen in the 1973 oil crisis, when the world plunged into deep recession due to a low supply caused by the oil embargo imposed by the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries and hence high prices of oil. In this way, our over-reliance on oil is demonstrated by the rapidly rising prices of oil.

Besides the rising oil prices, the need of oil in many countries has even translated into conflicts and violence between nation states. These conflicts did not arise owing to the defence of national sovereignty, and not because one nation waged war on another, but arose due to unhappiness between countries regarding the allocation of oil. In the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq attempted to invade Kuwait for its oil resources, but was expelled by American coalition forces after a short-lived three months. During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States justified their invasion and occupation of Iraq as an operation to find weapons of mass destruction and to stop the oppressive regime in Iraq. However, many experts and conspiracy theorists believe that this was more of an insecurity issue the US had with Iraq as an oil-rich nation, even giving the ill-fated Iraqi occupation a nickname – Operation Iraqi Liberation – OIL for short. China is currently in dispute with Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan over claims to the oil-rich Spratlys Islands in the South China Sea. All these examples only illustrate one point – our willingness to kill our own kind for oil is more than enough to prove that we are over-reliant on it.

Thirdly, the apparent impacts of global warming serve as poignant reminders for us that we are indeed over-reliant on oil as a resource. Statistics show that emissions from the burning of oil constitute two-fifths of global warming emissions from fossil fuels. Extremities in weather worldwide



have risen rapidly in terms of frequency, from massive heat waves in countries near the equator to dreaded monsoon rains and massive thunderstorms in temperate countries. Natural disasters have increased in occurrence and their damage and cost to states massive, exemplified by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 at US\$108 billion, Hurricane Irene in 2011 at US\$19 billion and Hurricane Ike in 2008 at US\$37 billion. Global warming has also led to an ostensibly insignificant rise in the global surface temperature of a further 1.1 to 2.9 °C during the 21st century, but severe in the long run. These 'symptoms' of global warming demonstrate how much emissions from the consumption of oil has contributed to global warming in the last decade, hence even more so showing the extent of our excessive reliance on oil.

While it is irrevocable that the world is heavily dependent on oil, we must not forget that there exist countries who acknowledge their over-reliance on oil and are slowly but gradually reducing the need. Currently, alternative sources of energy such as hydroelectric energy, wind and solar energy are used by some countries to cut emission rates from the combustion of oil. In Canada and some parts of America, hydroelectric and wind-generated power is used as a source of power. UK has built the world's largest wind farm off the Cumbrian coast in the Irish Sea – the Walney offshore wind farm which will generate enough electricity for 320,000 homes. These technologies and the fact that countries are in the pursuit of alternative sources of energy goes to show that some parts of the world are trying to reduce their reliance on oil. However, let us not be too optimistic, for only a minority of the countries which have the financial reserves can undertake research or build the infrastructure needed to harness alternative sources of energy. Most of the time, developing countries lack the technology and money for such projects and continue to deplete the limited supply of oil. Even some developed countries that are able to do so are unwilling, either due to the extensive effort and time required for the country to change and adapt to use these cleaner sources, or the large opportunity costs of carrying out research, namely the potential development in infrastructure in the country and research into other areas of science which exceed the benefits cleaner sources of energy could bring.

Optimists suggest that in addition to finding alternatives to oil as sources of energy, governments in the world have tried to reduce the need for oil locally by encouraging citizens to take public transportation or buy only what they need, in the long run resulting in lesser consumption of oil to manufacture lesser goods and provide less services that are not needed. In this way, governments have reduced their society's dependence on oil, and at the same time saved on costs to research and develop alternative sources of energy. Nevertheless, these are but minute efforts and one wonders how much impact efforts like 'Earth Hour' can have given how a sea change in attitudes is needed, yet far from coming. In short, it would be naïve to believe that things will change in the short term, instead, it will take generations before a paradigm shift can occur; hopefully in time before global warming obliterates us all.

In conclusion, oil is quickly becoming a universal commodity, its importance likened to that of the basic necessities of human survival – food, water and shelter. As oil has been accumulated over the Earth's millions of years in history, at the rate human beings are depleting this limited and unsustainable supply of oil, it is only a matter of time before the lubricant to the engine of global economic growth runs out, causing the latter to come to a grinding halt.

Jonathan Ang Yik Ming 12S101

Review

This is a commendable attempt to address the PoC, with close attention paid to how the world's level of reliance on oil has gone to excessive levels. The essay is also strongly substantiated with important statistics and case studies, making for a highly informative piece of writing.

How far is recycling the answer to the problem of waste? (2004 A levels Q6)

“ One man's rubbish is another man's treasure.” This age-old adage has been around for generations, teaching all who hear of it how perspectives differ between people. However, in today's modernised and technologically-savvy society, this saying may

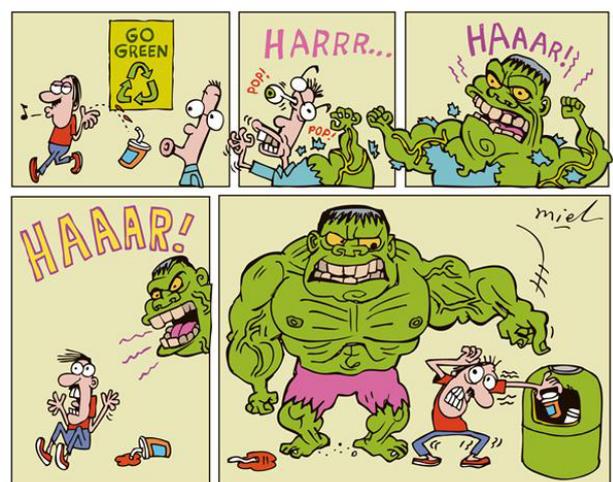
instead hold a much more literal meaning, where much of the garbage that households throw away daily may become useful again through the process of recycling. Despite this, recycling should not be seen as a cure-all antidote to the problem of having too much waste; it is, in fact, only effective to a small extent to address the problem of waste.

Waste brings about a plethora of problems to societies across the world when there is too much of it. These range from the limited availability of land space required for landfills to environmental destruction when waste is not properly disposed of. In the United States alone, the numerous landfills that dot the country are close to being full to the brim and yet much of the waste cannot be incinerated as harmful gases can be released that creates adverse effects for the environment. However, an alternative to these two methods of handling waste is recycling. A significant percentage of daily common waste is recyclable, whereby products such as glass bottles, newspapers and aluminium drink cans can be turned into much more useful products. By recycling much of the waste, the reduced amount remaining can then be disposed via the conventional methods of burying or burning. As such, recycling can help alleviate the problem of waste by reducing the amount of it.

However, labelling recycling as the answer to the problem of waste is too extreme. Even though recycling takes some pressure off finding suitable land space for landfills and incineration plants, it does not completely remove all sorts of waste, and would only delay the consequences resulting from the problem of waste. Many products, such as plastic bags and bottles, are unable to be recycled. Furthermore, these products are very poisonous if incinerated and would take a thousand years to decompose in landfills. In large enough quantities, these non-recyclable products add up, and yet recycling would not be able to help reduce such types of waste.

Another reason why recycling is not the answer to the problem of waste is that it is far too costly. Despite the fact that the Earth has limited resources, firms in the production sector find it much more cost-effective to continue to drill for more precious metals rather than set up a recycling plant that can separate these metals from other rubbish and treat them such that they can be used again. Inevitably, many firms and companies are profit-driven, and are willing to look for cheaper alternatives to attain these recyclable materials even if it is at the expense of the environment. In addition, it is considerably much cheaper to bury and burn waste rather than sort out the recyclables and then bury or burn the others. The costs involved would create disincentives for the firms to recycle, leading to many firms preferring its alternatives. As such, recycling is not the answer to the problem of waste as the business sector of the world will not make use of recycling to help deal with the problem of waste.

One many argue that the power of the people would be enough, and that as long as every other citizen that forms the public recycle, it could be the solution to the problem of waste. However, garnering public support in this situation is a monumental task. Like businesses, the people would also face several disincentives while recycling. In a survey of Singaporeans by the National Environmental Agency in Singapore, the number one reason most people gave for not recycling was the inconvenience it brought about. The public would have to manually separate the recyclables from the non-recyclables while at home, and even when outdoors, they would have to find a proper recycling bin. This presents several difficulties as the bins are much harder to locate as compared to the ubiquitous rubbish bin located nearly everywhere. Because of this, many people would find it troublesome to recycle and without support from the community, recycling is not very effective. As such, recycling would not be seen as the answer to the problem of waste.



By looking at current technologies available and the little social awareness people have towards the problem of waste, one can conclude the problem of waste is far too colossal to have one single

'answer' to it. It is undeniable that many of these current techniques in place and future possibilities of dealing with the problem of waste have both their advantages and disadvantages. For example, efforts to incentivise recycling and composting, promoting "zero waste" or taxing industrial waste production, new technologies to make incinerating cleaner are all making good headway in the battle against waste. Nevertheless, as with recycling, each of these solutions must work hand in hand with other solutions to properly deal with the problem of waste.

In sum, recycling is an important tool in the shed to fight the waste problem. However, its effectiveness is limited by far too many considerations and would only be the answer to the problem of waste to a small extent. Yet, if this problem of waste is not dealt with in time, the copious amounts of waste may one day drive all of us to abandon the giant and poisonous landfill that is planet Earth.

Benjamin Poon Wei Fu 10S209

 **Review**

The student displays a mature understanding of the issue and writes convincingly with a strong sense of personal voice. To improve, more examples could have been given.

'Our attempts to save the environment cause more harm than good.'
Do you agree? (MJCJ2MBT2010Q6)

The disaster movie "The Day After Tomorrow" depicts a scenario in a future where humanity does not curb its polluting ways. That might be a fictitious reality, but one that is seemingly not improbable given the scale and frequency of natural catastrophes and man-made crises in recent years. Man is increasingly afraid that his day of reckoning is imminent and has stepped up efforts to reduce his carbon footprint and preserve the environment. However, in my opinion, the attempts made thus far are actually inflicting more harm than producing benefits, to both the environment and humanity.

Our attempts to create alternative energy to supplement our fast dwindling sources of fossil fuels, though commendable and necessary, are creating more harm to the world population than benefit to the environment. Due to the resource-heavy requirements of these attempts, the fact is that their execution denies people resources that they need for their survival. One example is the biofuel, which can be developed without environmentally destructive extraction and polluting refining processes and is potentially plentiful since it is ethanol derived from staple foods such as corn and maize. However, there is a potentially deadly flaw. The opportunity cost of producing it is exorbitant; the impoverished are unable to outbid green energy companies. Neither do they benefit from the litres of biofuel. With poor harvests and poverty a rampant reality in many nations, using biofuel to power machines to satiate the developed world's appetites for comfort and luxury, no matter how clean it is and how little greenhouse gases it produces, is untenable. The situation came to a boil in 2008. In less than two months, the price of rice rose by 75 percent globally and more in some markets, while the price of wheat jumped 120 percent in the past year. Consequently, the price of a loaf of bread more than doubled in places where the poor spend as much as three quarters of their income on food but earn less than USD2 a day. Hunger, desperation and frustration at surging food costs fuelled riots across the world. In Haiti, the prime minister was fired, the government dissolved and hospitals filled with wounded demonstrators. In Egypt, rioters burnt cars and broke windows. Similar scenes were enacted in Bangladesh and Mozambique. Quoted in a BBC Online report, World Bank President Robert Zoellick pointed out that while many are worrying about filling their gas tanks, many others around the world are struggling to fill their stomachs, and it is getting more and more difficult every day. He warned that the surging costs could mean "seven lost years" in the fight against worldwide poverty and appealed to the





international community to fill the estimated \$500 million food gap identified by the U.N.'s World Food Programme to meet emergency needs.

