KS Bull

2024 | Issue 1

Raffles Institution

The views expressed in each essay are purely for the academic purposes of crafting a viable argumentative response. They do not necessarily reflect the personal opinions of any student or staff member, nor do they necessarily represent the perspective(s) of Raffles Institution.

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

CONTENTS

2023 Year 6 GP Prelim | Paper 1

2023 Year 6 GP Prelim | Paper 2

2023 Year 5 GP Promo | Paper 2

2022 Year 6 KI Prelim | Paper 1

2022 Year 6 KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 1

2022 Year 6 KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2

2022 Year 6 KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 3

1

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 4 **Christine Fahboety Kho | 23S03C**

Consider the role of the social media in shaping public opinion.

From its introduction into our society, social media has become a key player in providing new insights into the many political issues of today. In fact, it has become the fastest and most effective way to publicise any piece of news, whether that is unfounded conspiracy theories or even massive Twitter threads (sorry, 'X' threads) complete with citations and a full reference section for further reading in response to one innocuous comment made in the name of fun. With its unique ability to reach millions of individuals across the world and its rather low barriers to entry, social media -the mish-mash of online forums and media sharing sites like Reddit, YouTube, Tiktok, Instagram and more- has also carved itself a strong foothold on politics as well, lending a voice to anyone who would want to use it, and for any purpose they have for it. Hence, social media has become an integral part of the political sphere in doing what it does best -influencing public opinion.

Social media inherently limits the politics one is exposed to; it possesses in its arsenal an almost mythical tool used to sort users into categories that are then utilised as labels for directed marketing. Otherwise known as the algorithm, this tool has proven to be indispensable to politicians looking to gain support where it would be most likely given. Using the targeted algorithm, social media applications like Tiktok, YouTube and Facebook can easily tell where you land on the vast plains of the political spectrum just based on the posts you've interacted with in the past, and can continue recommending more content in the same vein. While targeted advertising is certainly nothing new, what makes this form of it so insidious is largely the context in which it is used. Unlike traditional media (newspapers or television), social media is not obligated to provide comprehensive and somewhat objective reports across real-world events, but can consistently show you information that it knows you will enjoy. Over time, repeated reinforcement of your preferences would turn your 'Explore' page entirely liberal -or fascist, or conservative, or whatever unique blend of all three the user happens to be. When constantly subject to only one point of view at the expense of others, users become trapped in an echo chamber, their views limited to the same 'hot takes' that employ the same moral values and have the same few faces behind them. Without being forced to interact with posts and opinions that differ wildly from their own, users become increasingly polarised, and less able to accept a more nuanced or centrist position simply because there is no longer a need to form another, individual opinion. This effect of social media can be seen in countries like the United States -based on nation-wide government polls, its citizens have gradually lost a common ground between them even since 1979: those who identify as either liberal or conservative have begun to hold the same opinion about a wide range of political issues spanning from abortion to vaccines, public schooling to healthcare. Fewer people can hold the 'Democrat' opinion on one matter and the 'Republican' perspective on another, as the population approaches near homogeneity on both sides of the political spectrum -a spectrum that has begun to look more like a

mutually exclusive Venn diagram. Influencers such as Brett Cooper of the Comment Section and Ben Shapiro have played a large part in this polarisation, by choosing to direct their content to users likely to engage in it, they reinforce views that these users hold while simultaneously introducing their opinions on other issues users might not have formed an opinion on yet, all skewed to the same end of evaluation. One might expect the opposite to be true- having platforms that allow one greater access to a wide variety of diverse voices would in theory let us explore contrasting views to better inform our opinions. However, this is simply not true: rather, the title of the 'For You' page says far more about what people seek on social media than the 'Explore' page does, if only because most people use social media recreationally, preferring instead to return to beliefs that do not challenge their worldview -contradiction remains an uncomfortable situation for us, one that we generally do not like encountering on the sofa after a hard day's work.

Additionally, social media has cultivated a different metric of judging political stances than we had relied on prior: the personality product. The easy and fast connection that social media provides its users the ability to upload and share snippets of their lives nearly in real time as events occur -providing a brief glimpse into the human behind the politician. This new method of increasing appeal is not lost on politicians -many have eagerly tackled the task of crafting a narrative and personality online as opposed to relying on other forms of media (which they have sparing control over) to shape their image. Consequently, users are now inundated with information on politicians' private lives -their happy family, their little pets, their hobbies- which has inevitably begun to shape the opinion they have of that politicians' values and policies. Humans tend to be irrational creatures, our capability for empathy eclipsing our logical processes often when there is no objective reason for doing so. In fact, a recent study has shown that when individuals are shown donation requests for a crisis in Syria, we often donate 30% more to a personal anecdote coupled with a child victim's face and experiences as compared to mere statistics showing the number of asylum seekers who have gone through the same exact things, although in theory the latter should hold the same weight, if not more (on account of the magnitude of those suffering) than the former. Politicians on social media exploit this very same human empathy to build support for their cause, by creating an online personality that can peddle their politics for them. It might interest you more to check out Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's Green New Deal if you saw her playing Among Us last year with OfflineTV on Twitch because she was so likeable, and considerate of other players, or so logical in her deductions in-game that these qualities would surely translate to her politics as well. It might interest you to support Ong Ye Kung in his political endeavours upon seeing a Facebook post of him posing in front of a Barbie movie poster on a weekend out with family, because surely a politician who spends time with his family to watch a feminist movie would make policies that have the best interests of children and women in Singapore in mind. Just the same way that we are 20% more likely to believe our close friends and family on news without concrete proof (according to a Pew Research centre survey done in 2019), it makes sense for us to trust these politicians — who have become, rather parasocially, our friends — more easily even before we know what they stand for. In fact, even just having made a positive impression would have been enough, as it primes us to perceive them more favourably down the road. Hence, social media has indeed had a great impact on shifting our basis for forming political opinions, from simply assessing

a candidate's views and logic to also being subconsciously swayed by their apparent personality.

While I have previously asserted that social media may have done much to muddle the methods with which we judge politics—or even the kind of politics we are exposed to — it has also been an indispensable tool for connecting those all around the world to political crises, giving users the ability to partake in politics even without an already established platform. Its relatively low barriers to entry -anyone with a mobile phone and a good internet connection could use it- means that many can take their first foray into politics on these less intimidating platforms. Coupled with the widespread availability of understandable, bite-sized video essays or posts that users can watch to gain an introduction to politics, social media has made itself the ideal starting point for younger users to form their own opinion of the world. Video essayists on YouTube such as Shanspear and Mina Le can provide interesting case studies on topics ranging from capitalism, feminism or racism to more light-hearted criticisms of hidden political agendas in fashion and media, helping to teach beginners ways to dissect arguments and search for biases in the commonly used quips by politicians or, occasionally, even logical fallacies that orators fall into. These forms of media also often have citations and further reading in the descriptions, where interested users can continue diving into topics that fascinate them at a greater depth than the video itself allowed for. Platforms such as Reddit or X can provide a place for users to discuss issues pertaining to their country's politics, or to seek out different perspectives on political debates (r/AskMen or r/AskWomen are frequently visited ones). While the medium used (short-form videos or one-liner posts) may not be ideal for nuanced or extensively researched opinions, one cannot deny social media's ability to spark conversation and pique interest — it is, after all, what it was designed to do.

As with any other tool for human connection, social media has transformed the political landscape with its creation -whether it is slowly enclosing you in an echo chamber of #Notallmen and #AllLivesMatter or showing you paparazzi-style photos of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong shaking hands with children at pep rallies. The messages that social media sends us influence our views on politics, whether we like it or not. Going forward, it is perhaps best to continue remaining aware of its subtle influence on our choices, and to educate our next generations on the reliability of judging politics based on the last post they saw on TikTok.

Comments

It would be good to examine the limitations of social media in shaping political opinions, as balance, prior to these ideas you've raised. Otherwise, an excellent analysis that has taken into account the close relationship of social media with how political opinions are shaped. You've used your evidence insightfully and in a manner that is compelling to read, even though this is a popular question.

2

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 7 **Noh Sangeun | 23S06Q**

The solution for climate change is not to be found in technology but by having a simpler lifestyle.

If you thought it was hot, it's only getting hotter. It came as an unpleasant shock to many regions of the world, which had already been experiencing record heatwaves and various natural disasters, when scientists revealed the impact of climate change had so far been mitigated by an extended period of La Nina, a phenomenon that cools our oceans. The calamities caused by climate change, manifesting as wildfires in Maui and the coldest winter on record in the United States, appear set to exacerbate as we enter a time of El Nino, when sea temperatures rise. Of course, natural causes are far from the only contributors to climate change. Our consumerist culture and the very structure of our modern societies has created a seemingly inescapable spiral of environmental destruction culminating in vast shifts in the world climate. In the frantic search for ways to alleviate our impact on the climate, and respond to existing problems, some have argued that scientific innovations hold the key. Others champion the benefits of consuming less as individuals. I argue that both are crucial in achieving a real impact to salvage our world from its apparent doom.

Advocates for a simpler lifestyle often point to the pernicious effects of capitalism. With industrial revolution after revolution, we have found all too many ways to satisfy our endless desires. The average person today consumes thrice as much food annually as someone from the 17th century, thanks to exponential improvements in farming technology and fishing techniques, as well as the abundance created by fast food franchises. The consequence of this reckless resource depletion, of course, is a breakdown of the ecosystems that maintain the delicate balance in our climate system. Since 1950, we have caught more than half the fish in the sea, including those prominent in coral ecosystems that help to calibrate sea temperatures. In another instance, the rapid consumption cycle enabled by fast fashion and products of planned obsolescence generates excessive industrial waste and greenhouse gas emissions, which catalyse further warming and hence devastating changes to the global climate. By consuming less, we may be able to moderate our pace of resource depletion and environmental degradation, directly putting a damper on climate change. By 100g less of beef, we save on carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to driving 70km in a car. The economy after all runs on a system of demand and supply; if we consumers cut demand, we will naturally also reduce the modern production processes which are so detrimental to our planet. Further, this cuts into the profits of large corporations. By exercising our dollar votes, we may be able to pressure companies to cut down on pollutive factories. Alternatively, they might make a move away from especially damaging corporate tactics like planned obsolescence, manufacturing instead durable products that will satisfy consumers for long periods between one purchase and another. In a world where consumerism holds so much sway, consumers must recognise their power to make change happen. Some even argue for a gradual regression to the old days of self-sufficiency, completely eliminating the behemoth that is the economic machine and making a u-turn on consumerism. Though this may seem absurd, in an ideal world such a move would guarantee an immense alleviation of our carbon

footprint and so ameliorate climate change. These switches to a simple lifestyle will reduce further emissions, slowing the pace of climate change and perhaps buying us time to enact climate policies.

For that is something we have in short supply: time. With the aforementioned calamities only set to worsen, and the already-devastating toll that climate change has taken on our livelihoods, finding a solution is undoubtedly urgent. Yet, before they are implemented or even writ into law, climate policies must jump through hoops of government bureaucracy and partisan debate. In many politically polarised countries like the United States, this severely happens the progress of such policies when the incumbent ruling party does not prioritise climate action. On the international stage, this is even more pertinent an issue: climate deals like the Paris Agreement were such milestones because it takes so much haggling for powerful countries to come to a consensus on how best to act against climate change. And then there is the issue of execution, what with complications arising from the free-rider problem where each country waits for another to make the first move. Even in corporations, rests must be taken into consideration before any changes are made to company policy: shareholders, consumers, owners, and so on. Comparatively, adopting a simple lifestyle appears easy. All it requires is for an individual to change his mind, to buy perhaps one shirt fewer in the course of a year, to decide not to eat that burger after all. These are immediate actions we can take to slow climate change, the expediency of which is even more striking when contrasted with the nature of technology. Innovation and research take time. For over two decades, we have talked excitedly of meat alternatives with no real breakthrough in the global market that truly flawlessly replicates meat. Then there are innovations which, given our current level of development, appear to be castles in the sky. Recently, Korean researchers proposed their formula for a superconductor, which if verified could revolutionise the energy sector and eliminate the vast majority of carbon emissions. However, that was falsified by subsequent research. We cannot afford to wait for such long-term, uncertain benefits to come into effect. When the impact of climate change is already so evident, the best response may be to take whatever steps we can.

That said, we must still leverage on the power of technology to enact fundamental structural change. Consuming less is not in fact as easy as it sounds when the world is full of such temptations as the tote bag that only costs $1. It is also difficult for consumers to discern the eventual environmental impact of every purchase they make: for instance, choosing between that tote bag and a plastic bag. When what we consume often has an impact comparable to how much we consume, merely leading a simpler lifestyle is not guaranteed to yield fruit. Furthermore, there is little transparency about production processes. Though we may buy fewer products, such actions are futile and even counterproductive if they are produced by less sustainable means—think buying an avocado, which consumes unbelievable amounts of water per tree, as opposed to buying two apples produced locally in a smart farming facility. Ultimately, today's world, and our consumption pattern, is dominated by unsustainable economic systems. Beyond taking individual steps, there is a need to revolutionise the very processes that make consumption possible. This is where many point to technology's proven capacity to overturn economic systems. For one, technology can majorly alleviate the effect of existing consumption. Carbon capture technology, being implemented in factories across Europe, reduce carbon dioxide emissions

by close to 90%, making it more feasible for us to live in a way that does not exacerbate climate change. In this manner, technology subverts our expectations of a relation we thought was inevitable: that consumption equals emission. In other cases, technology provides viable alternatives that could turn the tide on public opinion. Where many are deterred by the idea of going fully vegan and thus consuming less meat, alternatives like lab-grown meat and tofu-based chicken nuggets can encourage these people to try their hand at a simpler lifestyle. Thus at times technology can act as an incentive to adopt simpler lifestyles. Hence, technology necessarily complements and amplifies the impact of simpler living.

Furthermore, technology often accomplishes what a simple lifestyle cannot, in terms of easing the impact of climate change. A solution to climate change entails not just reducing future emissions but recognising the havoc wrought by existing levels of emissions. In numerous island nations, the challenge of rising sea levels is an all-too-real threat to their very existence. Elsewhere, in India, record heat causes temperatures high enough to be literally deadly to a healthy adult standing in the shade. Though it is important to address our potential future impacts, it is equally imperative that we look for ways to alleviate suffering now. Research has yielded innovations that may be able to help us live with climate change, ranging from sea walls to heat shields. Cutting-edge floating island designs offer a tantalising prospect of relocating vulnerable seaside communities. Technology is also invaluable as a tool to help us build climate models and predict the consequent natural disasters, which allowed countries like South Korea and Japan to warn residents about upcoming typhoons and significantly eliminate potential casualties. In planning for climate-resilient infrastructure, technology is also key. Modern heating systems, in addition, could help temperate countries survive colder winters. It is evident from these examples that technology can play a valuable role in our response to climate change. Having recognised existing problems, we must utilise technology to improve our solution to these immediate challenges in every way possible. In this way, it may be dangerous even for us to simply preach the need to consume less, which benefits future generations but not the people worldwide who face serious threats to their very lives even at this moment.

In conclusion, climate change is too complex a problem to be addressed by any solution in isolation. Even as we strive to minimise the impact of capitalism on the planet, and exert any power we can from the standpoint of cogs in an economic machine, there is undeniable value in technological innovation as a means to reform the relationship between the climate and our consumerist culture, as well as to provide answers to existing climate change impacts. Where simpler lifestyles reduce how much we consume, technology is a vital tool to improve how we produce and consume as a society. Though adopting simpler lifestyles will buy us some time before we reap the benefits of technology, the bottom line is that both must work in tandem, especially considering that it is impossible to persuade the entire global community to go hunter-gatherer. As Sun Tzu wrote in his Art of War, "know thy enemy and know thyself"—despite growing conflicts worldwide, one of the current generation's greatest wars (and legacies) will be with climate change. Understanding its devastating present impacts and its sure prominence in the world to come, we must embrace both solutions in our strategy for the days ahead.

Comments

Very thoughtful response that managed to critically evaluate the issues in the question, while raising strong and relevant examples. There are some instances where examples raised conflated "simpler living" and "eco-friendly living", but they are not frequent. Very good use of language with a variety of sentence structure and vocabulary. Note that a stand where you lean clearly towards one of the two highlighted solutions (technology or having a simpler life) would offer you opportunities to weigh their effectiveness.

4

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 10 **Jolene Yee Xin Yi | 23S03A**

Consider the value of humour.

British comedy legend Charlie Chaplin once said, "A day without laughter is a day wasted." Decades later, this philosophy of his continues to be embodied by scores across the globe, and the aphorism "laughter is the best medicine" is still widely circulated as conventional wisdom. In this regard, humour remains and is destined to be a mainstay in our lives, although the role it takes has evolved in recent years, in tandem with forces such as globalisation and heightened geopolitical tensions. While it is able to create ripples of mirth and delight, I am of the view that humour is ever more so polarising in today's context, capable of touching off torrents of anger and resentment, to the detriment of communities and societies.

Of course, however, humour should be recognised for its role as a stress-relieving antidote. It boasts an incredible ability to diffuse the tensions of the average Joe and it is precisely this function of humour that has allowed it to continue being the central and binding theme of many entertainment works. Taking the eponymous series, Mr Bean, as an example, the titular character is still widely adored by millions globally, especially among children who identify with his anarchic and silly behaviour. In a similar vein, American comedy cop series Brooklyn Nine-nine has been a fan favourite since its release, by virtue of its light-hearted nature and hilarious character portrayals. In a world fraught with disorder and disturbance, humour pokes fun at the challenges and quandaries of the layman, and its high relatability has consolidated its importance as a means of escapism for many. The fast pace of life, coupled with various everyday stressors, be it from work, school, or relationships, sharpens humour's edge as an enduring tool to relieve stress and break monotony. Nevertheless, this assumes the best of humour—that it is benign and palatable to the general audience.

In recent times, the tone of public discourse surrounding humour has changed. First and foremost, humour is increasingly becoming political, and getting politicised. It has acquired negative overtones for its grossly insensitive use, potentially leading to new fissures and chasms in societies. For instance, comedian Jocelyn Chia recently came under fire for her comments on the ill-fated Malaysian Airlines Flight MH 370. Malaysians, in particular, took umbrage at her trivialisation of the deaths of the passengers and crew on board. It sparked a furore, both offline and online, triggering an apology from no less than Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, and even a request for Interpol to arrest her. In her defence, Jocelyn Chia remarked that Asian audiences were not ready for bolder and more "in-your-face" humour that her American base is more accustomed to, and cited how Americans have made fun of the September 11 tragedy as well. This particular incident illustrates the polarising nature of humour. While some might take pleasure from certain types of jokes, others are repulsed and disgusted. It is worth noting that humour, when used in the wrong context, or interpreted by a different audience than the one intended, could have serious geopolitical repercussions, and be the reason for diplomatic skirmishes or friction between nations. In the context of our present globalised environment, once impenetrable cultural

barriers are crossed, and inviolable social norms transgressed, intentionally or unwittingly, and now humour has to be approached with caution.

Moreover, humour takes on a new dimension depending on the medium through which it is promoted or propagated. This means that more often than not, humour laced with malicious intent could be slyly disguised as good-natured, well-meaning humour. In humanity's latest brush with macabre humour, the OceanGate submersible incident, before the fatal implosion was confirmed, some netizens were morbidly counting down to when the oxygen supply would run out, some jibed at the sheer impracticality of the mission, while others lampooned those on board for squandering their riches on such an undertaking. This drew the ire of many citizens, with many remonstrating that death is no fodder for jokes. While we would give a second thought about spreading such perverse jokes and memes with an acquaintance, the cloak of online anonymity permits and fans such behaviour. In the virtual world, the shackles of respect and social niceties are cast off with wild abandon. In fact, this culture of 'memefication' has burgeoned in recent years, for in the quest of virality, incendiary and sensationalist content is guaranteed to provoke consternation and promote audience engagement. In other words, internet penetration and algorithmic amplification have painted a vastly different picture as to how humour will play out in our lives in time to come. And it is a pessimistic and bleak one in the digital realm.

Additionally, humour is also used presently to normalise sexist or racist views, particularly those held by extremists. Consider Alan Kurdi, the two-year-old boy whose body was washed up on a Turkish beach, who became the tragic face of the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015, and who even appeared in French satirical weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo, an incident that drew widespread condemnation from communities due to its denigrating nature. The trend is clear: marginalised communities and racial groups are constantly being disparaged, as seemingly discriminatory insults are written off as simply ignorant or innocuous remarks. Taking it closer to home, casual racism, exemplified in the form of casual banter laced with racist undertones, remains a source of malaise and cause for concern.

No doubt, humour is an effective pressure valve, providing a cathartic and much-needed release for all of us. Yet, at the heart of it all, humour is a matter of taste, and it is imperative to recognise that not all types of humour are universal—a gag that elicits raucous laughter in a region might draw a pained groan from another. At the end of the day, humour is appealing because it is about the subversion of expectations and the contestation of the limits of tolerance of a society. But when sensitive and hot-button issues like death, politics, race and discrimination are concerned, humour is certainly no laughing matter.

Comments

While topic sentences could be framed to more consistently engage the notion of value or lack thereof. However, overall, this was a strong response with some insights and evaluation! Illustration is apt— good selection here, though it varies in specificity. Highly fluent, with a wide-ranging vocabulary and good control.

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 11 Clara Tan Hui En | 23S03E

Is a thriving economy the best measure of a good government?

A very large part of governance is to ensure the economic survival and prosperity of a country. It is often the tool we use to measure the success of an administration - whether they have led us through a period of economic growth where the GDP per capita has risen or whether they have created jobs for the people. It is the reason also, for the downfall of politicians; Liz Truss was forced out of office after just 45 days for fumbling the microbudget. A thriving economy is increasingly being used as a yardstick to measure the livability and prosperity of a country and by extension, its government. However, is it too narrow-minded to measure such an arbitrary thing as governance with only a one-dimensional metric like the amount of GDP a country generates in a year? This essay argues that while frequently used as a benchmark, a thriving economy is not the best measure of a good government because society is ultimately multidimensional with complex interactions between groups of people, and good governance has to holistically address such needs. Additionally, with the improvement in standard of living worldwide, a country's needs have expanded to encompass other factors beyond the economic realm and thus the metrics we create to measure good governance have to reflect that.

Firstly, a thriving economy may not always be attributed to good governance and can be due to a host of other factors. Hence, judging a government by the state of the economy may be an inaccurate indicator on the competence of the government. Consider, especially, the nations rich in natural resources like oil; they may have a thriving economy propelled by their export sector but not because of the government's management of resources. The economy is measured by data and statistics such as the export revenue of the country or the amount of foreign direct investment it secures, but ultimately numbers only tell you the state of the economy; it does not show the components that enable such economic growth, much less the primary stakeholders leading the charge. Moreover, it is only a temporary indicator, the country may have enjoyed exponential growth because demand for its precious metals like coltan have accelerated in the past few years. It does not predict the future trajectory of the economy which is still up to the government's ability in the long term to grow the metaphorical pie. In the early 2000s, when Venezuela found an oil reserve sitting in its land, the extraction of oil enabled rapid economic growth in the country and helped pull many out of extreme poverty. The government was loose with money, giving its people more subsidies for housing and education. But when years of unbridled growth came to a crashing halt in parallel with the crude oil sector, instead of austerity, the government had chosen to print money, causing hyperinflation and economic collapse in the country. A key catalyst of Venezuela’s downfall was in part because the government lacked the foresight to diversify the economy early on, leading to an economic addiction almost, to oil. As such, a thriving economy can be due to factor like luck, whether that country is lucky enough to have what the world reads. When a measure can just as likely be a twist of serendipity as it can be about

good governance, it would not be a good indicator of the government in the country, much less the best.

Next, it is imperative to recognise that the government has other responsibilities to its people than just ensuring their material standard of living. As part of the social compact, besides creating jobs for the people, the government also has a role in ensuring the security of its people and more centrally, playing referee in equity and social mobility in the country. As more counties enter the club of developed or at least , emerging economies, people's expectations of a government are also evolving. Worldwide, people are paying more attention to the growing schism between the haves and the have nots. They are demanding good education, healthcare and speaking up about issues like racial inequality, sustainability, free rights—all these are ideological aspirations that extend beyond whether they are well-clothed or have enough money to eat. In European countries, we see people taking to the streets to demand stricter laws on the environment, you even have kids in Hawaii suing the state for enabling brown industries to flourish. Even in China, a heavily censored and autocratic state, you have teenagers "lying flat" on the ground after their graduation and quitting the "996" lifestyle in silent protest against the government's emphasis on working hard and slogging away for the company and their country. What people treasure, the values and ideals they hold dear, these are all evolving, and the standards we set for good governance have to evolve as well. A civil servant serves the people, not the financial juggernauts. What good would it be if the country sees massive economic growth at the expense of intangible welfare? There are countries which manage to match the GDP per capita of large countries but whose governments are run through cronyism and repeatedly infringes on the individual human rights of the people. A case-in-point is Xi's China, where the Communist Party has indeed helped achieve "common prosperity" for the majority of its citizens but whose draconian Zero-Covid policies have caused many tragedies to unfold and have even enabled systemic discrimination of its Xinjiang ethnic minority. Such is a form of governance that does tick all the boxes of a good government in the economic sense but which is not ideal when it comes to the welfare of the people.