My bleak assessment is also based on my observation that mankind's efforts to save one aspect of the environment inevitably destroys another part of it and produces a myriad of problems; so moving forward one step sets us back by several. For instance, consider mankind's attempt to generate hydroelectricity using dams that harness water to spin turbines that in turn spin electricity-producing generators. Again, it sounds promising: we can now produce energy using a process that is constantly available and does not release toxic pollutants to worsen global warming and devastate human health like the burning of fossil fuels does. Moreover, the damming of rivers can aid flood control, divert water where it is needed and enable better agriculture management too. However, to construct dams, especially over rivers that are situated in the midst of forested areas, massive deforestation has to be carried out to clear land for development. Other than the adverse impact on the carbon cycle, food webs and ecosystems will collapse too. As such dams work by flooding one side of the water body, the extent of damage will escalate. The Three Gorges Dam in China, the world's biggest dam which took sixteen years to become fully operational, forced the destruction or relocation of much heritage and displaced 1.13 million people, has spawned environmental and geological problems such water pollution, species endangerment and landslides. Observers are also concerned about changing weather patterns arising from unintentional geo-engineering.

In addition, many of our attempts to save the environment centre on reducing pollution and conserving resources, which most unfortunately, can backfire. Take for example the recycling of renewable resources from waste material. Recycling is promising because we are heavily reliant on natural resources in many aspects of modern life but are running out of "fresh" supplies. We can recycle potable water from sewage, aluminium and other metals from drink cans, vehicles and mobile phones, and glass from discarded bottles. In fact, the energy needed to recycle waste is less than what it would take to procure the same raw materials from scratch. Moreover, it frees us from the arduous task of scouring the earth and destroying natural habitats in search of material such as iron. However, the caveat is that recycling must be carried out in a controlled environment or the process will become harmful. Consider Guiyu, a cluster of four villages in Guangdong, China that was exposed as an informal processing hub for illegally imported electronic waste in 2001. About five thousand five hundred businesses and one hundred and fifty thousand workers are determined to earn a good living from recycling junked computers, phones and other electronic devices, ignoring the obvious harm they are causing to the environment and themselves by working in a haphazard manner. To extract precious metals, they rely on poorly constructed furnaces that belch toxic gases that burn their respiratory tracts and intensify global warming. Worthless plastic and other non-recyclable parts are dumped into nearby rivers, thus tainting drinking water. Soil is also heavily contaminated by heavy metals. Unsurprisingly, a high proportion of the workers suffer from respiratory, neurological, digestive and skin afflictions. Miscarriages are common and lead levels in blood are scarily high. Although the Chinese government intervened after international organisations raised concerns, a 2008 "60 Minutes" feature documented how Guiyu continued to receive illegal shipments of e-waste from American recyclers and process them in dire conditions. The Guiyu debacle shows how we readily support seemingly beneficial pro-environment practices but fail to realise that they could be carried out in extremely harmful ways.

Depressing though my assessment thus far might have been, not all of our attempts end up causing more destruction than benefit and credit must be accorded where it is due. Commendable efforts have been made to spread the green message in many countries and people have responded by being disciplined enough to reject polluting processes and proactive at lobbying for change. Pro-environment legislation and policies enacted over the past few decades have helped to curtail degradation significantly. In the United States of America, the use of extremely harmful pesticides linked to land and water pollution is controlled and so is the inclusion of ozone-depleting CFCs in everyday products. In Japan, households have to sort waste into burnable, non-burnable and recyclable items before disposal. Taiwanese legislation requires restaurants, supermarkets and convenience stores to charge customers for plastic bags and utensils. Countries such as Scandinavia are also concertedly implementing reforestation and sustainable wood harvesting campaigns. However, one does wonder whether the good done in environmentally conscious nations are sufficiently pervasive and whether they have been undermined by the self-serving or apathetic



tendencies in other countries. Given how environmental degradation is deep-seated and trans-boundary, we do need the entire world's cooperation to ensure real progress. However, that does not seem to be happening. In India, billions of litres of waste – including disease-causing untreated sewage – are pumped into New Delhi's Yamuna River every day. Even the holy Ganges River is not safe from such water pollution. In fact, so much urban waste ends up in the country's bodies of water that many of them are unfit for human use. Given this example and similar situations elsewhere, I tend to think that harm outweighs good where saving the environment is concerned.

In my opinion, the best way to save the environment is to solve problems at their root rather than to only start alleviating situations only after harm has manifested itself. We need to control population growth so that we do not overtax the earth's carrying capacity. We need to change our wasteful and excessive consumption habits such that we attend only to our needs and stop succumbing to being held hostage by our desires. We might need to give up some of our ambitions and value quality of life over standard of living. Only then can we truly preserve the world for generations to come.

Chua Jun Cheng 09S415

Review

The student displays a very impressive amount of knowledge concerning environmental issues. The essay is also well-considered from various angles. A very informative read!

Is clean energy for all a realistic aim? (MJCJC2P210Q6)

For most of us, the idea of an apocalypse occurring within the next century or so, oddly enough, is becoming more possible by the day. We are well aware of the constant damage being inflicted upon Mother Earth, a result of our relentless electricity and fuel consumption in schools, at work and in our own homes. In recent years, environmental awareness has skyrocketed. Natural disasters such as flooding, due to rising sea levels and unwavering rainfall, have scared many into looking for means of sustainable living. The recent British Petrol oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico further reinforces the harm that our current source of energy can cause. Clean energy can be widely defined to be an energy source that produces a minimal amount of harmful by-products in any of the processes through which it is obtained or used. Several forms of clean energy used today include solar energy, wind energy, geothermal energy, hydroelectric energy and wind energy. While clean energy is a viable option for some countries at present, it is definitely unrealistic to aim for clean energy for all countries given the numerous limitations that many countries face.

Clean energy is definitely a viable option for some countries endowed with natural resources or geographical features which facilitate the production of clean energy. Take for example Iceland, which has a numerous volcanoes. This natural occurrence enables it to harness geothermal energy, which sufficiently provides for 24% of the energy needs of its citizens, and hydroelectric energy, which accounts for 75% of the total energy consumed. Contrast Iceland with Singapore, a land-scarce country with barely any natural resources and endowments. Iceland's ability to provide its citizens with clean energy also stems from the fact that it has a population of 320,000 and not 5 million, as in Singapore's case. Singapore cannot even begin to harvest sufficient clean energy to provide for the needs of its citizens and booming economy. Energy sources such as solar, wind and nuclear energy require vast amounts of land space. Land-scarce nations hence find it extremely challenging to find sufficient land mass to build huge wind turbines, solar panels and nuclear power plants to provide clean energy for its citizens. The natural constraints faced by many countries are not easily overcome, as can be seen from the fact that countries around the world would have to identify a source of clean energy suited to the ability, expertise and resources they possess and be willing to invest in the development of that particular clean energy industry. This not only requires a great deal of time and commitment, but the probability of success is not even certain. Thus, clean energy is only realistic for some, not all nations worldwide.

In addition, currently, 80% of the entire world's energy needs are obtained through the burning of fossil fuels. Despite the dwindling supply of it in the earth, to shift the world's source of energy entirely from fossil fuels to cleaner methods appears to be rather impossible due to the large scale reliance on oil to provide us with our energy needs. Power grids across all countries are wired to channel



conventional forms of energy, not clean energy, and while some nations may be willing to divert their resources into the production of clean energy, some developing nations such as China and India may be less willing to do so as they would want to focus more on the country's economic development first and sustainable consumption much later. Fossil fuels remain the most "tried-and-tested" method of energy production that is able to provide them with the vast amount of energy they require to spur their industrial growth. The reluctance of such huge and populous countries, which also happen to be amongst the most polluting ones, in making the switch, causes many other countries to question the need for clean energy production. This hesitation makes it difficult and cumbersome for clean energy to be adopted worldwide.

Another factor that limits the ability for every single country in the world to harness clean energy is the level of sophistication that such technology is currently at. Much research has been done in an attempt to achieve better and more efficient methods of harnessing clean energy due to the incredibly low volumes of clean energy that can be harnessed. Every forty minutes, enough sunlight reaches the United States to power its energy needs for a year. However, what prevents us from harnessing the most abundant energy source of all to its full capacity is the relatively low level of sophistication of our current energy-harnessing technology despite the improvements that have already been made. Although there already exists in the market solar panels that are able to power households, buildings and such, solar panels which are affordable and compact enough to be able to supply enough power to entire countries in the long run have yet to be developed. Even while United States President Barack Obama has unveiled a US\$28.4 billion budget request for research into energy efficiency and renewable energy for the fiscal year of 2011, given the limited amount of resources some other countries are able and willing to invest, research and development into clean energy has yet to be developed to a level that is likely to be able to sustain the industries and economies of the entire world. Furthermore, although the United States has devoted so much money for research into clean energy, she projects that she will only increase her clean energy production from 2% of its energy needs to 10% in 2025, highlighting the deep reliance on fossil fuels, even for up to 90% of its future energy consumption.

For most countries, a factor that largely determines its choice of energy is cost. Undoubtedly, coal, a form of fossil fuel, remains the cheapest energy source available. While some nations such as Costa Rica, which relies on clean energy to meet 98% of its energy needs, are able to overcome the challenges, including the high costs involved, not every country in the world is able to do so on its own. Technology such as wind turbines, solar panels and nuclear reactors are extremely costly. Research conducted by Time.com showed that for a typical 3 bedroom, 2 bathroom house in the United States, the cost of installation of solar panels would amount to \$80,000, what more installing solar panels that would be able to power an entire country. The extremely high cost understandably deters some nations from embarking on a journey towards clean energy, especially in a world that has just experienced the worldwide economic crisis of 2008, what is said to be the greatest financial disaster since the Great Depression. Less developed, poorer nations would thus be unable to harness clean energy, making it unrealistic for every nation, society and individual to embrace clean energy in the near future.

Costs aside, because of the particular nature of clean energy production that depends so heavily on factors that Man cannot control, even financially-able nations may still face immense difficulty in making the large-scale switch from conventional energy sources to clean energy. Even within countries, resources and locations which are able to produce substantial amounts of clean energy are more often than not concentrated in limited zones of the land, rather than conveniently and evenly scattered around the country. This makes the transportation of such energy immensely difficult and perhaps even inefficient and unsustainable, making clean energy for all unrealistic. Take for example the United States which has explored the possibility of harnessing wind energy as its main energy source. Its wind belt is largely concentrated in the states located in central North America. For wind energy to be fully utilized, it would have to cordon off vast land areas for the construction of wind turbines and build underground power grids to transport the energy generated to other parts of the country. This process would require large amounts of manpower and a rather long time to complete, rendering it unattractive to many countries. Thus, while some may be in the position to adopt clean energy methods of production, providing clean energy on such a large scale is after all still unrealistic for now.

Nevertheless, the prospect of clean energy is not entirely bleak. Driven by a realization that the world needs to change and that clean energy has to drive the future world economies, countries around the world may find the means to embrace clean energy as its only source of energy one day. For this to occur, technological advancement and expertise has to go even further than it already has right now, developing cost efficient methods of clean energy production.