That being said, it is equally important to acknowledge that the economic prosperity of a country is often the most widely used measure of a government because of its convenience and pertinence to society as a whole. It is a whole lot more difficult to measure the qualities of a government with more intangible and often obscure metrics such as the corruption rates of a government or its success in serving the people. These are largely arbitrary metrics that would firstly, be dependent on what the government reveals about its intrinsic workings in parliament, and secondly, it is a metric that has to be adjusted for unique conditions and circumstances of each government. For instance, the coalition that Pheu Thai formed in Thailand has links to the military and excluded the democratically elected Move Forward party. In places like the USA where democratic values are prized, it is by all standards a bad government - one that is undemocratically elected. But in Thailand's case, it may be a much better government than its military junta. Hence, it is a lot more difficult to quantify with other metrics how "good" a government is, without using the economy as a litmus test since economic data is a lot easier to collect and quantify. It is also important to note that a thriving economy is still one of the most vital aspects of a developed nation or even a

developing one, due to the cascade of positive effects that a thriving economy brings its citizens.

The state of the economy is inextricably linked to people's welfare – whether they are able to earn a livelihood, whether they can afford the rising cost of living and whether their society is progressive in the technological and consumerist sense. A thriving economy can help combat poverty in the lowest rungs of society and bring more opportunity for social mobility, all of which are key tenets of the social compact. It is the reason why the government has worked assiduously at stimulating the Japanese economy out of its years of deflation and why the Chinese government has chosen to bury youth unemployment statistics which negatively reflect on the government. Bread-and-butter issues have always been close to the people's hearts and giving them the means to succeed financially through economic prosperity is a crucial function of a government.

It makes sense that having a thriving economy is one of the most important indicators of good governance but it also could not be trumpeted as the best or only indicator. When economic growth takes priority, it may incorrectly nurture the mentality that growth is of utmost priority. This narrow-minded focus on only a thriving economy will often come at the expense of other things. In Brazil, fiscal-centred policy making has for years led to the government encouraging loggers and miners to tear down parts of the Amazon to make way for mining of copper and cobalt and expand farms into parts of the forest. As one of the largest carbon basins in the world, the loss of canopy cover in the rainforest has severely impeded efforts to reverse climate change and has had other unsettling impacts on indigenous communities and biodiversity. When the economy becomes of utmost priority, the government may choose instead to sacrifice such intangible and invaluable heritage of the people which cannot be restored after economic growth has been achieved. In Singapore too, in the name of building more residential or industrial spaces, we tear down economic buildings like the Turf Club and even the Merlion. To what extent is economic prosperity justified when it means revamping people's current ways of living and taking away what we consider to be our heritage and home for generations? Economic data alone does not account for such environmental and cultural artefacts in our societies, which is part of the government's job to protect. Deeming a thriving economy as the best measure of a good government may be too short-sighted and shallow.

In truth, there are few ways other than a thriving economy to testify for good governance. Composite indicators such as the human development index or the Gini coefficient add some depth to the evaluation. Nevertheless, just because economic prosperity is the most convenient measure we have, does not make it the best measure. There is a need for us to characterise and encourage good governance that extends beyond the economic realm and to signal that societal values are changing and so, governments have to evolve in parallel.

Comments

Clear, good knowledge of the issue and good application of examples. Thank you for making the effort to dig deeper into the analysis. Perhaps you could ground the last development such that its link to the question becomes more direct, and craft topic sentences that more explicitly address the question.

5

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 11 Hui Zhou Rong Isaiah | 23A01B

Is a thriving economy the best measure of a good government?

China has been averaging a 10% growth rate in the last decade or so, yet many of us would agree that the Chinese government may not be a particularly good one. This begs the question: is a thriving economy the best measure of a good government? A thriving economy refers to an economy that has been experiencing high levels of economic growth, usually measured through a country's GDP growth rate. While there is no explicit metric for good governance, the closest proxy we have for measuring that is the satisfaction and happiness felt by those living in that environment. I believe that while a thriving economy is one measure that can measure good governance, it is not the best one because it neglects three important areas, the first being the distribution of economic growth, second on the degree of causation between governmental policies and economic growth, and the last on other non-economic interests of the people.

Critics often claim that a thriving economy is the best measure of a good government because it translates into the purchasing power of individuals, allowing them to uplift their standard of living. Maslow's hierarchy of needs gives a ranking of human needs and preferences, with physiological needs at the very bottom, meaning that it is the most foundational of all human needs. A thriving economy helps people fulfil these needs: Singapore was once a poor country because of its lack of natural resources like water and oil, which is why many in the 1960s were forced to live off a few dollars a day. It is no wonder that the average lifespan of Singaporeans back then was much lower than the average lifespan now of 84 years, because people were struggling to feed themselves, had little access to nutritious food, and could not afford expensive healthcare to treat themselves when they were sick. However, it was through good governance that Singapore slowly became one of the Asian Tigers and had a thriving economy—the signing of free trade deals and the imposition of export subsidies attracted foreign direct investment into the country, allowing the economy to grow. Generally speaking, when economies grow, it means that the profits of companies are increasing and these profits tend to be redistributed to workers to encourage them to stay in the company. Therefore, a thriving economy leads to higher incomes for people. With higher incomes, people are now able to purchase more goods and services that uplift their standard of living, as evidenced in Singapore, where there was a more than 5 years increase in the average life expectancy because people were now more able to purchase healthy food and healthcare to protect themselves. As a result of Singapore's thriving economy, Singaporeans have expressed their satisfaction with the government by voting for it in power. PAP's long-lasting governance is a reflection of how good of a government it is because people continued to vote for it. Therefore, a thriving economy is the best measure of a good government.

However, I disagree that a thriving economy is the best measure of good governance because it does not take into account how that economic growth is experienced by people in the country. While it is theoretically sound that economic growth translates into better lives for people, many societies are unfortunately very flawed in their wealth distribution, with many having high levels of inequality. In these unequal societies, economic growth rewards the rich disproportionately more than it rewards the poor and vulnerable because it is capital owners and the upper management of companies who get to dictate how that profit and wealth is allocated within the company. As a result, workers at the bottom reap the least benefits from economic growth because companies have no incentive to treat them well—they are easily replaceable labour given that they perform low-skilled labour, and sometimes, can even be replaced with automation. In fact, governments are often complicit in these injustices, because companies donate to political parties and candidates as a form of lobbying to ensure that governments do not tighten legislation around wage levels. In the pursuit of self-interests, governments accept this lobbying and therefore do not regulate how wealth is distributed by companies. This means that even when countries experience successful economic growth, those in most desperate need of economic upliftment are not able to achieve that. In the US, 99% of all capital is owned by the top 1% of elites, and the minimum wage imposed by the government, which has not increased over the years to account for inflation, is in fact insufficient to lead a good life. For many living in the Rust Belt, an area that has been economically stagnant despite overall US economic growth, they are dissatisfied, upset, and have little faith and trust in the government. In China, even though it is historically the fastest-growing economy and is comfortably placed as the second strongest economy in the world, many in the countryside still don't have internet access, education, or even access to clean water. As a result, it is unfair to say that governments with thriving economies are good and successful when a significant portion of their people do not enjoy its benefits.

Furthermore, the relationship between a thriving economy and good governance is often quite unclear, where bad unsustainable governance can similarly lead to thriving economies, making a thriving economy not the best measure of a good government. Every decision comes with an opportunity cost and tradeoffs, but many governments are unfortunately very short-termist and therefore end up choosing the sub-optimal form of governance. Governments are short-termists because regardless of whether one is in a democracy or an authoritarian regime, political leaders have the incentive to give people better lives right now because that is the most immediate and tangible outcome. This comes at the cost of a sustainable society. Many governments deprioritise the environment in pursuit of economic success as we saw in Brazil with its deforestation, Indonesia with its slash-and-burn techniques, and China where air pollution in Beijing and Shanghai has resulted in a sharp 40% increase in respiratory problems. While it is true that these countries also have thriving economies—Indonesia is Southeast Asia's largest economy, Brazil is South America's largest economy, and China is the world's second-biggest economy—their economic growth has come at the expense of the environment. These short-termist forms of governance are terrible because they lead to detrimental environmental outcomes in the future that people will suffer from. Moving away from the environment, some governments are only able to

achieve a temporarily thriving economy which inevitably crashes because they were based on unsound economic policies. For instance, Venezuela used to be a very economically successful country because of its abundance of oil. As a result of this, the government did not diversify its economy and relied heavily on its oil industry to achieve short-term economic success. When the price of oil fell globally, the country's economic growth halted and took a turn for the worse. In fact, poor governmental decisions like refusing to enact austerity measures to cut back budget deficits are what caused Venezuela to be in its current state of economic despair, with hyperinflation wreaking havoc in the country. Therefore, the short-termist nature of governments means that they pursue economic growth in an unsustainable manner, both in terms of the environment and the economy, so a thriving economy is not the best measure of a good government.

Finally, a thriving economy is not the best measure of a good government because it neglects the other non-economic interests that people have. While it is true that economic needs are important to people, they also have other needs and rights, like the ability to speak freely without censorship, the ability to choose their governments, or more fundamentally, to not be oppressed. Therefore, many governments, like China, are not governments we conventionally deem as good, because its authoritarian nature restricts many important civil liberties of people. China is notorious for its state censorship, its non-tolerance of political opposition, and its abuse of human rights in the Xinjiang Province. These are all fundamental to human nature because we are rational human beings with the capacity to reason, and we form our identities through our interaction with the rest of the world. When governments restrict our civil liberties, it fundamentally restricts our right to identity formation, something inherent to the human condition. It can be argued that humans prioritise this over material well-being — bankers and lawyers in Hong Kong were willing to risk losing their jobs and being incarcerated by protesting on the streets against the Chinese policy to control Hong Kong once again. They were afraid they would lose their rights and freedoms to the CCP and were willing to do anything to protect those rights, even if it came at the cost of the economy, which we saw happen in Hong Kong where the year when protests were most rampant was also the worst-performing year economically. Fundamentally, a thriving economy is not representative of the diverse nature of human needs, and good governance cannot be measured with a monolithic focus on the economy, making it not the best measure of good governance.

In conclusion, I believe that there is no singular metric that can be claimed as the best measure of governance. Rather, good governance is affected by many different factors. While economic growth and performance are one factor in evaluating governance, equity, sustainability, and the protection of civil liberties are also very important factors in enabling the success of a government in satisfying its people. To claim that a thriving economy is the best measure of good governance is just unfair and unrepresentative.

Comments:

Isaiah, a sharp analysis of the essay question that looked at all the necessary factors contributing to good governance without neglecting the key topic of a thriving economy, thereby averting the possibility of a 'hijack'. Well done!

6

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 11 **Wu Yu | 23A01A**

Is a thriving economy the best measure of a good government?

From Mao's death in 1979 up till the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government has pulled off arguably the single greatest economic miracle in the modern world — an unbroken streak of 10% annual GDP growth, pulling the entire country of 1.4 billion people out of distressing poverty experienced in the cultural revolution. By this metric, we should judge the Chinese Communist Party to be one of the greatest governments in the world. Yet, their legacy — and the legacy of all governments — is more complicated than that. I contend that while a thriving economy is a necessary condition for a good government, it alone is an insufficient measure. We must also consider how this wealth is distributed, whether it is sustainable, and whether citizens can enjoy other quality of life aspects.

Proponents of economic growth often push the concept of "performance legitimacy": wherein, so long as the government manages to uplift the material welfare of the populace through prudent economic management, they are a commendable government that deserves their hold on power. This argument has its merits, as bread and butter constitute the minimal requirement of subsistence, and it is the basic duty of the government to ensure its citizens can survive, or even enjoy a prosperous life. No better example illustrates this than perhaps Singapore — an entrepot trading hub at its independence with scarce economic hinterland, labour, or international support. Despite being dealt this sub-optimal hand of cards, the Lee Kuan Yew administration, through remarkable economic dynamism, capitalised on our skilled labour, status as a port, and new areas of comparative advantage in petroleum refining and high-tech manufacturing to supercharge the economy above our East Asian peers. Deservedly, Singapore earned the epithet of an Asian Tiger. This uplift in the material conditions of the country rewarded the People's Action Party the mandate to rule continuously for the better half of a century, and international acclaim as one of the most competent governments. Many other countries in their earlier stages of development (like Rwanda or Kenya, both striving to be the "Singapore of Africa") seek to replicate the Singapore economic road-map. All of this demonstrates that the citizens of a country, and the international community, highly value economic growth and use it as a significant metric in assessing the performance of a government.

While that is true, we must nonetheless not lose nuance in our evaluation of governments — there are very many qualifications to economic splendour that must be noted.

Firstly, even as there is stratospheric economic growth, we must consider whether this growth is enjoyed by all in a society. Often, the fruits of economic prosperity are only enjoyed by a selected, favoured minority while other segments of the population live in impoverishment. In these cases, we would not consider a thriving economy to be a good measure — as such inequality eventually leads to social unrest and instability. Look only to the biggest economy in the world, the United States. Despite its hegemonic economic dominance, there is a striking difference in the living conditions of those on the East and West

coasts, where economic capital is situated, and the Rust Belt Americans that work in domestic industrial sectors. It is obscene that bankers, tech monopolists, and entrepreneurs carry 9-digit net worths, while communities in the South are struggling to make down payments on their home loans. This results in movements like Occupy Wall Street and the rise of right-wing populism as a reactionary force to such disparities, as individuals harbour resentment towards those that hoard the rewards of growth. Consider also an example in wealth inequality across economic sectors: the Netherlands is often known for its "Dutch Disease", where a rapidly expanding oil-export sector is the bellwether of economic growth, but at the tremendous expense of other domestic sectors (like agriculture) that cannot compete with it in terms of export competitiveness. Structural inequalities emerged as those working in oil-exports were thriving, while the rest of society was suffering from its country's success. The government does not just have a duty to a specific subset of its populace, but a duty to all peoples' welfare. Insofar as this is not achieved, we cannot myopically deem it a good government on the basis of a thriving economy alone.

Moreover, we must also consider whether economic growth is accompanied by an increase in human rights and liberties. Economic growth is well and good, but not in and of itself an a priori goal. It is only beneficial to the extent that citizens can use their newly found wealth in the ways that they want to. Hence, governments that severely restrict the liberties of its populace cannot be deemed "good". We return to our opening example of China: its impressive economic record is only as famous as its catalogue of human rights abuses. On the light end, we observe freedom of speech restrictions, where the internet is heavily censored, journalists are arrested without trial, and foreign media is stifled. On the heavy end, there is rampant exploitation of Uyghur minorities for cheap and environmentally destructive labour, the forceful silencing of protests, and Orwellian public surveillance for seditious activity. Likewise is the case for Saudi Arabia, where a surfeit of oil reserves has only given greater power to the ruling House of Saud through their monopoly on this economic lifeblood. They continue to impose an extreme form of Wahhabist Islam that restricts women's rights, limits religious freedom, and endorses the assassination of critics like Jamal Khashoggi. In these types of governments, although individual citizens are certainly wealthier and materially content, it is much more difficult to make rosy claims of their other standards of living in terms of freedoms to think, act, and express. These aspects of life may seem nebulous and amorphous, but nonetheless are critical to the wellbeing of a populace for identity formation and fulfilment. Thus, governments that restrict these cannot be considered good.

Finally, economic prosperity must be qualified by its sustainability. A government can theoretically produce incredible growth in the short term (perhaps a few decades) while plundering its resources and reserves without making adequate plans for the future. This would lead to foreseeable economic doom and is a clear act of mismanagement by an incompetent government. We need only look to the recently imploded economy of Sri Lanka: its growth in the previous decades was fuelled by excessive borrowing from foreign lenders, while also masquerading the rampant corruption of the ruling Rajapaksa family. This house of cards came crashing with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, that took out its only real economic sector of tourism. While it was thriving, it is undeniable that Sri Lankans enjoyed prosperity and an improvement in standards of living, yet because it was a precarious balance that would necessarily fall one day, we cannot judge Sri Lanka's government as one to laud

and praise. Likewise is the economy of Greece in 2011's sovereign debt crisis: again a mirage of growth was created by borrowing and cooked books that could never last. The long-term outcome of such short sighted governments is eventual suffering, as the ball is kicked further down. We cannot then use the veneer of a thriving economy as our basis of judging its government.

In evaluating a government's legacy, it is then insufficient to look at their thriving economy success alone. Although a government that fails to achieve growth is certainly a bad government, the converse is not true — rather, it is what a government does using its economy growth that determines whether it is good. It should use it to advance the welfare of all citizens, use it to ensure all qualities of life are improved, and use it to make prudent investments to ensure growth will continue in the long run. As all countries modernise, develop, and progress into the first world, this basic condition of material subsistence is more or less going to be fulfilled for all. Then, factors beyond economic prosperity acquire ever-greater relevance and significance.

Comments:
A thorough response, drawing on wide-ranging examples across the globe to bolster your case. The clear understanding that a government's primary responsibilities to its citizens undergirds the essay and assured control is demonstrated — writing is lucid and carries conviction.

7

2023 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ

PASSAGES

Passage 1. *Francis Hezel discusses how culture can thrive in a globalising world.*

1 Culture change is upon us, many fear, like a tsunami advancing rapidly to the shore threatening to engulf whole populations, erasing them and all memory of what they once held dear. The watchword, then, is cultural preservation: keeping a close lookout for whatever might imperil the culture, eradicating anything that threatens to suffocate those cultural forms we know as customs, employing the same measures we have learned to take to preserve our wildlife. Indeed, there is no indication that the storm will abate in this present era of globalisation. We can expect much more of the same in the years ahead. Under these conditions, it would appear that our cultures are doomed.

2 Yet, consider the ludicrous notion that Italy will look and smell and sound just like Germany after a given number of years of shared membership in the European Union. The widely shared fear, often mongered by uninformed experts, that globalisation will extract the exotic taste from all cultures so that people will be blended into the same bland batch of cultural dough is groundless.

3 On the contrary, cultures manage to survive for hundreds of years despite the many mutations they have undergone. A striking example of this is Japanese culture. What does life in urban Tokyo today, with men and women in Western business dress commuting to work by subway or bullet train, have in common with the days of the sworded samurai and graceful geishas? Not much, on the surface of it all. Yet they are all distinctively Japanese. Is it in the formal courtesy that Japanese pay to those with whom they deal? Is it related to the sparseness in Japanese décor, or focusing on a single detail and somehow finding all of life embodied in one leaf or one blossom? None of these really comes close to summing up what it means to be a Japanese, of course. Yet it does suggest that it is a combination of features that goes into the making of a culture: indefinable, intrinsic qualities that are passed down from one generation to the next—not through the DNA, but through the social environment with its hundreds of personal interactions.

4 Many perceive culture to be the sum total of the products of a people, and hence we may have been focusing too exclusively on preservation of customs and the external features of that culture in our efforts to ensure cultural survival. Yet, culture is not about exotic artefacts—feathered headdresses, shell belts, and paintings—found in a museum, relics of the past. It should be the pattern of life, the design for community living, that is found in a real people as they exist today.

5 This rhetoric has led to suggestions that perhaps our emphasis on cultural survival is misplaced. Instead of guarding the ramparts against breaches of culture, we should be encouraging adaptation as a means of survival. The key to cultural survival, then, is not purely conservatism—hanging on tightly to all that we have received in the past—but a genuine sense of dynamism and a readiness to adapt to a changing world. Therefore, some of what we have understood in the past as either-or dichotomies ought to be re-examined in the light of this new model of culture. Some changes are necessary, even inevitable. We should not be afraid to adopt and adapt.

6 Over the years, cultural uniqueness will inevitably burst out in many ways, even in countries that complain of being saturated with Westernisation. TV soap operas may be an American invention, but Latin American or Korean dramas are clearly stamped with their own unique style. McDonald's serves up burgers in many countries around the world, but the menu reflects the subtle difference in taste from one place to the next. In Micronesia, the nose flute has given way to the guitar and lately to the keyboard, but the music today still reflects a distinctive island sound. The cultural genius of a people will not be denied.

Passage 2. *Taryam Al Subaihi discusses the negative impact globalisation has on culture.*

1 Over the past decade, geneticists have proved that all people alive today are descendants of a relatively small number of individuals who walked out of Africa some 60,000 years ago and carried the human spirit and imagination to every corner of the habitable world. Our shared heritage implies that all cultures share essentially the same potential, drawing on similar reserves of raw genius. Whether they exercise this intellectual capacity to produce stunning works of technological innovation or to maintain an incredibly elaborate network of kin relationships (a primary concern, for example, of the Aborigines of Australia) is simply a matter of choice and orientation, adaptive benefits and cultural priorities. Each of the planet's cultures is a unique answer to the question of what it means to be human.

2 Unfortunately, globalisation has taken its toll on the world. It continues to blend cultures together at an extraordinary rate, integrating or erasing customs, values and traditions. In many parts of the world, this process has had a profoundly positive effect and eradicated some of the worst practices of racism, xenophobia and other injustices that have plagued the human race throughout history. But with it, globalisation has also ushered in an era filled with lost culture and identity.

3 This last point is particularly true in rapidly developing countries. The move towards becoming a "modern" country, by benchmarking their progress against other nations, has led to the formation of a rapidly changing culture. Consequently, the by-product of that shift is that many citizens struggle to hold on to the values passed on to them by their parents, families and community. They undertake this struggle, while sometimes contradictory foreign values are being adopted from the media, expatriate colleagues, friends and society as a whole.

4 For those of us who have spent time abroad, the process is that little bit more difficult. Living on the fence, understanding the logic and benefits of both sides, the struggle is ongoing to identify ways to combine inherited and adopted values and put them into one identity. So much so that many eventually end up lost or isolated. Familiar with both worlds yet belonging to neither.

5 This is not to say that cultures should be forced to remain static, that they cannot maintain their identity while changing some of their ways. Our goal should not be to freeze people in time. Instead, a balance must be struck between the old and the new—striving to keep an open mind to change and development, yet also ensuring that our culture remains uniquely ours.

8

2022 | Y6 | GP Prelim | Paper 2 | AQ **Eugene Tan Heok Pong | 23S03I**

Francis Hezel discusses how culture can thrive with globalisation whereas Taryam Al Subaihi comments on the challenges to culture in an age of globalisation.

How far do you agree with the opinions expressed in these two passages? Support your answer with examples drawn from your own experience and that of your society.

Hezel claims that culture refers to "indefinable, intrinsic qualities …… passed down from one generation to the next." [P3, L10]. Succinctly, she asserts that culture exists not as a tangible object, but as intangible assets exclusive to a community. I believe that such a viewpoint is highly relevant and applicable to Singapore. Singapore has long been regarded as a "melting pot" of various races and their respective cultures. A simple walk through any hawker centre may be highly shocking to a foreigner. Why so? Because there are no dishes with "Singapore" in its name, or screams "I am the keystone of Singapore's culture". Singapore's multiracial diversity has undeniably caused different cultures to blend together. Our cuisine is a key example of this phenomenon – take for instance, the hybridization of Western and Chinese cuisine with McDonald's chicken rice burger. Evidently, tangible assets do not form a critical part of our culture. Instead, it is the intangible aspects of being Singaporean that truly brings all of us together regardless of race, language, or religion that exemplifies our Singaporean culture. Take for instance, the notoriously Singaporean mindset of being afraid to lose – or being "kiasu". Historically, it grew out of a necessity for Singaporeans to be competitive to propel a young and struggling Singapore to the world stage for economic survival. Today, this very same trait has been passed down from generations to generations - manifesting even in our hyper competitive education system in which parents are afraid of their children falling behind and thus, "losing out". Singaporeans also frequently joke about how our "kiasu" attitude makes us queue at long queues, thereby showing that such innate and intrinsic qualities are ones that are uniquely Singaporeans and bring us together. Thus, the writer's assertion that culture exists beyond tangible items is highly relevant.

Subaihi claims that globalisation "eradicated ……racism, xenophobia" [P2]. Unfortunately, I believe that his observations are not reflected in Singaporean society. The small and open economy of Singapore is one of the largest beneficiaries of globalisation, with us relying on imports due to our scarce resources and depending on exports as our main key to economic growth. Another issue affecting us is the lack of low-skilled labourers, leading to our lax immigration policies to encourage inflow of foreign workers. However, this inflow of workers from China and Bangladesh, for example, did not do anything to foster greater intercultural understanding and appreciation. Instead, it created a huge wave of xenophobia and racism amongst Singaporeans. In the past few years alone, it is not uncommon to see Singaporeans making unpleasant remarks towards these migrant workers, including malicious ones like how Bangladeshi workers are all smelly and should return to their countries. Notably, such

sentiments are mostly shared by the older demographic in Singapore. This may be due to the fact that this demographic; comprising the Pioneer and Merdeka generations, were part of the founding generation that contributed to Singapore's transformation from a third to first world country. As such, they are highly nationalistic and proud of their country. As a result, seeing the large influx of migrant workers have caused many of them to develop the flawed idea that they are enjoying Singapore's present prosperity without sacrificing in the past for it – spurring discriminatory mindsets. Thus, the author's observation is not relevant in my society.

Comments:

Considered attempt at evaluation, though more could be done to develop the outcomes.

More examples for paragraph one would be helpful.

2023 | Y5 | GP Promo | Paper 2 | AQ

PASSAGES

Passage 1. *Phil Doust talks about the disadvantages of living in cities.*

1 I would love to love cities, I truly would. Apart from 10 glorious years in the deepest, darkest countryside in the middle of a forest, I have spent all my life in them. They are where the work is, where my friends are. Loving cities would make me happier and more at peace with myself. But it is hard. I watch the sun set over south London and wish I was in that woodland glade, listening to the deer bark in the distance. What is so awful about cities? How long have you got?