Siti Maisarah 09S415

 **Review**

This writer impresses with her sheer breadth of knowledge displayed in the essay, evidence of a good reading habit!





How far, in your society, should unpopular views be open to discussion?

(2013 A levels Q12)

Singaporeans, as with the people in many other societies, have a routine of going with the general consensus and doing very little or nothing to acknowledge or appreciate unpopular views, unless of course the issue is something of personal concern to them. After all, as pragmatists may question, what are the benefits of considering unpopular views, given their lack of support from the masses? Also, how will acknowledging, what more discussing, these unpopular views help Singapore's society to grow and mature? Upon considering these questions, I nevertheless believe that it would be highly beneficial for my society, Singapore, if unpopular views are open to discussion.

The political establishment here takes the view that in a multicultural, multiracial society such as Singapore which has faced violence and bloodshed due to racial distrust and resentment in the past, it would be more beneficial to have unpopular views closed to discussion and censored to prevent conflict from occurring. We see this present particularly for racial and religious insults and comments. The Media Development Authority (MDA) would first block the offending page and locate and charge the culprit responsible for the comments. An unfortunate example is Amy Cheong, a former NTUC membership assistant director, who in 2012 commented about the noise generated by Malay weddings in the void decks and said that they should just save up and get a "real" wedding at a hotel. In less than 24 hours, her post was removed, she was given a stern warning by the police and she was fired from her job (which was vacant two hours later for job applications). Indeed, such censoring of views may be seen as justified as it upholds the overall peace of the society. Nevertheless, upon deeper examination, is not such a form of treatment for unpopular views a superficial and temporary solution? In not questioning why such views arise or the rationale of such an argument, it leaves the root of the problem untouched. This would, on the surface, give an impression of a cohesive and united society, but there may be hatred and resentment hidden underneath which may cause many more issues to surface or even escalate further down the road. Therefore I believe that unpopular views, if kept closed to discussion, would only delay the issue and not solve it; opening it up, on the other hand, brings benefits, of which will be outlined further in the following paragraphs.

The first reason why unpopular views should be, to a large extent, open to discussion is that it reinforces the importance placed on freedom of expression by Singapore's society. Freedom of expression is considered by the United Nations to be one of the few inalienable human rights granted to all human beings in all societies, and Singapore is no exception. To facilitate freedom of expression in our society, all views, not just the popular ones should be brought up for discussion. This would help bring localized issues up to the national level for discussion, and through this, help all aspects of our society feel more included. A prime example of this would be the issue of foreign worker treatment in Singapore. Two years back, the issue of treatment of foreign workers never came across the public's consciousness, and when some individuals and organisations tried to surface it, they were ignored and such an unpopular issue was closed to discussion. Only after a strike initiated by Chinese bus drivers and subsequently the unforgettable riot involving the Indian workers in Little India, was such an issue brought to the public's attention. Upon doing so, many organisations became more aware of this issue and regulations were reformed to help improve the living conditions of foreign workers. As such, it opened the unpopular view of the poor treatment of foreign workers up for discussion. This has shown that when unpopular views are brought up for discussion, it may invoke change that would improve the more neglected aspects of Singapore's society, making it a better society. For this reason, I believe that unpopular views should be open to discussion.

Furthermore, as a first-world nation who declares herself to be a democracy, Singapore should uphold the principles of democracy and not restrict the discussion of unpopular views. Since Singapore is a democratic society, and pluralism is a key component of any democratic nation, it raises the pertinent issue of how pluralism is to be upheld if unpopular views are not up for debate. In



principle, through pluralism, all views of the society would be brought up and thus, the nation would be able to work together to come up with a solution that encompasses and takes into consideration everyone's opinions. This would allow the governing body to become legitimate as now the more unpopular aspects of society become visible and accounted for and the people would no longer feel oppressed and excluded from society. While I admit that it is impossible to consider everyone's views in our society, a small step that we can take towards pluralism is to not close off unpopular views from discussion. This would help the nation to be more inclusive and the government to earn real political legitimacy; therefore I feel that unpopular views should largely be open for discussion.

Lastly, I feel that unpopular views should be open for discussion as when we open up these unpopular views for discussion, it truly helps our society to grow and mature. When unpopular views are brought up for discussion, it is an indication that these views are not only acknowledged but also respected. It lets everyone know that there is an issue and people can no longer avoid it and run. It drives people to think and educate themselves on the matter. Overtime, people would grow more accepting of the view and understand the rationale behind such views. In fact, surfacing unpopular views for discussion would be unavoidable as Singapore's society would naturally evolve to include people with unpopular views. An example of this starting to occur is Singapore's attitude toward LGBT rights, through the use of the Speakers Corner at Hong Lim Park, to host the Pink Dot campaign. Through this event, it has raised public awareness on the subject and made more people more tolerant and understanding towards such opinions. Surveys of Singaporeans have shown that over the past 5 years, the number of people accepting of a gay lifestyle has grown from 30% to 50%. It can even be suggested that in the coming years, Singapore's society would reach a tipping point, whereby something must be done to acknowledge this view on the national stage. Through this, Singapore's society would grow to become a more inclusive and mature society, making Singapore a better place to live in. Therefore I believe to a large extent, unpopular views should be open for discussion.

All in all, I feel that Singapore's society should allow unpopular views to be open for discussion as it would help our nation to grow and mature, and further enforce our democratic system of governance. While I do concede that some views may cause conflict in the society, I strongly believe that Singapore is more than able to handle them, and through it, grow.

Benjamin Ng 13S102

Review

Although some points overlapped across paragraphs, the essay brings up several interesting and mature arguments which have been insightfully supported by the use of appropriate examples.

How far is your country prepared for future crises? (2006 A levels Q6)

Ranked as the second safest country in the world, Singapore experiences a low crime rate, little to no occurrences of natural disasters and has been enjoying rapid development. The lives of Singaporeans have been peaceful with few crises for the past few decades. However, can the same be said for the future? Some believe that Singapore would not be able to shelter its citizens indefinitely in the face of external pressures such as terrorism and global conflicts, as well as internal issues such as social stability. Despite such concerns, I feel that Singapore has largely implemented relevant measures and policies that anticipate future crises, and is thus very well prepared to deal with whatever problems that may occur.

First and foremost, Singapore has prepared its citizens well by ensuring that they are aware of what to do in a crisis. This will allow the people to respond calmly and rationally during times of disasters, while coordinating their actions with government efforts to deal with the situation. This is further supported by a robust crisis management plan that the country has for most types of crises. One example is the network of sirens that the Singapore Civil Defence Force has installed around the island that constitutes Singapore's public warning system. The public is educated to recognise various public warning signals and what to do when they are sounded, such as the "important message signal" made of pulsating blasts and the "alarm signal" made of wailing blasts. In schools, fire drills are conducted regularly to ensure that students know how to react in the event of a fire,



mobilising them to leave the premises in a quick but orderly fashion to a safe zone. The same evacuation procedures that students are well-versed in can also be adapted to deal with various other scenarios like a terrorist attack or a bomb scare. Given the level of preparedness of its people, Singapore is definitely ready to handle future crises.

Additionally, Singapore is a technologically advanced country, constantly pursuing and adopting the latest innovations in technology. This enables us to overcome our limitations and better prepare ourselves against external threats that we may face. One such aspect would be in the field of military defence. Singapore has been tapping into various forms of technology to create superior weapons that can compensate for our small defence force. The most prominent of these include the Advanced Combat Man System (ACMS) which serves to provide soldiers with enhanced survivability and lethality by equipping them with navigation systems, tracking systems and head mounted display. There are also other forms of technology such as the Formidable-Class stealth frigate which is a warship and SSPH 1 Primus which is a self-propelled howitzer. This has led to the reference of our army as the "3rd Generation Fighting Force", with an emphasis on being an advanced network force. This focus on technology has also been extended to other critical security areas, with CCTVs installed in many sensitive locations around Singapore to monitor for terrorist or other disruptive activities, while our immigration checkpoints boast thermal scanning abilities and biometric identification systems to actively lookout for potential threats entering our country. Through continued investment in modern technologies, we would indeed be able to anticipate, detect, and neutralize potential threats quickly and effectively, leading most to believe that Singapore is indeed prepared for future crises.

Moreover, Singapore is also developing various ways to be self-reliant and free its dependence on other countries for resources. In times of crises, Singapore would be vulnerable to potential shortages in supplies such as food and water that it imports from other countries. To avoid being held hostage to such situations, Singapore is coming up with creative solutions to sustain itself. One such example would be vertical farming in Singapore. Company Sky Greens has developed a way to grow crops vertically at protected outdoor green houses. Known as the A-Go-Gro vertical systems, these methods of farming can produce significantly higher yields than traditional farming all year round and could potentially account for up to 50% of the vegetables we consume in the future. Another example of self-sustainability is NEWater. With Singapore's water contract with Malaysia ending by 2060, NEWater is aimed to account for 55% of the water we consume in the future. As of now, NEWater is responsible for 30% of the water we use. Given the continuous drive towards self-sufficiency, one cannot deny that Singapore is able to deal with potential crises.

Some critics may argue that in recent years, there have been several unexpected happenings in Singapore that it was evidently not prepared for. Sensitive issues such as religious and racial tensions remain a bugbear that Singapore is unable to fully resolve and remain potential threats to its otherwise peaceful society. One such example would be the riot at Little India by Indian foreign workers which occurred spontaneously. The response by the police was criticised for being ill-prepared for handling such an unprecedented event. Yet, even though it is definitely true that there will be unexpected things Singapore may not have anticipated, it would be too hasty to give us a failing grade on our level of preparedness for crises. The nation has still shown the ability to learn quickly, adapt and improve on how it deals with any crisis. Despite facing no civil unrest for more than 40 years, Singapore's police were able to quell the riot without any fatalities, while being grossly outnumbered by an inebriated crowd. While they could have managed the situation better on hindsight, the fact of the matter is that they were dealing with a new crisis for the first time, and were able to defuse it in a relatively effective manner with no casualties suffered. Moreover, the various government agencies learnt tremendously from this incident, implementing a slew of measures to prevent such incidences from repeating itself. Such examples include introducing laws that prevent public consumption of alcohol on weekends and public holidays, deploying additional police officers to patrol the area and installing more police cameras in the vicinity. A Council of Inquiry was also set up to further explore other possible learning points. Singapore's adaptability, responsiveness and eagerness to learn from its encounters show that Singapore is always ready to address any possible crises that are on the horizon.

Other detractors may argue that Singapore's level of preparedness against crises might be undermined by a new generation of leaders that do not have the best interests of the people at

heart. They cite the recent spate of corruption as an indication that the government is being infiltrated by self-serving individuals that care little for the country's welfare and more for their personal profits. Examples include Edwin Yeo, Head of Field Research and Technical Support for the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) who stole up to \$1.7 million government funds, and Peter Lim, Chief of the Singapore Civil Defence Force (CDF) who gave IT-related government tenders to certain companies in exchange for sexual favours. However, I would argue that there are bound to be black sheep in any organisation. While we cannot completely weed out such individuals, it does not suggest that the organisation as a whole is rotten. More importantly, we should recognise Singapore has little tolerance for such individuals, dealing with them swiftly and harshly. Both Edwin Yeo and Peter Lim were promptly removed from their posts and put behind bars, while the government has further reviewed and tightened its anti-corruption policies. Today, Singapore is ranked the 5th least corrupt country in the Global Corruption Survey, indicating the high level of quality and integrity in its leaders. As such, Singapore is most assuredly under the good leadership of capable leaders able to meet the challenges of the future.