2 Let us start with the obvious: cities are dirty and smelly. London, my hometown, loses up to 9,000 inhabitants to air pollution every year. When it does not kill you, smog sucks the pleasure out of life. Only when I left the city in my 40s and moved to the Vosges, famous in France for the pure air and pine-scented forests, I was shocked to discover I could smell the wind, the grass, the trees. I even became a reasonable cook, and now I could properly taste what I was working with.

3 Second, there is nothing to look at. Cities are more urban deserts than urban jungles, devoid of anything that is remotely appealing to the eye. The country has lakes, mountains, trees, wildlife, stirring sunrises, and glorious sunsets. The city? Tarmac, buildings, billboards, and other people. Parks? They are just wannabe fields. Canals? They are just constipated rivers. And when night falls, those glaring but unimpressive urban illuminations – house lights, headlamps, and floodlights – mean you cannot even see the stars. There is a majesty to the heavens that can only be appreciated far from streetlights.

4 Then there are the people. There are just too many of them. In the city everyone is in your face, all the time, usually wanting something, from your money to your seat on the Tube[1]. Even one person can be too many. An empty street is unsettling in a way that a deserted lane never is. At any minute, a stranger could leap out and beg you for money – or worse, take something even more precious.

5 Getting around the city can be murder too. Every walk is an obstacle course, thanks to cars blocking the pavement, and cyclists who refuse to stop at junctions. Driving is slow and expensive, and parking is banned or unaffordable anywhere you actually want to do it. Public transport is expensive, unreliable, and rarely deposits you precisely where you want to be.

6 The city also makes you lazy and unhealthy. Since you have got buses and trains, you

[1] *British slang for the London Underground rail system.*

tell yourself you might as well use them, even when you could easily do the journey

on foot. Have you ever tried to get on a bus when the schoolkids are heading home? You will never see so many unhealthy-looking blobs, all hogging the seats for just three or four stops. And they will be stuffing their faces with crisps, chips, chocolate, and all manner of harmful, processed 'food'.

7 Finally – and this may be hard to believe – the sporting facilities are better in the countryside. My local running track was a forest-fringed plateau, with hundreds of kilometres of empty roads and shady paths. My swimming pool was a mountain lake – free to use, so long that a single length would take you almost an hour, and with water as clear as anything that ever came out of a tap. Imagine that, you poor, gym-subscription-paying, chlorine-stinking residents of the city. It is time to buck the trend and move out.

Passage 2. *Tom Campbell examines the benefits that cities offer.*

1 I would love to love cities, I truly would. Apart from 10 glorious years in the deepest, darkest countryside in the middle of a forest, I have spent all my life in them. They are where the work is, where my friends are. Loving cities would make me happier and more at peace with myself. But it is hard. I watch the sun set over south London and wish I was in that woodland glade, listening to the deer bark in the distance. What is so awful about cities? How long have you got?

2 Let us start with the obvious: cities are dirty and smelly. London, my hometown, loses up to 9,000 inhabitants to air pollution every year. When it does not kill you, smog sucks the pleasure out of life. Only when I left the city in my 40s and moved to the Vosges, famous in France for the pure air and pine-scented forests, I was shocked to discover I could smell the wind, the grass, the trees. I even became a reasonable cook, and now I could properly taste what I was working with.

3 Second, there is nothing to look at. Cities are more urban deserts than urban jungles, devoid of anything that is remotely appealing to the eye. The country has lakes, mountains, trees, wildlife, stirring sunrises, and glorious sunsets. The city? Tarmac, buildings, billboards, and other people. Parks? They are just wannabe fields. Canals? They are just constipated rivers. And when night falls, those glaring but unimpressive urban illuminations – house lights, headlamps, and floodlights – mean you cannot even see the stars. There is a majesty to the heavens that can only be appreciated far from streetlights.

4 Then there are the people. There are just too many of them. In the city everyone is in your face, all the time, usually wanting something, from your money to your seat on the Tube[2]. Even one person can be too many. An empty street is unsettling in a way that a deserted lane never is. At any minute, a stranger could leap out and beg you for money – or worse, take something even more precious.

[2] *British slang for the London Underground rail system.*

10

2023 | Y6 | GP Promo | Paper 2 | AQ **Alexander Mark Amaragantha | 24A01A**

How far do you agree that living in the city brings more disadvantages than benefits?

Support your answer with reference to:

- ***the ideas and opinions from at least one of the reading passages***
- ***examples drawn from your own experience and that of your society***

Firstly, I disagree with the statement as I believe that the author's statement in passage 2 that "cities… in them people get on together and overcome their hang-ups about ethnicity, faith, gender and sexuality" is applicable in my society. The author's arguments revolve around one having the opportunity to form connections with a diverse mix of other people regardless of their inherent differences. In Singapore, we are a multicultural city that promotes different races, languages or religions, uniting together in peaceful harmony. This is evidenced by how Singaporeans tend to frown upon and demand justice against instances of racial discrimination. For example, in 2016, a Prima Deli manager rejected a Malay applicant because of her inability to speak Chinese. This was quickly circulated on social media and a flurry of heartening support for the victim led to the eventual resignation of the manager. This shows us that Singaporeans have internalised the concept of racial harmony, going past the level of just forming connections with one another, to stand together against instances of marginalisation. This is made possible because of our country's historical background. From our conception, the government has implemented multiple safeguards to ensure racial harmony such as the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act in 1990. This, coupled with the integrative tone that the government continually emphasises with regards to multiculturalism, predisposes Singaporeans to form connections despite their differences. On another level, the small size of our island makes it pertinent for people to maintain harmonious relations as a small threat to social stability can have a huge impact on our social stability, Singaporeans are cognisant of this and make use of the city's dense population to form a diverse mix of connections. However, there are still xenophobic tendencies that exist amongst Singaporeans, particularly towards Migrant workers. In 2013, there was a large protest by Singaporeans against the Population White Paper's target of increasing the population to 6.9 million by incurring the inflow of migrant workers. Singaporeans, especially amongst the more conservative older generation, hold the belief that migrant workers dilute the Singaporean identity. If left unchecked, this negative stereotype may affect the attitudes of foreign talent choosing to remain in Singapore, which may have negative ramifications for our economy.

Secondly, I agree with the statement made by Phil Doust that "the city also makes you lazy and unhealthy" is highly applicable to my own society. The author's argument revolves around the city being not conducive for a healthy and active lifestyle. In Singapore, this is the case as the convenience and economic prosperity of our country often comes at the expense of an active lifestyle. For example, our public transport system is world class with its ability to connect the heartland neighbourhoods to the central business district in less than an hour and at an affordable cost. This is a double-edged sword as commuters would pivot towards public transport even when their offices are a short walk away. Even the government

acknowledges this problem, with its recent emphasis on Active SG, providing all Singaporeans with $150 worth of credits for sporting activities. The fact that the government has to spend such a large sum of our nation's budget to subsidise our active lifestyle highlights the sedentary nature that is common amongst Singaporean adults. This can be attributed to the over competitive nature of Singaporeans' workforce. This stems from our meritocratic society, where people are rewarded according to the results that they produce. Thus, in their hustle to produce the optimal results at work to edge out their peers for a promotion, Singaporeans tend to neglect their wellbeing. This comes in the form of working over the weekends instead of exercising or simply refusing to take the short walk home in favour of the marginal amount of time saved by taking public transport. Thus, this over competitive work culture in Singapore impedes Singaporeans from leading a healthy and active lifestyle. However, with a shift in government attitudes towards health in Singaporeans. Their many subsidising schemes and communal active events catered for all age groups, may shift the perception of active lifestyles in the long term. Thus, this would help Singapore to progress towards a healthier society even as Singaporeans continue to work and live in the city.

Thus, I believe that the city has both its advantages and disadvantages.

11

2023 | Y6 | GP Promo | Paper 2 | AQ **Wong Yu Wen | 24A01B**

How far do you agree that living in the city brings more disadvantages than benefits?

Support your answer with reference to:

- ***the ideas and opinions from at least one of the reading passages***
- ***examples drawn from your own experience and that of your society***

I disagree that living in a city brings more disadvantages than benefits as the development and innovation living in a city provides has helped shape our society into what it is today.

Campbell posits that "cities have prospered because in them people get on together and overcome their hang-ups about ethnicity, faith, gender and sexuality" (lines 5-7). I agree with this statement and believe that it is highly applicable to the Singapore context. It is our very national identity to be made up of a huge melting pot of cultures and races, having one of the most diverse ethnic pools in the world, and the cultivation of such a community has allowed for greater integration, acceptance and harmony that may have not been possible living in the isolated, population-sparse countryside. Especially given Singapore's small size, people of different traditions. Cultures and backgrounds are bound to bump into one another. At the Singapore Grand Prix, local influencer Sheena Phua came under fire for posting that two men wearing turbans were like "obstructions", but the Sikh community's response was incredibly gracious, taking her on an informal tour around their temples and educating her on their culture, which resulted in an amiable conclusion with Sheena thanking the SIkhs for their kindness. Indeed, in a multicultural city and society like Singapore, it is all the more integral for us to be able to put aside our differences in order to upkeep our social fabric and maintain peace. In such a case, the coincidental encounter between these two wildly different groups of people has ended up with both sides learning more about the other, with the transgressor in this case having managed to overcome at least part of her initial prejudices and ignorance about the Sikh community. By overcoming such a mental barrier, we would be able to draw the line at discrimination and know better about each other's boundaries and respect them. The community that we have cultivated in Singapore can thus provide us with these opportunities to get to know new people of different backgrounds and learn to be more accepting and open-minded of such opposing viewpoints and experiences from our own, by putting aside our differences.

Campbell agrees that the abundance of people in the city allows for the establishment of strong support structures, creating a sense of camaraderie and belonging. She states that "these extended networks also provide great support". I believe that this viewpoint is also applicable to the Singapore context. Being a bustling trade port even decades ago, Singapore as a city has always possessed an abundance of people, and being such a small city, it is often that we tend to find old friends everywhere we go, and familiar faces in every place we frequent. We have placed emphasis on the idea of "kampong spirit", or a sense of community where everybody helps each other out and where everyone knows everybody. Though this is a relatively old-fashioned view, it can still be felt today, where communal areas in population-dense government-built residences such as HDB flats can be found in great

prevalence. Void decks below flats serve as free spaces for children to play with friends, for elderly to meet up and participate in community-organised activities, or even for festive celebrations to be held, ushering in the Chinese New Year or celebrating the joyful union of a couple. On a larger scale, community centres help organise enrichment activities for all to participate in, and provide ready-to-use facilities for groups of friends or family who wish to relax and enjoy some simple games of sports. These common areas in which we spend so much time in can help us to inevitably cultivate new friendships with people we may meet on a daily basis—those with similar hobbies, neighbours, or just people we see routinely on our daily commute. The concentration of people in cities facilitates our interactions with others, and these support structures may come to benefit us when we need them the most, be it a helping hand from neighbours to borrow missing ingredients for dinner or kind strangers paying that extra ten cents at the food court for our meal. The community spirit is very much alive in Singapore and our sense of unity and togetherness is part of what makes our country so unique, harmonious and peaceful.

Thus, given all these ways living in cities has enriched our lives, I believe that living in a city ultimately brings more benefits than disadvantages.

Comments
There's evidence of evaluation—rather convincing and shows some good understanding of SG context. You could take note of more areas that could make for more convincing evaluation.

Critically assess the view that only two conditions are required for knowledge: justification and belief.

Epistemologists have long sought to construct a definition of knowledge in the form of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. While some propose the possibility that knowledge requires only justification and belief, a reasonable view in some fields, this requires a largely discredited and unipolar view about all knowledge in general, because truth is widely regarded as another necessary condition for justified belief to become knowledge. Ultimately, our need for belief and quest for justification in knowledge—a pursuit undertaken to mitigate the risk of epistemic error—implicitly reflects our need for knowledge to be true, making justification and belief jointly insufficient overall to constitute knowledge in the vast majority of our fields of inquiry.

Before we tackle the necessity of the truth criterion, it is necessary to first consider whether belief and justification respectively are necessary for knowledge. Ostensibly, belief seems to be a distinct concept for knowledge in everyday parlance—often, we might hear a confident athlete declare before a game that he does not "believe" he will win, but he "knows" he will win. In this example, it appears that belief is not necessary for knowledge: we can know something without believing it to be the case. However, epistemologists have generally managed to dispel the intuitive, commonsense appeal of this illustration—what the athlete means is not that he does not "believe" he will win at all, but that he does not just "believe" he will win. This linguistic expression of confidence and certitude therefore should not render belief separate from our conception of knowledge in epistemology. In fact, Moore has observed that it would be contradictory and bizarre to claim one does not believe something that one knows—for instance, we would find it strange for someone to say that "It is raining, but I do not believe it is raining." The absurdity of claims of the form "P, but I do not believe P" reflects that knowledge implies belief: when we make the knowledge claim "P", it implies strongly that I indeed believe "P" to be the case. Hence, it is clear that belief must be a condition for knowledge—we encounter Moore's paradox otherwise.

Similarly, justification is an important necessary condition for knowledge, even when it seemingly does not add to the utility of a belief. Detractors of the justification condition often claim that a belief without justification can be just as useful as a belief with justification—for instance, even though the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians were unable to offer a proof for the Pythagorean Theorem like the ancient Greeks did, they were equally able to use the theorem to construct right-angled triangles and build magnificent architectural feats. Hence, if the reason we value knowledge is that it is applicable in our lives, it seems that we would say that the Egyptians and the Mesopotamian peoples equally 'knew' the Pythagorean Theorem—in every meaningful sense, their belief (though unjustified), was just as useful as the ancient Greeks' justified belief. This argument, however, remains unpersuasive for most philosophers, because the presence of epistemic luck does not detract from our capacity to use unjustified beliefs in our lives. For instance, a gambler would not be able to use the

unjustified belief that the next lottery number will be 1234, a belief he obtained from guessing alone—even if the lottery number is 1234 this time, such belief obtained from guesswork will one day fail to win him a prize. In this matter, the utility of most beliefs in our lives are intricately connected to the strength of our epistemic justification for believing it—a rational person would hesitate to act on his unjustified belief about the lottery number, but he would be far more willing to act on his justified belief that he is likely to lose money from gambling (obtained from statistical analysis) and thus abstain from placing a bet. Thus, we cannot say that justification is not necessary for knowledge—the gambler does not know that "1234" will be the number that appears, because the belief's poor justification makes it prone to error and by extension less useful in his life.

At this stage, it is clear that justification and belief are both conditions for knowledge—an unjustified belief or a justified 'non-belief' cannot be knowledge. Some epistemologists go further to propound that these are the only conditions for knowledge—it need not be the case that knowledge is true. There is some limited merit to this view, particularly in some fields where the concept of truth seems to be elusive and inapplicable. For example, in aesthetics, it is unclear how we would judge the 'truth' of a belief that the Mona Lisa is beautiful—it would be strange to evaluate whether the physical artwork of the Mona Lisa corresponds to the abstract, intangible ideal of 'beauty', since we would not have any epistemic access to the abstract realm of these ideals as entities living in space-time. Additionally, we seem to hold the intuitive conviction that beliefs about beauty are subjective and do not require correspondence to the ideal of 'beauty' as coherence with others' aesthetic judgements—beauty is in the eye of the beholder, after all.

As such, it is indeed the case that aesthetic judgements only need to constitute justified beliefs to become knowledge—even without correspondence to reality or coherence with other judgements, we seem to be able to know objects to be beautiful. Justified belief seems to be jointly sufficient to constitute knowledge in this case.

However, aesthetics seems to be the exception to the rule rather than the rule itself—the unique nature of aesthetic knowledge that precludes truth is not found in most other kinds of knowledge we seek. It is easy to verify whether our beliefs about the natural world correspond to physical reality—for example, we can check whether the earth is a globe or a flat plane by looking at satellite images or performing calculations based on the earth's curvature. In fact, we would consider it intuitively necessary for our beliefs to be true before we consider them to be knowledge. Although humans in the 13th century believed the earth to be flat, a belief justifiably obtained through the usually reliable senses that can typically identify the shapes of objects, we would hesitate to say that they 'know' the earth to be flat—they merely believed it to be so. A similar requirement of truth seems to exist in other fields too—in history, we would be uncomfortable with the statement that "Holocaust deniers know the Holocaust did not happen", because the Holocaust did in fact happen—it corresponds to the experience of Jews in the past and coheres with our records from the 1940s. Hence, the fact that we reject justified but false beliefs as knowledge in a vast range of fields suggests that truth is an unimportant condition for knowledge as well.

In fact, our need for justification and belief seems to imply our requirement that knowledge must be true. The reason the aforementioned Moore Paradox arises in the first place is because our beliefs pertain to truths in the world—when we believe "P" we also believe that "P is true, making it illogical to not believe what one claims to be true." If our beliefs are inherently connected to truth, it stands to reason that our conception of knowledge should account for this condition of truth. Similarly, our need for justification is also tied to our quest for truth in knowledge—we want to arrive at our beliefs in the right kind of way so that we minimise the possibility of epistemic error, i.e. the possibility that our beliefs are false. Hence, justification is an attempt to secure the truth of our beliefs, making it natural for truth to be a condition for knowledge as well given that it is the end goal of what we seek in knowledge.

Ultimately, in the vast majority of instances, truth is an important part of knowledge, because it is what enables us to use knowledge. We seek knowledge because it can be applied in our daily lives—we can use our knowledge of V = IR in physics to build circuits and power homes, and we can use our knowledge of blood types to give blood transfusions safely. However, we can only use such pieces of knowledge insofar as they reflect what really is the case—if voltage were not related to current and resistance in real life, and if there were 1000 blood types instead of 4 main ones we use today (A, B, AB, O), then these pieces of 'knowledge' would cease to be applicable in physics and medicine, becoming mere beliefs rather than knowledge in essence. As such, truth is integral to knowledge, because it gives knowledge the pragmatic value that distinguishes it from beliefs, hunches and suppositions.

Overall, while justification and belief are certainly necessary conditions for knowledge, it would be hasty to conclude they are the only conditions for knowledge. With the unique exception of fields like aesthetics where truth is not applicable, we require the vast majority of our knowledge to be true, because only justified true beliefs can be used in our daily lives.

Comments

A very good effort! The essay answers the question and provides developed arguments with examples. It could have taken more seriously the idea that truth might not be obtainable for the sciences especially or empiricism in general, as well as the seemingly close connection between the justification and truth theories.

2023 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 2 Keith Chan Soong-Lin | 23S06Q

'Since we can only be sure of academic knowledge, common sense knowledge is useless.' Discuss.

Here in Singapore, we made it explicit from the early stages of education the rift between the arts and STEM—STEM is cold, hard calculation, and art is subjective, personal and interpretation-heavy. Naturally, one might expect mathematics, the queen of the sciences, to be antithetical to art. Indeed, it sometimes seems that the objectivity of mathematics, with its deductive, unassailable logical proofs, lies in stark contrast to the subjectivity of aesthetic inquiry. Yet, mathematicians often allude to a kind of elusive beauty or artistry common in mathematics. I believe that such an appeal was made possible by the deep connection shared by both mathematics and aesthetics—both are socially-affirmed products of personal human thought, both relate to the physical world as reflections of what the human mind perceives in it, and both appeal to some innate sense within us. Viewed from this lens, mathematics seems less like an objective fact and more like an exploration of ideas and their consequences; the only difference, then, might be the degree to which we are inclined to agree with others in either field.

How is mathematics objective where aesthetics is not? Well, in aesthetics, disagreement is hardly a problem to be solved—I can disagree with someone about whether vanilla strawberry ice cream tastes better, but at the end of the day, we would just agree to disagree. There is no contradiction there. On the other hand, if I disagree with someone regarding the existence of infinitely many prime numbers, I simply have to walk him through my proof. Either my proof is right, and he is wrong, or my proof is wrong, and he is right. There is no room for subjectivity there. This is because mathematical proofs are deductively proven, or aesthetics appeals to intuition. If we take logic to be objective, then mathematics is objective because it is all logic. Intuition, on the other hand, is an inaccessible part of our inner world. We cannot explain or justify holding one aesthetic opinion over another, other than by appealing to our innate aesthetic sense. Hence, mathematics is objective while aesthetics is subjective.

However, when we look at the axiom-theorem structure of mathematics, or more specifically, at the axioms of mathematics, there is less objectivity than first meets the eye. We find that multiple contradictory mathematical systems can simultaneously exist as the result of a different set of axioms: if we insert that space strict we arrive at Euclidean and analytic geometry. If we allow for space to be curvy then we have the system of Riemannian geometry. Neither system is more "objectively" correct than the other, they are just different sets of ideas borne out of different bases, just like how neither interpretation of a piece of art would be more "objectively" correct than others.

Furthermore, the 'correctness' of, or at least value of both mathematical & aesthetic systems seems to be somewhat socially defined. For example, it might be possible for me to start

studying "90° geometry" in which only lines that cross at 90° angles are considered. Whilst I could form some mathematical system around this, perhaps even a deeply personally valuable one, for it to be accepted into the canon of mathematical literature, I would need to convince others to partake in it. This tension between the private and the social is even more pronounced than in aesthetics. What is considered art has changed over time based on socially defined conventions—the artwork "Fountain" by Duchamp was just a urinal placed in an art museum, but because of the discourse that it generated, it became somewhat widely accepted as art. Both mathematics and aesthetic interpretations are inventions of the human mind that are tested against the acceptance of a social community.

One repudiation some may have against mathematics being an invention of the mind—and hence against the idea that this makes mathematics similar to art—may be that mathematics does correspond to reality, as evidenced by its unreasonable effectiveness. They claim that the successes of mathematics in making scientific predictions, and even predicting undiscovered scientific facts (such as the mathematical 'discovery' of neutrinos decades before they were actually experimentally confirmed) surface evidence for its reality, which aesthetics does not hold a claim to. However, I believe that such an unreasonable effectiveness is merely a symptom of the perceptual qualities of the human mind, and that there is indeed such an analogue in aesthetics.

Mathematics, while being invented, is invented out of human thoughts, which are influenced by the real world. We see how putting one rock and one rock together leads to having two rocks, and thus find a way to represent this through the symbols of "+", "1" and "2". Through abstraction, we invent ideas to help us represent the world as we see it. It is no wonder then that mathematics represents what we can see in such a useful manner. In science, we formulate our solutions to problems in mathematical language and choose problems that can be answered in mathematical language. For example, we do not scientifically inquire into the existence of ghosts, which eludes mathematical representation. Mathematics is not the language of the universe—it is merely the language of our perceptions of the universe, and we are biased in believing that all we can see is all there is to know.

Similarly, aesthetics is a language that we speak to understand the universe. Consider the prevalence of representation in art, or the motives of Expressionism, which is ultimately an artist's attempt to translate his internal world into art. Even in more socially-based definitions of art, that include Duchamp's "Fountain" for instance, aesthetics is an invention of the human mind that reacts to what it perceives as social reality by questioning it. So, in a way, art too is "unreasonably effective" at describing our inner and outer worlds—think about how the coldness of Shostakovich 's 11th Symphony allows us to experience the terror of the storming of the winter palace, and about how we well written tragedy can speak to the depths of our soul and elicit tears in our consideration of the human condition, about how we can almost see the reality and emotion in a well-drawn photorealistic portrait.

Finally, where earlier I considered logic versus intuition as a central difference between mathematics and aesthetics, the point might also be made that both fields make appeals to some kind of "sense". In aesthetics, the appeal to sense is more explicit: "Can you not see

how beautiful this artwork is?" In mathematics, however, we see a similar appeal to number sense: "Of course 1 + 1 = 2. It just is!".

The reason such an appeal is made is once again due to the representational intent behind mathematical invention: We live in a discrete world where in most cases it is useful to count things in natural numbers. One might imagine mathematics be looking very different if it were made by a hyper-intelligent jellyfish at the bottom of the ocean - perhaps then, a continuity in mathematics similar to our version of calculus might be second nature to its descriptions of the continuous ocean.

One might even go further to contend that deduction, the basis of mathematical knowledge construction, is an invention of the human mind, albeit a very convincing one. After all, a statement like "If p, then q. p, therefore q.", which seems to follow from logical necessity, cannot be further justified - we take it as ridiculous to even ask such a question as to whether it is correct. It could be unjustifiable because it is correct, but it could equally well be unjustifiable because it is a foundational belief - much like aesthetic taste judgments are unjustifiable judgments of taste.

However, one would be painting a pretty misleading picture of mathematics to draw the analogy out this far. Ultimately, mathematical and logical truths are objective because we cannot imagine thinking without, or outside of them. Regardless of if this is merely symptom of biological need slash evolution, or some reflection of a deep truth in logic that eludes further expression, to be human is to agree upon these basic logical truths—we have neither example of or even the possibility of finding people with alternative modes of deductive logic. In contrast, however, we find plenty of examples of alternative conceptions of beauty and taste in aesthetics. Somehow, objectivity in aesthetics is less essential in our being than mathematics is.

Ultimately, mathematical and aesthetic inquiries share similarities because they are both human projects based somewhat in representation, whether that be a representation of the physical world, internal world, or social world. It is interesting then, that when we mathematically reason, we are so adamant about objectivity—in fact, we cannot imagine thinking differently - And yet, when we aesthetically reason, we are so willing to let differences slide as a matter of opinion. Perhaps it is because mathematics is more outward focused - that we see consistency across physical reality, and seek to represent that reality with the consistent, paternalistic logic so important to surviving as a human. And aesthetics is more inward-focused, where we can accept - because we have no other access to another's internal world—that there are differences between individuals. Anyway then, the difference in the way we choose to think mathematically and aesthetically hints at a fundamental tension in human existing between coherence and richness of experience. Our seeking to unify the aesthetic world socially by forming institutions to agree on it, and our appeal to his sense of aesthetic beauty mathematics is then a reflection of our desire to overcome this tension in the human condition.