To conclude, Singapore is a country which is definitely prepared for future crises. However it should also be worth noting that despite being well prepared, Singapore is not complacent and is always expecting the unexpected. Always aware that a war can be sparked at any instant and an economy can fail at any moment, she is always forward-looking and preparing herself for the worst. As athlete Jackie Joyner-Kersey said, it is better to look ahead and prepare, than to look back and regret.

Tay Li Si 14S302



Review

Although some of the views presented here on Singapore could have been better hedged in order to sound less extreme, the points are nevertheless valid and supported with relevant examples.

'The tourist does not see the country the inhabitants know.' How far is this true of Singapore? (2005 A levels Q8)

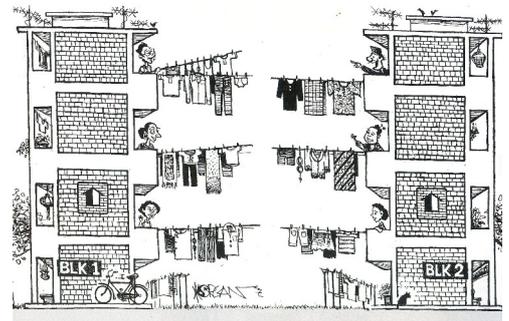
According to the Singapore Tourism Board, the year 2013 saw a ten per cent year-on-year growth of international visitor arrivals to 3.9 million, while tourist receipts increased by two per cent to \$5.6 billion. Indeed, Singapore continues to be an attractive destination for holiday-makers. However, doubts have been raised regarding the authenticity of the Singapore experience tourists enjoy with the increased focus on 'selling' our man-made attractions to boost the influx of tourists, rather than playing up the rich heritage and culture of Singapore. The tourism industry's portrayal of Singapore is hence less accurate, often showing tourists a side of the nation that is different from the locals' perspective. Therefore, it is very true that the tourist does not see the Singapore the inhabitants know.

Detractors of my view argue that there are many places of interest that offer accurate historical and cultural perspectives of Singapore, congruent with what Singaporeans know about their country. Heritage trails are available where tourists seemingly travel back in time to the different time periods and key historical moments, acquainting themselves with the local smells, tastes and sights of Singapore's history. All this history has indeed been taught to the younger generation or experienced personally by the older generation of Singaporeans. However this overlooks the fact that such places are increasingly commercialised and artificial experiences, missing what is truly authentic about Singapore. One example is Chinatown. Once populated by the early Chinese migrants to Singapore, it is today filled with modern eateries and booths selling touristy kitsch – imported fans, chopsticks and even very un-local kimonos – to the bus-loads of tourists descending on it every day, all doing little in providing them with an authentic local experience. This plays down the attractiveness of Singapore's rich and unique historical heritage, causing tourists to not see Singapore as it really is.

The tourism industry would also contend that tourists are offered quick insights into the daily lives of an average Singaporean through the activities planned out in their tour itinerary. Singapore's famous Duck and Hippo tours' 'hop-on and hop-off' system allows tourists to explore the city and heritage routes, getting a glimpse of Singaporeans' usual routines at such places and seeing

Singapore as the Garden City she is. They are also exposed to the multicultural and bilingual nature of the country. With that said, it is also important to note that these would just lead to the development of stereotypes and caricatures about Singapore's society as all those are just merely snapshots and rarely true insights on Singapore's society. Only those who are adventurous would venture beyond the hotel lobby, away from the tourist-populated areas to where the real charm of Singapore lies. However, most tourists tend to gravitate towards the famed retail stretch of Orchard Road for familiar brands like *Louis Vuitton* and *Chanel* instead of the more local and authentic night markets. Famous local cuisines like the *Fried Kway Tiao* and *Satay* from our hawker centres are shunned for the usual food they can get in their home countries. Hence, this superficial level of experience prevents tourists from seeing the country as her inhabitants do.

Likewise, another key reason is that although tourism has proclaimed to provide visitors with a unique insight to a country's culture, in reality it is simply a profit-driven industry. More often than not, tourists are engaged in extravagant activities at higher-priced venues such as Universal Studios Singapore, Gardens by the Bay, the Singapore Flyer and other man-made attractions that are rarely frequented by Singaporeans themselves. Tourists are then taken in by the façade created by the tourism sector, of a glamorous and exciting city, in an attempt to continue drawing visitors. With this, the country's heartlands such as Toa Payoh, one of the two oldest HDB estates in Singapore, and Holland Village, a truly bohemian enclave which has the best local offerings of art, carpets and antiques, are quietly ignored to give way to such rising attractions that are meant to further boost the tourism industry and hence the country's economy. Yet these are the places where a tourist would truly get to experience Singapore as she is, stripped bare of all the bright lights of the city, the throngs of people on the streets and the endless chains of couture brands, a cosmopolitan little island rich with heritage and its own fascinating story to tell.



The tourists' short stay in Singapore further supplements the inability to see the realities of Singapore's society as a whole, with all its shortcomings. Local societal problems are often elusive to tourists as a result of a positively crafted portrayal, like that of cleanliness in the country. Singapore may be known to be a clean and green country, but this is in fact not a consistent occurrence. For example, the neighbourhood coffee shop or hawker centre which is less or never frequented by tourists is of much lower standards of cleanliness as that in the city. The rising wave of anti-foreigner sentiment among Singaporeans following the influx of immigrants in recent years is also unseen. Most tourists do not spend sufficient time mingling with the locals and suffering through the problems and the bread-and-butter issues which locals struggle with. It is thus a challenge for the tourist to be able to know the country within such a short period of time.

Lastly, in bilingual Singapore, the tourist's lack of interaction with the many languages in Singapore poses as a barrier in fully understanding and appreciating the culture here. Language is a link to a person's cultural heritage. Prominent French linguist Claude Hagege contends that language holds the connection and associations that define a culture. Surely this is true as traditions, rituals, and various art forms constituting a particular culture are invariably expressed in the language that the group speaks. One may be able to survey the Malay Annals literature or traditional *Bangsawan* opera with interest, but it is only with proficiency in the Malay language that one can truly experience the shifting nuances in these works of art. Thus, even if the tourist were to explore all the possible cultural and heritage places in Singapore, but have no basic knowledge and appreciation of the individual native tongues, it would be of little value to them.

In conclusion, it is not possible for a tourist to have a full understanding of the country based on isolated experiences or sightings. Instead, only by living among the local communities for an extended period of time would allow a tourist to attain understanding and insights into the country.

Gloria Ou Hui Xin 13S101

 **Review**

The essay is coherently structured and has some interesting points and examples. However, a more balanced view to the issue is needed.



Can humour ever be serious? (2012 A levels Q10)

When we think of humour, what comes to mind would most probably be laughter, jokes and comedy. We perceive humour as enjoyable and associate it with light-heartedness and joy, so much so that it is rather disconcerting to think of it as serious. However, the paradox within the question hints at humour encapsulating a serious element and indeed, humour is possibly more serious than we have ever credited it for.

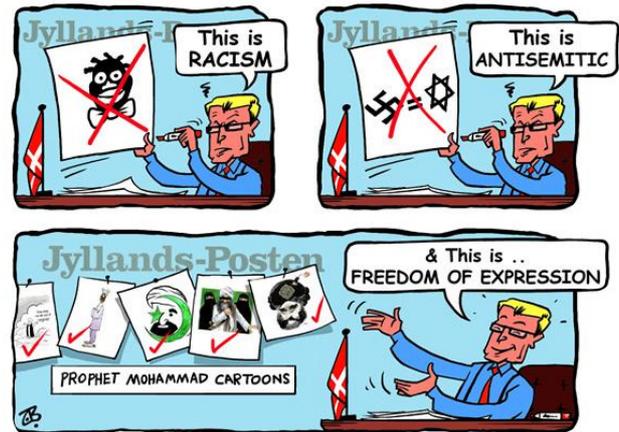
Detractors of my view would argue that humour is by its very nature something which is not serious as it only serves to tease or ridicule. From slapstick to satire, farce to parodies, all genres of humour inspire a guffaw out of people of all ages and cultures. Even in the past, humour existed in healthy doses. In ancient Egypt, a scene at the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri portrayed the overweight figure of the queen of Punt, followed by a small donkey. The caption reads, "the donkey that had to carry the queen". A more modern and popular form of humour today is the internet meme, such as the memes which feature Gordon Ramsey's "his food is so undercooked" catchphrase to sneer at unskilled chefs. Whether it be in the past or present, good sense and taste appear to be missing in the humour, as such, detractors argue that such humour cannot be seen as serious as it does not serve a real purpose and its only function is to mock and make fun of people or prevailing issues.

It is rather unfortunate that these aforementioned detractors fail to see the bigger picture behind these jokes. Admittedly, on a superficial level, the intent of using humour is to ridicule, but upon closer inspection of the issue which is being ridiculed, there is indeed a deeper, underlying meaning or purpose behind it. Humour is actually being used to surface and garner awareness on important issues which plague society. Consider the sarcastic jokes told by ventriloquist Jeff Dunham on American life with the implication that Americans blindly follow trends instead of daring to show their individuality. Another case in point would be the hilarious "Headlines" segment in "Tonight's Show with Jay Leno" where Leno reads out newspaper headlines from all over the world which usually contain unintentional language errors that comically and completely change the original meaning of the message. These absurd and farcical mistakes make the editors and journalists of the respective newspapers appear to be incompetent. Humour aside, being editors and journalists of a newspaper, an important publication used to inform the masses of daily happenings, is not the use of poor language worrying as they may instead mislead the people? Humour is indeed silly and funny, but underpinning all the jokes and laughter is a serious message that brings to the spotlight problems in society which need to be addressed.

Others may argue that humour does not contain the element of seriousness if people are enjoying it. After all, how can one be serious and focused on an issue when one is having fun? According to this group, humour has no purpose but to entertain and people love entertainment. They point to the huge success of comedies as featured in movies and television programmes such as *Meet the Fockers* and *The Big Bang Theory*. Indeed, it would appear that humour cannot have a serious element if it is used to lighten up a situation in the first place and thus, there is seemingly no link between humour and seriousness. To critics, humour is a diversion and a distraction from our busy and hectic lives. Yet, precisely because of this entertaining factor, humour is used as a tool to get people to comprehend the seriousness of an existing problem. Humour sheds light on and directs people's attention to the issue at hand and as a result, brings across the severity of the issue and the need for it to be rectified. For example, in the Singapore education system, it is not uncommon for teachers to show students the silly mistakes that they make in examinations and assignments. While students may laugh at their failures and mistakes, this actually helps to emphasise the atrocity of the mistakes made so that students are able to remember these mistakes and hopefully not repeat them. Hence, the amusement they feel from viewing these mistakes enables them to be more aware of their common errors. Moreover, humour is usually incorporated into most movies of any genre to keep the attention of the audience. This is because when one is entertained, one will be more focused and find the movie more enjoyable. Clearly, humour via the use of entertainment and pleasure, can engage us and direct our attention to serious issues.

On top of humour's ability to keep one's focus on a serious matter, humour on its own is actually a serious issue when seen from the perspective of those who are being mocked. As they say, one man's meat may be another man's poison. Humour can thus actually be poison for those who are victims of mockery, while third parties and onlookers enjoy the meat – the humour – at their expense. In the sporting arena, we often laugh at the mistakes that athletes make especially in the sports of football and basketball. While we laugh and jeer at how daft Ronaldo may act on the field, to the extent that he was humiliated by fellow football player, Lionel Messi, Ronaldo himself will feel ashamed and bear the humiliation of his failures and inability to control the game or play properly. This serves as a major lesson not only to him, but to all other athletes who want to avoid being humiliated. Thus humour in this sense serves as a reminder to people to pull their socks up and improve as their mistakes would significantly affect themselves as well as those who depend on them.