Comments

Very interesting discussion on the similarities and differences between the two fields/inquiries. The points raised are fully relevant to the discussion and sufficiently support with relevant

examples, although a couple of points could be better developed and more clearly expressed. This piece demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge in both fields. Well done!

Critically assess the view that the possibility of manipulating historical facts should lead us to conclude that there is no truth in history.

Given the anthropocentric nature of the construction process of historical knowledge, i.e. being reliant on human agents to record, interpret, and re-interpret historical sources to construct historical narratives, many sceptics have questioned the very existence of historical truth based on the seeming easiness in manipulating historical facts by the various historical agents. Their scepticism rests on the idea that truth is universal, objective, and unchanging. While such a conception of truth may be intuitive, it may not be appropriate to apply to the field of history given its nature. I would argue that firstly, a sufficient degree of objective truth can be arrived at with the various mitigations of subjectivity in the historical method; secondly, truth in history may be conceived as subjective truth given the nature of the field, hence the possibility of manipulating historical facts should not lead us to conclude that there is no truth in history.

To begin with, it must be acknowledged that the possibility of manipulating historical facts is a real concern that undermines the discovery of objective truth in history. Given that history is about the past, historians need to rely on past records of historical events written by different historical agents. Manipulation of historical facts can be seen in three ways: omission, distortion, and bias. Omission occurs when the historical agent deliberately chooses not to record a particular historical event or some important details of it, resulting in a loss of historical evidence and perspectives. The most famous example would be Louis XVI's omission of his thoughts on the fall of Bastille in his diary, which directly resulted in the eventual historical narrative of the French Revolution being lacking royal perspectives, compromising its objectivity and accuracy. Distortion refers to the purposeful alteration of historical records by the historical agent for a particular agenda, such as that by the USSR government on the exact number of deaths during the Great Famine; this resulted in inaccurate and subjective narratives. Bias in the construction of history often manifests itself in the form of words and language, with different words possessing vastly different connotations that oftentimes are used subconsciously or consciously by historical agents. The most prominent example may be the phrasing of the Muslim jihadists as "freedom-fighters" by historians that support such a movement, but as "terrorists" by most historians in the West that disapprove of their actions, thereby introducing greater subjectivity in constructing historical narratives. Due to these issues caused by the possibility of manipulating historical facts which results in a corresponding lack of objectivity, many sceptics have challenged the very existence of truth in history.

However, such a challenge is unwarranted given that various safeguards in the historical method can effectively mitigate subjectivity and inaccuracies and allow us to arrive at sufficiently objective historical truths. The first safeguard is the use of cross-referencing as a fundamental and indispensable part of the historical method. Cross-referencing refers to a

process of corroborating existing historical sources with another, to discover and account for similarities and differences between different sources, in order to arrive at an acceptable compromise that takes into account most, if not all sources. This way, omitted facts in one source may be clearly and unequivocally shown by many other sources; distortions by one agent may be proven false by an overwhelming number of other agents; and the issue with bias by one may be effectively removed by the inter-subjectivity of others (for example, if all other historical agents call the jihadists "terrorists" and only two or three call them freedom-fighters, it is more likely that they are seen by people as terrorists), enabling the discovery of objective historical facts. The second safeguard would be how the concept of coherence is applied to historical knowledge construction. Historical records are tested and corroborated with the vast web of established historical facts, and any new records that seem to contradict the established facts will be re-examined and if no corroborating evidence is found, will be disregarded as false beliefs. This ensures the validity of the eventual historical knowledge admitted into the web of beliefs, thereby mitigating the subjectivity introduced by the possible manipulation of facts. The third safeguard is the high level of professionalism that historians possess, in their endeavour to discover objective historical facts by removing all possible biases and rigorously cross-reference as many historical sources as possible to mitigate the possibility of manipulation. This often results in the general acceptance of new historical narratives by historians taking years, sometimes decades, since all the opposing sources need to be rigorously examined before a conclusion can be made. The endeavour by Chinese historians to find out the true looks of the Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang took them more than 30 years before a conclusion was reached. These various safeguards in the construction of historical knowledge can effectively mitigate the subjectivity introduced through possible manipulation of facts, resulting in a sufficient degree of objectivity in the eventual historical narratives or truths.

Ultimately, however, even when the manipulation of historical facts is so prominent in all existing historical sources such that objectivity is highly elusive, truths can still be found in the form of subjective truths. As the only inquiry that deals with the past, the pragmatic utility of history makes the complete disregard for the possibility of existence of truths in history undesirable. History is often used for people in the present to learn from past mistakes (such as ensuring the Holocaust never happens again), and to form a national identity that is essential for social stability and cohesion, as well as to advise us to carry out the right actions in the future. Hence, despite the subjectivity introduced by the possibility of the manipulation of facts, truths can still be discovered in history, albeit with a high degree of subjectivity. Yet, while there are tremendous merits to subjective truths in the field of history, they may seem unintuitive at first. In many cases, historical events were recorded exclusively by those commissioned by the people in power, such as the Chinese Imperial court or the British monarchy, to bolster their political legitimacy or legacy, thereby resulting in the construction of historical narratives of these events to be from very limited perspectives. With the addition and re-emergence of new historical records from commoners—often the marginalised and disenfranchised – historical records may contain contradictory and conflicting narratives that make objective truth impossible. However, these subjective accounts often shed light on the lives of different communities besides those in power and contribute greatly to the preservation of different voices in history, especially that of the minority. Furthermore, given that truths in history is often determined by coherence with the current established web of

beliefs that may be entirely false, the emergence or discovery of new contradicting subjective beliefs compels the historians to re-examine past evidence and may eventually result in more accurate historical narratives or truths, thereby contributing to epistemic progress. Therefore, while historical accounts can be individually subjective, taking into account the recovery of voices of the past can make historical knowledge construction more justified.

Apart from that, there are issues with the sceptic's view (that there is no truth at all in history) that render such a belief ludicrous. Firstly, the possibility of manipulation exists in almost all inquiries. Even in science, which is often said to be a very objective discipline, scientists may sometimes choose to manipulate scientific data to fit their hypothesis, as they are plagued by confirmation bias. It would seem extremely radical to conclude that there is no truth in science from such a possibility. Secondly, by setting such a high standard of truth in history would necessarily mean that inquiries that are even less objective than history are completely devoid of truths as well. Such a belief may have direct consequences in ethics as we may fall prey to moral subjectivism, meaning that rightness and wrongness are completely relative to each individual, rendering society into chaos and dysfunction. Thirdly, the very existence of "historical facts" admitted by the sceptics in their challenge points towards the existence of historical truths, since these must exist before they can be manipulated. This means that, at the very least, there is a possibility that historians can arrive at historical truths, hence making the conclusion of "no truth in history" unwarranted.

In conclusion, the possibility of manipulating historical facts should not lead us to conclude that there is no truth in history as a sufficient degree of objectivity can be arrived at with the various safeguards in the historical method. Ultimately, even if such objectivity cannot be achieved, truths still exist in history, albeit subjective, that can contribute to epistemic progress and the recovering of minority voices.

Comments

Very good discussion on the possibility of manipulation of historical facts, supported by a sufficient number of relevant examples. Approach taken is systematic and the argument is logical. Engagement with the idea of truth and how truths can still be attained in history is relevant, although there is some sliding between the attempt at achieving truth and the actual truths that historians strive to uncover. Good job, overall!

2023 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 1 | Question 4 **Raphael Niu Zi Yuan | 23A01A**

Critically assess the view that the possibility of manipulating historical facts should lead us to conclude that there is no truth in history.

We live in what many scholars call the 'post-truth' era, where scepticism of the possibility of truth abounds in many fields. A similar criticism has emerged of historical inquiry, with some arguing that the possibility of manipulating historical facts—both intentionally and unintentionally—renders historical truth elusive and unachievable. While the possibility for the historian to introduce bias into historical accounts does perhaps eliminate the possibility of historical accounts perfectly 'corresponding' to the events of the past, it would be hasty to dismiss the possibility of truth in history altogether: coherentist truth can still exist in history, as the historical method allows for an intersubjective understanding of the past. Ultimately, this coherent truth is more than sufficient for history—it is not by perfectly representing the past but by offering a narrative of history within the bounds of facts that we manage to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Sceptics often claim that truth is dead in history, because historians often manipulate facts to suit their agendas in historical accounts. Of course, this does unfortunately happen in history: political constraints often induce historians to omit details from their records or fabricate facts altogether. In the USSR, mention of the Holodomor was wiped from the historical record for over half a century, with historians citing fabricated statistics about the availability of grain and the death toll in Ukraine during the early 1930s. Similarly, in China, details of the Tiananmen Square Massacre remain excluded from official records today—the CCP's account of the events of 4 June 1989 omits any mention of the use of tanks to disperse the crowd of student protestors in Beijing. This has justifiably led to critics questioning the possibility of attaining historical truth altogether—if historians are given the licence to fabricate facts, it seems that historical accounts will not correspond to the events of the past.

Of course, these cases of outright fabrication are few and far between. However, it remains true that historians can often unintentionally yet inevitably manipulate historical facts in a number of ways to suit their biases and agendas, threatening the possibility of objective truth in history. First, historians will have to select the historical facts to include in their accounts, introducing subjectivity that distorts the 'truth' of what happened. This can occur when they make subjective decisions about which facts are 'relevant' to their account—as Carr notes, just as a fisherman will select different fishing spots to catch different types of fish, a historian will select different historical facts to suit the account they wish to tell. For instance, a revisionist historian of the Cold War might—for the sake of uncovering new perspectives of the origins of the Cold War—select more sources that reflect the USA was to blame, omitting sources that reflect Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe. As such, historical accounts seem to inevitably bear the imprint of their historians' agendas, leading to subjectivity that deviates from 'what really happened'. Similarly, historians' accounts are affected by subconscious biases that are difficult to mitigate—for instance, accounts of WWII written by Western historians often focus more heavily on Nazi atrocities as opposed

to war rape by Allied soldiers, as they were brought up from young to think that the Allies were liberating Europe from the fascist Nazi empire. Such biases—introduced by historians without their conscious knowledge—limit our possibility of attaining the truth of events of the past, as our accounts will inevitably deviate from this 'truth'.

Even without the problem of selection, language constrains the possibility of historians accessing and conveying correspondent truth, as it inevitably manipulates our understanding of historical facts. It is impossible to describe a historical event in value-free terms, as our language is coded with connotations and associations that affect the interpretation of these events. For example, Russian accounts of the war in Ukraine in 2022 describe it as a "Russian special military operation", while Ukrainian accounts call it an "invasion". With the former phrase conveying a sense of neutral impartiality, while the latter is imbued with a sense of injustice, the historian's inevitable choice between these phrases will present the war in a different light, obfuscating the true nature of the war. With language serving as a coloured lens that distorts our understanding of the past, truth in history seems to be elusive.

Such a pessimistic view, however, seems to fixate merely on one version of truth—truth as correspondence with reality. This conception of truth might be an unrealistic ideal for history, given the nature of the field of inquiry. While we can easily check if scientific facts like "water boils at 100°C" correspond to physical reality by conducting an experiment, such a possibility for verification does not exist for history—the inexorable linear march of time means that we can never return to the past to verify whether our accounts correspond perfectly to the events of the age. Insofar as we can only learn about the past through sources and artefacts, we need a version of historical truth that accounts for this means of constructing knowledge, rather than unproductively holding historical knowledge to a high bar of correspondent truth that we can never ascertain.

Therefore, a more appropriate understanding of truth in history is coherentist in nature—we check if historical accounts are consistent and cohesive with each other, in order to arrive at an intersubjective understanding of what happened in the past. This is highly possible in history, since this goal is integrated into the historical method. Historians piece together their accounts by referring to numerous sources, checking if they corroborate, and including what the sources agree on in their accounts. This cross-referencing occurs not only on the level of the individual account but also within the historical field as a whole—the different interpretations of historians are compared with one another before other scholars refine and synthesise an account of the past based on the points of intersubjective agreement between these historians' accounts. This process of revision and synthesis is evident in the historiography of the Cold War—while initial accounts of how it began pinned blame variously on the USA or the USSR, scholars by the 1990s had begun to recognise the roles that both countries played in the outbreak of tensions, converging on a similar account of the Cold War as sparked by ideologically-fuelled suspicions. This shows us how history can achieve intersubjective consensus over time, making coherentist truth possible even when individual accounts by historians might unwittingly manipulate some facts.