Last but not least, humour is especially serious when it becomes offensive. When anyone makes a mockery of something, it would definitely be an insult to the person on the receiving end. While this can be dismissed as a mere joke on an individual level, it can have more serious repercussions on a national or even international level. In 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* controversially published editorial cartoons which depicted the Prophet Muhammad in a negative light. While published as a satire, the cartoons offended Muslims, eventually leading to protests not only in Denmark but also around the world, including violent demonstrations and riots in some Muslim countries which killed more than 200 people. Another case in point would be in 2007, when Oliver Jufer was sentenced to jail for defacing pictures of the King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej, by drawing graffiti on outdoor posters bearing the Thai King's face. Certainly, the *Lèse-majesté* law in Thailand is not to be trifled with. It is evident that jokes and humour are not always tolerated and the people involved could face severe punishment if they are caught. Humour does have serious consequences.



In summation, humour can be serious if people do uncover the hidden meanings and messages behind the facade of farce and absurdity. The element of entertainment and delight also serves to bring people's attention to serious matters. Humour also gives a form of motivation for the affected to improve themselves in order to prevent further humiliation. Last but not least, humour can become a serious offense if one does not consider one's actions and act inappropriately. Paradoxical as it may seem, humour is seriously no laughing matter.

Yap Xin Yi Jeanette 12S101

Review

This essay brings up several interesting arguments which are well-supported by a variety of appropriate examples. Additionally, the use of clear signposting throughout the essay makes this essay an easy read.

Discuss the importance of religion in society today. (2004 A levels Q11)

“ 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**

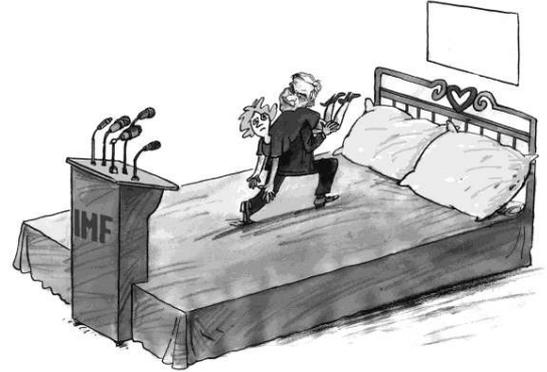
The impressive breadth of examples in the essay is evidence of a well-read student. While the writer has taken a more controversial stance, the essay has dealt well with how times have changed with respect to the importance of religion. Strong reasons coupled with good observations of global developments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

As long as people in the public eye do their job well, does it matter what they do in private? (2009 A Levels Q12)

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!

'There is no such thing as luck. People determine their own lives.' Do you agree? (2005A1vsQ2)

Luck is regarded by many to be a decisive factor in people's lives. When events are in people's favour, they joyously hail it as 'good luck'; when things just simply do not go people's way, bad luck bears the blame. However, is luck truly a force that exists or is it prescribed by the user according to one's whims and fancies? On the other hand, the power of self-determination is also a popular belief, glamourized by the many self-help books 'gurus' tout today. However, do people really have any vestige of control over their lives? In my opinion, luck simply does not exist; however, people also do determine their own lives only to a small extent, with luck not having a role in that.

Before anything is said, this question must be answered: what is luck? According to numerous lexicons, luck is chance, something that people accord the outcome of an event to when they cannot find another explanation. The path luck takes is considered to be utterly desultory: if something happens and it benefits the person involved, people say 'good luck' has made an appearance in that person's fortune. However, if that particular event just went the other way and

brought harm onto the person, it is considered as plain and simple 'bad luck'. Thus, luck is merely defined to be a random throw-up between good and bad.

Some people who subscribe to a belief in luck earnestly affirm that in an event whose outcome lies in the hands of probability, luck definitely exists as the force that guides the result, whether to the joy or chagrin of the people involved. Probability is ubiquitous in one's life and the world: a rolling dice, when any number can show up on the face, the speed and direction of the wind in a game of tennis which would affect the ball's trajectory, when a person participates in a lucky draw with thousands of outcomes, one of which awaits him. Therefore, when all of these events, being out of one's control, and with so many possible outcomes and results, if the turnout is to a person's delight, what else, these people say, could it be but pure, unadulterated luck? However, this view is easily contestable as it is too narrow a perception. In the bigger picture of things, when one uses a telescope instead of a microscope to look at his situation, it need not be luck that perpetuated this outcome. The force of luck need not have participated; instead, the outcome, out of millions of others, happened to be the one that people selected. The result would be far too random to be attributed to luck; if something good happened, voila, it was good luck; if not, it was bad luck. A more rational explanation would be the haphazard weaving of possibilities and chances, rather than something that could go either way. Thus, luck is likely to be non-existent.

Luck does not exist because the whole concept is a contradiction in terms: if people prayed to Lady Luck for a showering of blessings, they would be going against the fundamental tenet of luck. As aforementioned, luck is chance, with a path that divides into two and a resultant outcome based on whim and fancy. A person who puts his faith in luck is then allowing it to make his decision for him which then ironically goes against the very definition of luck. Supposedly luck is a deity, and if it determined the outcome of events, then luck would no longer be 'chance', but instead 'a supernatural being' that dictates the fates and destinies of people to unfold the way 'it laid them out to be'. Then, the results of many things in people's lives would be attributed to the god or goddess Luck rather than mere luck, which is the context of the discussion. One apt case study is the religion of Hinduism, when pious devotees pray to the god of fortune, Lakshmi, for good luck. They do not depend on luck per se, but rather, they place their hope in Lakshmi. As a result, it can be said that luck does not exist since deifying it goes against its very definition.

Additionally, luck is not taken into account when people make decisions or carry out activities. It does not make an impact on the outcomes of occurrences. For example, if a person meets an old friend on his way to his workplace, he may throw up his hands and relate this to good luck. However, did luck truly play a part? The person had to go to work and thus was on his everyday route to his workplace. His friend, similarly, had a purpose in the vicinity, and thus made an appearance there, and thus perpetuated the meeting. It is unlikely that luck has any role in people's lives, as people make decisions, which intertwine to result in specific outcomes. Luck does not determine the outcome, rather, it was the various disparate decisions of people that bonded together and delivered the resultant occurrence. In the 1960s, NASA engineers were venturing to launch the probe Ranger 7 to crash land on Mars and take a few thousand photographs of the Red Planet to beam home: a simple task. However, six probes before it had unfortunately failed to reach Mars. Bad luck? That is unlikely, as it could well-nigh be erroneous calculations made on the engineers'

part that led to the failures of these initial six probes. This time, Ranger 7 exceeded expectations by successfully making it onto Mars. Engineers could not comprehend the sudden triumph, and decided to accord the success to an engineer who happened to be chewing peanuts at the time of the launch. Ever since, peanuts have been the lucky symbol among NASA engineers. However, anyone with the use of their rational faculties can clearly see that peanuts will not impact the landing of the probe; it can be said that the two events were entirely unrelated. The success of Ranger 7 could be because engineers had located previous errors and corrected and improved upon them





accordingly, culminating in their eventual victory over their past failures. That seems more logical than peanuts. Thus, it is evident that luck does not exist, because many of what people consider to be lucky does not have a sensible link with events; at most, a very tenuous one, which, still, hardly can be 'luck'.

If luck does not exist, then can it be that people are the captains of their own destinies as the decisions they make will definitely have an incisive impact on themselves? When one chooses an option, he is ultimately carving out the path for himself directly, and rarely considers the impact of their choices on others' lives. This is readily depicted in numerous religions and beliefs, such as Christianity and Buddhism. In the sphere of Christianity, God offers people a choice to accept him or not, whether to follow his doctrines and allows people to decide how they want their lives to proceed. This can also be seen in Buddhism, where over two hundred laws have been stipulated for believers, who have been given the jurisdiction over their own lives and can decide if they will abide by these laws or not. Thus, it does seem that people do determine their own lives.

However, it is inevitable that one's decisions will tie in with those of others. Even if people consider only their self-interest and make their decisions in this narrow light, it will indubitably impact others, for everyone lives in the same world and context. One decision will lead to another, a domino effect that will affect all those who have any remote connection in the burgeoning mountain of consequences. In the famous short story, 'A Sound of Thunder', the hunter Eckels travel back in Time to gun down dinosaurs and, in his cowardice, accidentally steps upon a small, delicate butterfly in the distant past. Upon travelling back to the Present, he realizes to his dismay that it has been almost completely altered, with things being horribly different from what he had left behind. All of these happened with the death of a frail butterfly, and from this stemmed an inexorable concatenation of events that involved so many others, changing the face of mankind. It is thus evident that one's decision, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will snowball into something that has the potential to affect more than one can ever expect. Thus, people's lives are subject to the many decisions of others, showing that the extent to which they have full determination over their lives is actually very little.

Furthermore, how can one control probability? Probability is the one aspect of nature that people cannot control, for that is its very idiosyncrasy. Being beyond people's control, probability can lead to a slew of outcomes that will force people to make decisions according to what it dictates. People's lives are determined by the outcomes of chance, which plays a much more momentous role than any other, for probability is present in almost every situation, when one simply cannot mould the outcome in accordance to his will. This is clearly evident in cases such as the Moors murders in Britain in the 1960s, when ruthless psychopaths Ian Brady and Myra Hindley decided to kill whoever they saw walking down the street. During the tragic Black September massacre during the 1972 Olympics held in West Germany, numerous policemen had been shot and injured when police snipers could not find their targets in the inky darkness. Therefore, it can be seen that people do not have full control over their lives.

In summation, people control their lives to a small extent. Some may attribute this to the existence of luck. In the end, its existence will really boil down to a discussion between secular science and religious faith, which is in all essence a tough one, and better left for another day.

Lee Hui Ying 12S101

 **Review**

The writer adopts a unique approach to address this abstract question, bringing in thought-provoking perspectives and examples that are out of the ordinary. This is not the typical response to an essay question but has been artfully written due to the writer's writing flair and ability for abstract thought. An essay of very high quality.

Do you agree that city life is becoming increasingly unattractive?

(2002A1v1sQ9)

With an influx of people living within the cacophonous swirl of cities in the past five years, city life seems to have become more attractive in recent years. Yet there also have been greater complaints of city life being too hectic for some or simply an unpleasant experience. As such, I am of the opinion that city life is becoming increasingly unattractive.

With rapid industrialisation in many rapidly developing cities, there have been large increases in the number of factories and industrial plants. Such factories and plants tend to give off large amounts of pollutants in various forms depending on the nature of the factory or plant. In addition, increasing affluence due to the increased employment rates allow for a rise in car and vehicle ownership which contributes to the pollution situation. One such example is Beijing, China where rapid industrialisation in the past decade or so has caused a marked increase in air pollution. Smoke from factories and heating plants, winds blowing in from the Gobi Desert and fumes from millions of vehicles combine to blanket the city in pungent brownish-grey smog for days. This has had a negative impact on the quality of life of Beijing city dwellers, as this air pollution has brought about various respiratory problems such as asthma, affecting the physical well-being of the people. In fact, in 2010, the state-run China Daily quoted a Beijing health official as saying the lung cancer rate in the city had increased by 60% during the past decade, even though the smoking rate during the period had not seen an apparent rise. As the problem worsens, city life for these people in Beijing will become increasingly unbearable. Of course, Beijing is not the only city suffering from pollution caused by the industrial activities going on in the city; the world's ten most polluted cities are largely in Iran, Pakistan and India. The story they all tell, however, is similar – the unbridled industrial activities in cities contributes to pollution which makes city life increasingly unbearable.

In the development of cities, there are lifestyles changes to be made. People move from villages, where everyone is probably related in some way or other, to stand-alone apartments or other forms of isolated living. This results in a growing sense of isolation and loneliness. One such example is Singapore. The gripe of the older generation is that of housing apartments resulting in this lack of community spirit. In the city's early years, most of its inhabitants lived in villages. Although living conditions were relatively more squalid, there was an air of congeniality, where people genuinely cared for their neighbours. After moving these 'kampong' dwellers into public housing estates and development hit the country like a bolt of lightning, competition amongst one another has become fierce. Everyone who is anyone is caught up in this whirlwind of a hectic lifestyle, fighting to be that 'early bird' so that he can catch the proverbial worm. Sometimes, this competition takes place at the expense of community cohesiveness and the most basic of things – kindness. Is it any surprise that this city needs to have a Singapore Kindness Movement to keep the people in check and aware of the things they do? This compromises on the quality of the life you live as a resident of such a city, as it is draining – physically and emotionally – to have to live and fight in such a competitive environment, making it undesirable to live in the city.



Pushers packing people into trains at a Japanese train station

The influx of people from rural areas to the city has resulted in public services such as transport networks being inadequate to hold this increase in the number of people, causing large crowds of squeezing people. One such example is Tokyo, Japan, one of the most populous cities in the world with its population standing at over thirty-six million people. Its already-crowded train services are a nightmare at peak hours, with 'pushers' hired just to pack people onto trains like sardines at peak hours. It is also home to the world's busiest crossings in the Shibuya district, where the record has been set for the most number of people crossing the road at any one time. Twenty thousand people are said to cross the road at the same time; this happening on a regular basis. How about Manila, the



capital of the Philippines? It boasts the highest population density in the world, with 41,014 persons per square kilometre. Having to cater to 10 million people, the roads of Manila are filled with buses, pedicabs and cars. The traffic is consistently described as horrendous. Fixing this situation has to be put into the context of serious water problem and other infrastructure calamities, all of which struggle to cope with the overwhelming population numbers. The overcrowded cities can be partly attributed to people moving to cities in search of a better future. The question however is whether the future in such crowded cities where jostling with the crowds is a daily affair is really better. The standard of living of people living in cities is severely compromised as the city now attempts to accommodate more people than intended.

But every story has two sides, and there are no doubts upsides that still exist to living in cities. Job opportunities are certainly more plentiful in the city. Globally, more and more people from rapidly developing cities such as Guangxi and Mangalore have seen people leaving for greener pastures within the country such as Beijing and Mumbai after education. This can simply be attributed to the greater employment opportunities that they may not have back home; opportunities that are promising in the future of promotions and salary increments. In an effort to keep up with the rapid globalisation sweeping the globe, those who still continue to till the land in less developed areas are seen to be at a disadvantage in life. Those who willingly continue to do such menial jobs are perceived to be losing out on precious opportunities the city has to offer. Thus the almost-magnetic attraction for people to move to cities to live is mainly an effort to keep up with this rapidly globalising world. They make all kinds of sacrifices to keep up with their counterparts overseas, to ensure that they do not lose out on any opportunities and to stay on top of things. This explains why in 2001, twenty-one million people from China moved from rural area to cities, and in 2008 one in two humans lived in cities. This shows how cities, no matter how unattractive, will continue to attract more people with its attractive job opportunities.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the city has much to offer an individual seeking a better and more promising future. However, one must also consider if the sacrifices of moving to a city and the hardship that one has to endure is worth the effort. Is one really willing to forgo one's quality of life, one's joys in life such as the serenity of life outside the city, for mere opportunities for which one has to continue to slog for, for the rest of one's life? City life is definitely not as attractive as it has been made out to be and it can be safely said that this is not a phenomenon that will be reversed anytime in the near future.

Gwen Khoo Yu Qing 12S414



Review

A relevant essay that addresses the keyword 'increasingly' well. The detailed examples used show depth of knowledge.

"Fashion is much a good thing as a bad thing." To what extent do you agree? (2009 A levels Q11)

Fashion mogul Coco Chanel proclaimed that "fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, and what is happening". One of Singapore's leading fashion designers, Eshamuddin Ismail, better known in the industry as Ashley Isham, shares the same sentiment; "It is not just about the fashion anymore, but a whole lifestyle," he says. Indeed, the presence of fashion in our world cannot be denied. Fashion is everywhere. Whether we wish to or not, we come into contact with it every single day. Whether we realize it or not, fashion has a significant influence on our lives. No longer can the notion of "fashion" be confined only to clothing. With its pervasive influence comes both benefits and detriments, and it is imperative that we acknowledge the double-edged nature of fashion. In order to qualify fashion as good or bad, we have to evaluate its impact, and the extent of such in the various aspects of our lives.

One benefit that fashion brings about is that fashion as an art form provides designers a platform to showcase their creativity, fashion being the vehicle of designers' artistic expressions. Art is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Indeed, the dynamics of fashion fits the



bill, with designers crafting their work firstly with the designing process and then the actual workmanship that will finally result in the finished work. Art and fashion is intertwined, with a *la mode* pieces by Alexander Wang being compared to modern works of art by Andy Warhol, or classic haute couture by Rudolf Valentino displayed and admired like Renoirs in a museum. In the local scene, fashion courses offered at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts were praised by the National Arts Council for cultivating the creative minds of students. On top of expressing one's emotions, fashion also challenges designers to push the envelope and produce and create work that is forward and avant-garde, especially in the fast-evolving fashion world. Thus, we see through these how fashion brings about benefits for those directly involved in it, the designers. Fashion, in allowing them a channel for artistic expressions, is thus a good thing.

In addition, from a broader perspective, fashion also brings about gargantuan economic benefits. The fashion industry does not only include designers, there are the stylists, models, seamstresses, photographers, members of the press, and countless other jobs required to sustain the survival of the industry, in 2011 alone, the fashion industry reeled in a whopping US\$267 billion in profit revenue. Fashion brands across the board, with brands like Bvlgari and Tiffany's gaining a more than 100 percent increase in sale and fashion luxury giant Mulberry boasting a 529 per cent hike, defied the sluggish recovery of the world economy. It can also be said that the fashion industry aided the recovery of countries affected by the debt crisis with its thriving growth. Therefore, with such massive benefits for the economy, fashion can be considered a good thing.

Critics, however, may argue that fashion promotes a social ill of overspending on 'unnecessary' goods. Fashion, they say, is overpriced, and one's money can be put to better use. They also argue that consumer spending on fashion can become an addiction that will eventually result in running up numerous credit card bills. Furthermore, they add that the production costs of fashion do not warrant the exorbitant price tags that come along with them. Granted, that may be the ugly side of fashion, but it is still important for us not to be too narrow-minded. While excessive spending on fashion can be a problem, it only remains as that – a potential problem. Cases of people having addiction problems with overspending on fashion, termed in the media as "shopaholics", while not unheard of, are still isolated and rare. With a larger number of educated consumers these days, most if not all people engage in financial planning, which minimizes the chances of excessive spending. Additionally when placed next to actual vices such as gambling addiction, robbery and illegal money laundering, this "potential problem" pales greatly in comparison. With relation to the argument of unjustified costs, in the words of designer Ariel Levy, who explained that the high prices are due to the tedious and long-drawn creation process, designing is like 'creating a vaccine' – while the actual material costs of the product may not be that expensive, it is the effort and work placed into the creation of such a good that is of fine quality that results in the high price. Regardless, there is always the alternative of buying the good off-season where prices would be slashed significantly and one does not need to fork out that much money. At the end of the day, the consumer is the one who makes the final decision as to how much one wants to spend, as such, how can fashion be said to have a harmful influence on one?

Also, while taken for granted by many, there are also other social benefits that fashion entails that cannot be understated. Fashion is responsible for defining acceptable societal image and is a good instrument to determine desirable standards of dressing. For example, fashion styles may determine how we should dress appropriately and comfortably for the right occasions, with clothes suited for different context and events. The high necklines of Victorian fashion suited the times of Victorian prudery in the 1900s, whilst similarly today, dressing too casually or even too little for work is seen as a fashion faux pas, showing too little regard for one's workplace. In determining desirable standards, fashion also encourages people to engage in personal grooming, in a bid to look good. While the benefit may seem superficial, it cannot be said to be so for the individual who looks good, and thus feels good about oneself. Fashion can do wonders for one's personal confidence.

Detractors may argue however that the fashion world is to be blamed for the negative pressures placed upon society to strive for "perfection" that result in the increase in the number of cases of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the fashion world has taken a proactive initiative to promote healthy body image as well. The Madrid, London and Milan Fashion Week runway shows, three of the biggest in the world, have set industry standards that models with a BMI of less than 18 (in order words, underweight) would be banned



from the runway. Influential celebrity and fashion forward budding designer Victoria Beckham has also personally spoken out against being too skinny, and has pledged against underweight models at her runway shows. Vogue magazine has also set aside an issue that showcased plus-sized models driving across the message that one does not need to be thin to be beautiful; big can be beautiful too. These initiatives have redefined society's perceptions on beauty, and we have to commend them for that. Fashion can be used to become a role model and the benefits that it gives rise to cannot be dismissed.

We therefore see that fashion can be both a good thing and bad. It brings numerous benefits, yet it is not free of flaws. However, the very fact that the problematic aspect of fashion can be fixed, or at the very least efforts are being made to mitigate them, proves that its significance cannot be overstated. This coupled with the extensive boons of fashion, shows that fashion is very much so more of a good thing than bad.

Joel Lim Xing Zhi 10A301



An entertaining read! The essay gives a range of insightful perspectives coupled with good examples showing the author's knowledge of the fashion industry.

Do you agree that efforts to regulate population size are necessary and effective? (MJCJC2PE13Q3)

The pollution, the diseases, the crimes – these are all the symptoms – not the cause. We are the cause." This quote from a recent popular fiction novel *Inferno* represents the trans-humanist concerns for the booming world population and its effect on the world we live in. While some of these ideas may seem cruel to some of us, it is undeniable that the world today is undergoing drastic upheaval due to changing population sizes, and we face crises, ironically, of both over- and under-population. The necessity of regulating population sizes is a natural consequence. However, after several countries have jumped on the bandwagon — from baby bonuses to one-child policies — effectiveness remains uncertain. I personally believe that while regulating population measures are necessary, the limited effectiveness of the current policies require a revolution of ideas regarding the problem.

The world population has soared in the last half century due to varying reasons like improving standards of healthcare, a (mostly) stable and peaceful global political climate, and revolutions in food technology, just to name a few. While these may seem to improve the general quality of life, several countries have seen the worst of it due to an exponential growth in population which the infrastructure of these countries cannot handle. Examples of developing countries which lacked effective birth control measures and family planning like India and several sub-Saharan countries come to mind. The problems resulting from this overpopulation often form the core of these countries' developmental challenges. There is resource depletion: widespread malnutrition in nations like Ethiopia exists simply because there is not enough food for so many mouths to feed. Social problems also arise, like in India where employment cannot be generated at a pace fast enough to match the rising youth population. Not surprisingly, the emergence of illegal businesses as well as youth gangs has become a problem in several states across the nation. These countries seem to be stuck in a vicious cycle, in which the effects of the people's economic and social development are neglected in the light of the rising population, which is further exacerbated by poor management of the increasing numbers. These countries need effective population regulation to allow the nation's development to reach the masses before further growth can be considered. This is necessary to maintain and improve the quality of life, infrastructure, as well as the economy of the country.

On the other end of spectrum, we have the problem of falling birth rates and ageing populations in developed countries like Singapore and Japan. While of a completely different nature, this problem is no less severe. A shrinking workforce and rising burden on it threatens to destroy the social fabric and economic developments that have made these nations exceptional. Japan has already seen a continuously falling GDP and has slipped downward in the list of the largest economies, despite being at the forefront of technological development. Social problems have also gripped these

countries — Singapore, which is increasingly relying on immigrants to maintain its international competitiveness, has felt a threat to her national identity and seen a rise in xenophobic sentiment. This has led the government to contemplate policies like tax increases in the near future which can cripple the country's position as a global financial hub. Despite rising social welfare and community life, the populations of such countries continue to shrink — an unfortunate trend that could be attributed to many things but cannot be pinned to any. The result is often irreversible damage to the countries' domestic life and international position. Population regulation and meticulous planning around it is necessary for this part of the world as well.

It can clearly be seen that population regulation is necessary — albeit in varying forms — for many countries in the world today. This global concern has seen different approaches to regulation policies, each tailored to the needs and characteristics of a particular society. That being said, I would have to argue that their effectiveness presents a rather dismal picture.

Countries with severe overpopulation issues have often been driven to extreme measures. Draconian policies like China's infamous one-child policy — though statistically effective — often border on human rights violations and have received much criticism from the international community. In 1973, the Indian government, in a bid to follow China's example, implemented a forced sterilisation programme where the rural population was sterilised against their will. This programme proved to be so unpopular among the people that it had to be abandoned. Unfortunately, milder attempts have also backfired. Another of India's highly controversial population policies, sex-selective family planning, has resulted in a grossly-imbalanced sex ratio in several parts of the country that continues as a result of prevalent and now-illegal sex-selective abortion. With too many variables coming into play, what seemed like a simple solution has instead become a hydra of unforeseen problems that are not so easily resolved — and could even cause current efforts to backfire. We only need to look at Singapore's Stop At Two policy, which attempted to reduce the effects of the post-war baby boom, and was — ironically — almost *too* effective, to the point where the country now grapples with a steadily declining birth rate. While efforts like these are well-meaning, it can be argued that the proverbial road to hell — a stable population size in this case — is paved with good intentions.

Of course, many would argue that most countries have moved away from such cruel and unethical methods, and are choosing to adopt a softer approach — incentives are, after all, psychologically-proven tools of effective behaviour modification. To prop up sagging birth rates, generous tax breaks and cash hand-outs are being dangled as inducements for young couples to have more than two children in Singapore. The newly revamped Marriage and Parenthood Package has a slew of measures targeted at addressing both the financial pressures as well as the work-life balancing act of having children. However, such pro-natalist policies have seen limited success as they frequently do not address the root cause of the problem — a high cost of living and insufficient time for children. With increasing inflation and a heavily work-oriented culture, would-be parents are discouraged from the lifelong commitment of starting a family. On a similar note, state policies aimed at controlling birth rates can be limited due to being at odds with religious and cultural mores of the citizenry. New calls to the Catholic Church in the Philippines, Brazil and Spain to allow contraception have been met with fierce opposition. In countries with a largely rural population, where large families are the norm — and even a necessity — people are highly unlikely to heed calls to reduce family size. Policy can only go so far before it is met with the implacable force of a collective cultural mind-set.



Immigration is often adopted as a means of increasing population size, where the injection of foreigners directly into the veins of a country has helped to counter most of the effects of a diminishing workforce and stagnating economy. Its immediate benefits are undeniable — and yet,



pro-immigration policies are often not well-received by locals and can pose problems in the long run, especially when immigrants are not integrated well into the mainstream. Other than muted racism in heavily immigrant nations like Australia, riots have also been started by migrants in European countries — France in 2005, Britain in 2011, Sweden just last year — all of which highlights the severe rifts in these societies. And even if we were to somehow solve the problem of integration, the continued growth of any migrant population presents more practical concerns in the long run. The overcrowding of public infrastructure and the pressing need for housing because of a burgeoning migrant population places a huge strain on a nation's fiscal and physical resources. Furthermore, measures to increase population size purely for the sake of maintaining economic competitiveness could be hugely unpopular among citizens, who feel that such competition leads to a worsening quality of life for them. Some have already found this 'push' as reason enough to pack up in search of greener pastures, which further aggravates the issue of a dwindling local population. Countries cannot continue indefinitely in this manner, not when the long-term implications clearly dwarf any short-term effectiveness in addressing population growth.

We have now realised the severity and urgency of this global problem, and it is beginning to articulate itself in our collective conscience through popular media and books like *Inferno*. This re-ignites hope for fruitful discussions into designing policies that are more in line with the needs of individual societies and global conditions, hence increasing their effectiveness. Realising the necessity of population regulation, hopefully, will lead to its effectiveness as well.

Navya Sinha 12S103



Review

A well-written essay that deals thoughtfully with both points of contention. Excellent examples are deftly woven into the arguments, showing a good grasp of the issue. Language is fluent and engaging, making this essay a pleasure to read.

'The key to happiness is good relationships rather than money.' Discuss. (MJCJC2MYE11Q4)

The story of King Midas and his golden touch is a well-known one that, at one point or another, has been told to children all around the world. It is about a King, who in his obsession with riches and fortune, is given the power to turn everything he touches into gold. However, he soon learns that his gift comes at a horrible cost of losing his daughter and everything to his touch. This story highlights the fact that, despite having all the wealth in the world, one may not be truly happy without the care and concern of one's loved ones. As such, I agree to a large extent that even though being financially stable is important, the key to happiness is indeed good relationships.

Firstly, humans are, by nature, social animals. We naturally crave the attention and care of people around us, and cannot stand the idea of being alone - isolated from everyone else. This is the reason why we build families and stay together, and why we choose to spend our lives with a single partner we deem to value the most. This harkens back to the days of our ancestors since time immemorial – long before any notion of "money" or "currency" came about – when humans chose to roam around and live together in groups, eventually forming families. The reason for this is simple. By having good relationships and loved ones around to care for us, we feel a sense of security and contentment. This concept has been hardwired into our brains so much so that even till now, it still rings true for most people. According to a study done by the American Association for Family Services, it is the ultimate goal for over 90% of Americans to be able to start a family and settle down, as opposed to striving to be the top dog in whatever line of work they were in. This shows people do value good relationships the most in achieving happiness. On the other hand, at the other extreme end of the spectrum, having all the money in the world will do nothing in fulfilling our innate desire to love and be loved. Cold hard cash will be unable to reciprocate feelings no matter how strong, and 'friends' made on the basis of wealth and fortune may, and often do, degenerate into hollow, superficial relationships with no substance in them at all. In fact multiple studies have shown that it is indeed harder for the wealthy elite to form genuine friendships with other people, as a large portion of these acquaintances are often 'freeloaders' who are more fixated with the money rather than



developing any sort of meaningful emotional bond with the person in question. Therefore, I believe that good relationships undeniably take precedence over money in achieving happiness.

Secondly, having good relationships enriches us emotionally and mentally, something which money simply fails to do in any regard. This is evidenced by the increased emphasis being placed on maintaining strong family ties amidst our ever-hectic daily schedules, both by government agencies as well as social services groups all around the world. It is simply because being able to confide in and interact with loved ones on a personal level allows us to share our burdens, joys, and ultimately our lives with them, not only allowing us to relieve stress, but also eventually experience a sense of fulfilment with knowing that we are not alone in this world. Conversely, we see that having plenty of money can only allow us to gain materialistic fulfilment, which is ultimately short-term as in the end, if we have nobody to share these gifts with, we will probably lead a sad and lonely life. This concept was highlighted in the famous case of Kevin Riley, who managed to spend the last few years of his life living in the lap of luxury upon winning a state lottery in America. However, upon his deathbed, he stated that his one greatest regret was not being able to reconcile with his estranged father before his father passed away. Therefore, this shows that the fulfilment gained from all the material luxuries in the world pale drastically compared to having full and enriching relationships with our loved ones and the people around us, and that we can only truly be happy with emotional and personal contentment, as opposed to having material luxuries.

Lastly, it is imperative that we realise that ultimately, money is merely a means to an end. Having paper currency in our hand will not yield us any happiness nor fulfilment – it is what we do with the money that will end up benefitting us. I believe that money, in a lot of cases, is not used in itself to achieve happiness, rather, it is used to maintain and improve our relationships with our loved ones so that we can truly be happy. This is evidenced in a lot of cases where financial security plays a large part nowadays in contemplating marriage, or starting a family. No doubt, having sufficient financial backing is important in maintaining a good standard of living for ourselves and our loved ones, and of course one would find it hard to be happy if one has to constantly worry about where the next meal will come from or whether the bills will be able to be paid off in time. A lack of money can in turn lead to disruption in family ties, where financial troubles cause emotional stress, incessant quarrelling and fights within a family. As such, we see that money is still important in maintaining good and healthy relationships, but ultimately it is these relationships that allow us to be happy.

Conversely, we see that having excessive money can be too much of a good thing as it can in fact lead to more unhappiness, further strengthening my belief that the key to happiness is indeed good relationships. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, the time required earning this money is oftentimes not proportionate to the amount of time spent with one's family. Sad cases where workaholics sacrifice their time with their families in order to work are not unheard of. In these cases, high-flying workaholics often miss out on the amazing experience of watching their children grow up, and when they have 'arrived' at the pinnacle of their careers, they often find themselves returning home to an empty mansion. Secondly, having too much money may even cause disputes within the family over the amount of inheritance to be distributed to each heir. A case like this was recently highlighted in the media, where the family of the late Taiwanese business tycoon, Wang Yung-ching, became embroiled in a courtroom drama over the amount of company shares each son was meant to receive. This dispute destroyed the previously amicable relationships in the family, and is a stark reminder that wealth will not necessarily achieve happiness.

In conclusion, the saying that "money cannot buy happiness" rings truer than ever in our society today. I believe that while due emphasis ought to be placed on earning enough such that one lives a comfortable life, we as humans cannot be truly content nor happy until we learn to treasure and fully appreciate all that our loved ones have to offer us. Alas, one might find the world a sad and lonely place if everything were turned to gold.

Sang Wei Han 10S401

**Review**

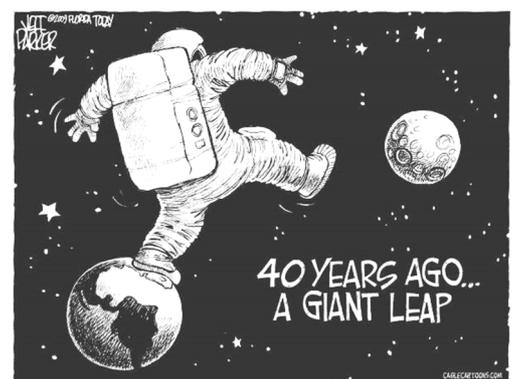
An enjoyable read! The essay is rather insightful and discusses several key issues from a mature perspective. In uncovering the 'key to happiness', the student has produced an effective comparison between money and good relationships.

Does space exploration merit the vast sums of money that are spent on it? (MJCJC2MBT11Q9)

Astronomy, the science that deals with the material universe beyond the earth's atmosphere, has been practiced by men of science and fascinated everyone else for centuries. From the time the first sunset was witnessed by Man, he probably would have pondered what lies out there, beyond the cosmos. One key aspect to astronomy is space exploration, which is the use of telescopes and mechanical probes to explore space, an investment in which astronomical amounts of funds have been poured into. In my opinion, whilst substantial benefits have yet to be reaped from this, it is still worthwhile to pursue for numerous reasons. As such, I agree that space exploration is worth every penny spent on it.

Our world today cannot be said to be perfect. Problems run rampant all over the globe; in some countries overcrowding has skyrocketed to dangerous levels and in others, pollution renders former living places uninhabitable. Resources are growing scarce and global warming is becoming a growing concern. There may come a time where people will literally have nowhere else to run when these problems grow too big to be ignored. So when earth inevitably becomes a barren wasteland incapable of sustaining life, where do we turn? Space, of course. In recent years, information has been obtained from numerous probes sent to Mars that life there may be indeed possible. Pockets of underground ice have been discovered, indicating that a supply of freshwater essential to survival is available. Whilst some may scornfully dismiss these ideas, saying that Earth will not face an apocalypse within the next century, Man's tendencies towards aggression coupled with the many environmental issues plaguing the world, will most certainly bring about some negative consequences into our lives, the only question is how long. It is of utmost importance that we begin planning for our future in the possible face of such dire outcomes. As such, the spending thus far on space to insure our future is worthwhile.

Space exploration has also solved a myriad of questions that Man has posed over the centuries. In the beginning, the Greeks believed that the Sun was the chariot of a God, galloping across the sky to watch over them. Man's insatiable thirst for knowledge however has proven that the Sun is nothing more than a giant ball of gas that our planet orbits. Without space exploration, we may still be worshipping our Sun and Moon today. Even more fascinating is how some great minds of science, with the use of high-powered telescopes to explore the furthest reaches of our galaxy, have come up with plausible theories regarding utterly mind-boggling concepts, such as time and space being related, and that space-time behaves like a fabric and can be bent. Such theories can never be derived without space exploration as the events resulting in the formulating of such theories are impossible to observe on Earth. Besides challenging us intellectually, space exploration has brought us some of the most incredibly beautiful images that Man could never witness on earth. From nebulae to dying stars, these things bring to us a sense of wonderment. It is very humbling to know that despite how technologically advanced we may be, we are actually laughably insignificant in our mighty universe. Space exploration has enriched us all intellectually and spiritually, and even with all the money in the world, we would not be able to purchase anything of earthly origins that could ever bring us to a similar level of enlightenment. This proves that space exploration is highly valuable and merits the large amounts of money being invested in it.



Another reason why I feel space exploration should be pursued is the possibility of discovering extra-terrestrial life. Many who are presented with this view immediately snort with derision, however from a strictly intellectual viewpoint, consider the following: our galaxy consists of less than one percent of our entire universe. Can we really be that arrogant to believe that we are the only living things that exist? Ignoring the normal Hollywood clichés about alien invasions and hostilities, in my opinion, if there really is life elsewhere in the universe, it would be reasonable to assume that if they were at the same technological state as we are, they would be rational like us and would refrain from resorting to mindless violence. This would be beneficial both for Earth and whoever is out there. Just like how



international trade has benefited countries which practice it, technology, ideals and resources could be exchanged. A great deal stands to be gained and learnt from another civilization. Critics may remain stonily unmoved by this, however in recent years it has been discovered that bacteria may have existed on Mars. Whilst being one of the simplest organisms known to Man, it is proof that life can be supported on a planet other than ours. It may appear that Star Wars and similar works of science fiction may have influenced many to hold this view but from an open-minded, purely scientific stance, the existence of another race is highly plausible. The fact that living things has been discovered shows the potential that space exploration possesses. As such, I remain an avid supporter of the huge inflows of investment into space programmes around the world.

Of course, space exploration has its fair share of shame and disaster. Take for instance the tragedy of the Challenger Space Shuttle in 1986. Minutes after launch, it was seen exploding in mid-air, incinerating the crew instantly. One of the most costly disasters ever witnessed, critics have often cited this incident to denounce space exploration. "A huge waste of resources with little return, all at the expense of human life", they say. However, that accident was a result of insufficient funding due to pressure from the very same critics. NASA, the organisation responsible for the launch then had to cut costs, which resulted in multiple errors of judgement. Whilst it is true that substantial benefits are still minimal, space exploration even after more than five decades is still in its infancy. In my view, more time is required before substantial returns can be gained. Hence, despite the occasional unfortunate loss of life, space organisations should still concentrate more on quality than conserving funds. I believe that we will soon reap what we sowed. Therefore, I believe that not only does space exploration merit the vast sums of money being spent on it but warrants even higher levels of expenditure.

Of course, a more pertinent problem that people have with space exploration is that the money spent could be put to better use. The money spent to launch a rocket could easily put food into the bellies of thousands of starving war-stricken refugees. Closer to home, many feel that the money should be spent on things with definite returns, like education for instance. Space exploration is undoubtedly one of the most expensive projects Man has ever undertaken. However, without space exploration, schools would only be able to teach half of what they teach today. With regard to the issue about alleviating problems like poverty, in my opinion such problems cannot be addressed when there are still other obstructions like corrupt governments in the way. It makes no sense to ship out a billion dollars' worth of supplies to North Korea to feed the poor when the government would probably take the money to build nuclear weapons. Furthermore, money has already been allocated to help solve these issues, and also, for countries with large surpluses of funds can easily undertake such projects whilst handling such problems on the side. The potential space exploration offers us is too valuable to scrap and as such, I feel that the space programme should continue having money flow into it.

It is true, that space exploration is an enormous financial drain on any economy. However, using fifty dollar telescopes can only permit you to learn the moon is fairly spherical and that stars twinkle. It takes a large expenditure on billion dollar telescopes which orbit our earth to obtain valuable information. Even then, what we would obtain is mere speculation. It would take multibillion dollar launches of probes into space to get confirmatory results. Some are enraged that such a large sum of money must be spent to determine the chemical composition of space dust. I however say that every cent is worth it. Space exploration has given us so much, both tangible and intangible. I find it hard to say that space exploration is a waste of money for in the future, it may even be our eventual salvation. In conclusion, whilst space exploration has yet to show much yield, the potential benefits are valuable enough for it to merit every cent that has been and will be spent on it. In the words of Stephen Hawking, renowned British theoretical physicist, "I don't think the human race will survive the next thousand years, unless we spread into space. There are too many accidents that can befall life on a single planet. But I'm an optimist. We will reach out to the stars."

Wong Zhen Yang 10S102



Salient and interesting examples given display the writer's wealth of knowledge concerning this issue. Overall an excellent essay written with passion and conviction.



Is it important to love what you do? (MJCJC2P210Q1)

“Wherever a man is against his will,” Epictetus once remarked, “that to him is a prison.” Our happiness is contingent upon the satisfaction derived from the things we do — be they history-making endeavours or simply the *picayune minutiae* of daily life — and hence if we do not love what we do, we can never attain personal happiness. Yet the fact is that in any society since antiquity a paradox has existed: what people do tends not to be what they love. This suggests that things may not be as simple as the hedonist’s rationale might conjecture, and that perhaps sometimes loving what one does takes an ancillary position to, *inter alia*, wealth and prestige.

Throughout human history, the most effective revolutionaries were borne by the love of what they did, or in other words, their passion. Indeed when one loves what one does, it is inevitable that passion follows, and with passion a whole host of other virtues, from perseverance to work ethic, follow suit. In short, loving what we do makes us more willing to do it, and lets us do it better (whatever “it” is). Perhaps no others exemplify this more than patriots like Nathan Hale, who proudly proclaimed at the gallows “I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country.” Motivated (the cynical might say blinded) by his love for his country, even death could not quell his passion. Conversely, when the love of what one does is lacking, there would be no drive and no fervour, resulting invariably in mediocrity.

But there are things we do, or rather, *have to do* regardless of how we may feel about them. As Sophocles put it, “nobly to live, or else nobly to die, befits proud birth.” *Noblesse oblige*, as the French call it, is what people (at least those of noble birth) are obliged to do as a matter of honour and integrity. To uphold one’s name, it is expected that one must inhibit depravities, be of graceful comportment, *et cetera*, whether one loves to do so or not. But to put things in context, it is duty — to one’s friends, women, families, deities or country — which remains an important and compelling reason to do things one does not love. Before the Draft was discontinued in 1973, thousands upon thousands of young American men were conscripted to fight in wars involving people they did not know, arguing about things they did not care about, in pursuit of goals that had no direct impact upon them. Make no mistake: these were no modern-day Nathan Hales, but when the call of duty came, many of them answered, if only to preserve one’s good name within the community and avoid the ignominious title of being a ‘Draft Dodger’. Indeed, the preservation of one’s social status may be a very compelling reason behind the vocations that people occupy themselves with: the social prestige that comes along with being a lawyer, for example, may well outweigh a complete lack of passion for litigation.

Furthermore there is the issue of talent. More often than not, what one loves is not what one is good at. Countless aspiring pianists have been unable to pursue their dreams of performing at Carnegie Hall by virtue of being tone deaf. When we get to the age when we realize that we simply have insufficient talent to pursue the things we love at a professional level, we take them on as avocations and go down the path of a career that we are more suited to, albeit one which may be less fulfilling. That is not to say that this is a bad thing, however, for if we all pursued what we are innately better at, whether it is balancing account books or cleaning septic tanks, the economy becomes more specialised, and hence more efficient. More things would get done. We may not be doing what we love, but surely such a society is better than one where artists litter the sidewalks but nothing is accomplished.

But even if we love our jobs wholeheartedly, we often keep a mistress in the form of money. Man’s love of money is often seen as a corrupting influence, to be shunned and regarded as a vice. But sometimes greed is born out of necessity, rather than maniacal avarice. Before we can enjoy the pleasures of doing what we love for a living, we must first ensure that we are able to make a living to begin with. For what good is the privilege of working at your dream job when you are unable to put a roof over your head, or food on the table, or toiletries in the bathroom? Life’s essentials do not come free. But even at higher levels of wealth, passion may still come second to money for the simple fact that more is never enough. We do not want to drive cars, but Ferraris; we do not want to drink champagne, but *Veuve Clicquot*. The desire to ‘keep up with the Joneses’, as the phenomenon is called, highlights the all too human tendency of greed for its own sake, and forces people to grit their teeth and go to work at jobs that are dull and insipid.

Yet, the love of what one does brings us something that no amount of wealth can compensate for, and that is contentment. It is the feeling of impatience in the morning when you cannot wait for the day to begin, and the satisfaction at the end of your day knowing that it was spent meaningfully.

The unexamined life, as Socrates said, is not worth living. If we do what we do simply out of obligation or greed, then we are no different from a football being kicked around on a field. Sometimes it is necessary to take a step back and examine our goals: whether they are set by societal expectations or are truly our own. And what we are likely to find is that of the goals that are truly ours, the reward is not fame or fortune, but the profound satisfaction of doing what we truly love.

Nicholas Wong 09S101

 **Review**

An excellent control over language and lexis is exhibited in this pleasurable read. The writer does not get by with language alone though, as arguments are loaded with logic and the overall impression is one of maturity of thought and comprehensiveness.