Additionally, historians are able to identify and discard accounts of the past that heavily manipulate or even fabricate facts of the past. The fact that we know the Holodomor and Tiananmen Square Massacre were omitted by the official Soviet and Chinese records of history shows us that these intentional manipulations can be discredited in a coherentist

conception of truth—by checking the accounts of these historians against that of other sources (e.g. Western accounts of the Holodomor and Tiananmen) and questioning their possibly hidden motivations (e.g. their writing under Soviet and CCP censorship), we can spot accounts that do not cohere with our intersubjective consensus on what happened in the past and discard these manipulated historical accounts from our historical knowledge. As such, manipulations of historical facts do not pose a fatal challenge to the possibility of coherentist historical truth—the historical method enables us to construct an intersubjective account of history independent of these fabrications.

Overall, attaining coherentist truth is more than sufficient for the historical endeavour, because an intersubjective consensus on the events of the past is enough to allow us to learn from them. We seek correspondence to reality in other fields because it is only with correspondent truth that knowledge in the field becomes useful—if our knowledge that haemoglobin carries oxygen in our blood does not correspond to reality, then medicine would not be able to achieve its aim of treating diseases like anaemia, since the field would be operating on completely mistaken assumptions of how oxygen transport works in the real human body. However, we do not need to have an account that perfectly corresponds to the past to learn from it. Even if our accounts of Hitler's rise omit some of the exact reasons why he came to power, our intersubjective consensus that the punishing reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles led to the popularity of extremist ideology is already instructive for future generations—that is sufficient for the Allied powers to support the reconstruction of Western Germany after WWII. Thus, insofar as our historical accounts cohere with each other, history will have succeeded in its aim of helping us understand our past mistakes and learn from them. In fact, coherence is more important than correspondence in this regard—to learn from history, it is more important to have a cogent set of historical accounts that illuminates a lesson for future generations, as opposed to a perfectly comprehensive and objective chronicle of what 'really' happened that does not form a coherent narrative. Coherentist truth in history is sufficient for its purposes, unlike in other fields.

Overall, while it is true that the inevitable manipulation of historical facts renders correspondent truth elusive in the field, sceptics of truth in history are ultimately barking up the wrong tree—we neither need nor strive for correspondent truth in history, since it is neither possible given the nature of the field nor productive given the aims of the inquiry. Ultimately, the historical method sufficiently mitigates the biases and manipulations of facts, enabling us to access coherentist truth in history.

Comments

An excellent piece that addresses the possibility of manipulation and, more importantly, why and how truth can still be found in the field. Good use of examples, with clear and concise writing. Comprehensive understanding of the nature of construction of knowledge in history is shown. Well done!

16

2023 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 1

PASSAGE

Art, with its captivating allure, has long been romanticised as a wellspring of profound knowledge and enlightenment. However, upon closer scrutiny, we find logical flaws and fallacies that underpin the purported contribution of art to knowledge.

Some believe that art experts can provide us with the necessary critical analysis we need to construct objective knowledge about art and from art, that is, whether something is a work of art, and non-aesthetic judgements. Through years of formal education and practical experience in studying and analysing artworks, these experts can evaluate the quality of art and tell you which art is better or worse, and why, be it through an examination of technical skill, emotional impact, conceptual depth, or cultural significance. They also can place artworks within their historical, cultural, and social contexts, as well as compare artworks across time periods, styles, and regions. Knowledge gained from engaging with art extends beyond the concept of good or bad. The expert's contextual understanding can help us interpret the intention of the artists and the impact of their work on society, and his comparative analysis can give us knowledge of the evolution of artistic expression and aesthetics. But the opinions of art experts are not infallible—their judgements are influenced by personal biases, cultural backgrounds, and prevailing trends. Placing undue faith in the authority of art experts stifles individual interpretation, limits artistic discourse, and overlooks the inherent subjectivity that defines aesthetic judgment. Requiring art experts to give us knowledge also makes art elitist and inaccessible to the common man, which is counterintuitive. How can we say that the average Joe does not know what art is?

Others believe that art's ability to elicit intense feelings and provoke introspection can equip individuals with deep insights into life's complexities, and the emotional responses evoked by art equate to a heightened understanding of the human condition. Surely this is knowledge. Besides, we can gain historical insight and cultural knowledge even without expert training. By simply looking at stained glass windows in churches can we find out about biblical stories of old, while traditional masks, sculptures and textiles from indigenous cultures can offer a window into their spiritual practices and symbolism. However, this argument commits the fallacy of mistaking emotional engagement for genuine knowledge. Emotions are subjective and fleeting, rendering them an unreliable basis for acquiring objective knowledge. Relying solely on emotional responses as a measure of artistic value distorts the purpose of art and disregards the need for critical analysis and empirical evidence. Furthermore, what if artwork was just propaganda? The portrayal of Richard III as a hunchback who orchestrated the murder of his young nephews in a Shakespearean play is a

classic example of how the public were fooled into believing that the previous Plantagenet monarch was a ruthless and evil tyrant who was defeated at the Battle of Bosworth which then established the Tudor dynasty. Without proper training, we would not know that this piece of dramatic literature was untrue but was actually used to distort the historical narrative and tarnish the reputation of the Tudor's political rival. The fact that Shakespeare's play provoked outrage and condemnation from its audience which reinforced the negative perception of the historical figure tells you that we cannot trust ourselves to know anything from art.

Hence, while art undoubtedly has value in evoking emotions and provoking thought, it falls short of providing genuine knowledge in the objective sense. Art is a complex and multifaceted form of human expression and is ultimately inherently subjective in nature.

Adapted from "The Illusory Power of Art: Fallacious Claims Regarding Aesthetic Judgment"

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of aesthetic knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

The author concludes that while art undoubtedly has value in evoking emotions and provoking thought, it falls short of providing genuine knowledge in the objective sense. He arrives at this conclusion through analysing two ways that we can claim to construct aesthetic knowledge (art experts and emotion/introspection), before showing how each of these methods are fundamentally subjective. While I largely find his argument to be strong, I disagree with his conclusion because genuine knowledge from the aesthetics need not be fully objective.

In the first part of his argument, the author asserts that having art experts provide us with aesthetic knowledge is not ideal, since it overlooks an inherent subjectivity present in aesthetics. This section of the argument is true. In the first place, our aesthetic judgements are fuelled not by concrete rationality, but a form of emotion or feeling that we get as a response to something beautiful. That is why we are able to claim (and know) that something is beautiful, even when we lack the cognitive ability to describe or rationalise why we feel this way. Given this, there can be no second-hand account to beauty, which means that no matter what qualities of an artwork art experts praise, or what sociohistorical context they place it within, it cannot overrule the individual feeling and emotion that we experience; this makes them a poor source of aesthetic knowledge. Moreover, the author correctly points out that the judgements of these art experts are not even objective in the first place, since they have their own biases. Furthermore, these experts also use similar faculties of emotion to assess an artwork, which does not make them an objective source of knowledge.

How, then, can art experts aid our understanding of art and the creation of aesthetic knowledge? For one, the ability of art experts to point out certain qualities of artworks and being able to situate a work within its wider sociohistorical context cannot be an independent source of knowledge about art, but it can draw our attention to these features so that when we assess the work again, we focus on those aspects and can better appreciate it. Moreover, art experts are useful insofar as they provide us with samples of art that can serve as standards with which to view art. This is important since beauty is largely determined by comparison: a 10-year-old might find Charlie and the Chocolate Factory beautiful because he is comparing it to Geronimo Stilton, while a fan of Austen and Dostoevsky will unlikely find beauty there. Art experts provide us access to more samples of art – we can personally assess these works and subsequently use these judgements to refine our own faculties of perceiving beauty. Hence, while art experts cannot provide objective knowledge about aesthetics, they are nonetheless useful and important in helping us construct personal subjective knowledge.

Second, the author argues that emotions (that we feel when we observe a work of art) are an unreliable source of aesthetic knowledge. However, he seems to contradict himself on some level when he claims that that way to achieve a measure of artistic value is through using

critical analysis and empirical evidence — if this was the case, then surely art experts would be the best able to assess the value of art (for they have spending the most time learning how to do this well). However, if the author is arguing for individuals performing such analyses on their own, then they are likely to have a poor understanding of the subject matter, and likely cannot reach the logical, evidence-based conclusions about art. This might not be the case for the examples of stained-glass windows in churches that he gives, but for more complex works such as Schoenberg's atonal music, it becomes difficult (if not impossible) for the layperson to logically explain why something is beautiful.

Nonetheless, while I agree with the author that emotions are subjective and fleeting, I disagree with the claim that it leads to it being an unreliable basis for acquiring objective knowledge. Even though our emotions are subjective, they can form the basis or the starting point for us to acquire objective knowledge. In the same way that we feel disgust when we hear of murder, which could lead us to rationally consider why we feel this way, a work of art can also serve the same function to create and partially (never fully since it is subjective) support objective knowledge. This is especially true of art that features aspects that we will never experience in our world—works such as Titus Andronicus reveal the horrors of evil, and support the (objective) claim that murder is bad, even if it is for revenge.

Given this, the biggest problem I have with the author's argument is that he seems to only credit objective knowledge as genuine, discrediting subjective knowledge. I would believe this link to be flawed, particularly so in the case of aesthetics. This is because when we consider the purpose of aesthetic inquiry, it is rarely for societal progress (in the same way that the sciences purport to do) or to discover universal laws about the world (e.g., moral laws in ethics). Instead, the whole function of aesthetic inquiry is a personal one, where we individually try and find answers as to what our ideal state is or what perfection is (i.e., true beauty). With this individual conception of beauty, it then becomes something which we yearn for and strive towards—there is no need to try and compare this vision with others, or standardise it (such a task would be futile). Therefore, genuine knowledge in the aesthetics need not be completely objective; subjective knowledge can be just as genuine.

Even if we accept that we need objective knowledge in aesthetics, the author only considers two ways of gaining knowledge from aesthetics, ignoring possible alternatives such as gaining knowledge from intersubjective consensus. If a diverse range of people are all able to arrive at the same conclusion that a work of art is beautiful, then this is likely to prove that we have arrived at objective knowledge: the personal feelings and biases do not play a significant role or change the outcome. Because the author fails to consider these alternatives, I am even less compelled to accept his conclusion.

Comments

An excellent piece that thoroughly examines the truth/falsity of the author's main premises and provides apt examples to support the points made. Reasoning is clear, concise, and fully focussed on the main tenets of the author's argument and its weaknesses. The nature of aesthetic knowledge is also explored in a relevant manner. Well done!

.

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of aesthetic knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

The author's main conclusion is that despite the capacity of art to evoke emotions and provoke thought, art cannot give us genuine knowledge. He first considers the two possible avenues for art to contribute to knowledge, namely via the interpretations of art experts and the eliciting of feelings and introspection, before concluding that neither avenue creates genuine knowledge—art experts are prone to bias, while feelings are unreliable bases for objective knowledge and can be elicited by propaganda. Ultimately, while the author correctly acknowledges the limited capacity of art to provide objective knowledge of the world given the inherent subjectivity of aesthetic judgements and responses, his argument is weakened by an overly narrow conception of what knowledge is—art can still give us tacit knowledge and introspective knowledge about our own beliefs and dispositions.

The author first examines the capacity of art experts to provide knowledge from and about art, before identifying two challenges that preclude this possibility—aesthetic judgements made by experts are still prone to bias, and requiring experts to interpret art is an elitist conception of aesthetic knowledge. The first point of criticism is an astute one—indeed, our aesthetic judgements are influenced not only by personal biases and preferences, but also "prevailing trends" as the author notes. For instance, Peking Opera—with its bright and bold face masks worn by performers—might be considered traditionally beautiful by the Chinese, but Western audiences frequently regard the loud colours of the masks as grotesque and discordant, since these combinations of bright contrasting colours are rarely found in Western art. Hence, even an expert might be affected by their cultural upbringing when they make judgements about art and beauty; this limits the capacity of art to give us objective knowledge of the aesthetic realm. Similarly, art experts are also beholden to the preferences of the art movements of their time—while experts in the Classical Age valued paintings with fine brushstrokes and realistic colours, experts in the Impressionist era lauded the coarse brushstrokes and unblended colours of artists like Monet. Thus, it is clear that experts are not able to offer a perfectly objective evaluation of artworks—it seems that the inevitable subjectivity of art limits its capacity to contribute to knowledge about aesthetic properties like beauty.

The author's second criticism—that requiring art experts for knowledge leads to elitism—is, however, a weak one. Not only is it justified merely via a rhetorical appeal to the supposedly ludicrous claim that an average Joe does not know what art is, it is also tense with his earlier observation that there is "inherent subjectivity" in aesthetic judgement—logically, if aesthetic judgements were really subjective for everyone, the implication is that neither experts nor the common man has knowledge about what art is. Therefore, even though this criticism is a poorly justified one, a charitable reading of his argument as a whole reveals that his conclusion does not depend on this largely tangential attack of elitism—so long as he demonstrates there is subjectivity in aesthetic inquiry, he sufficiently shows that objective

knowledge from art is not possible. To that end, this flawed attack does not cripple his claim that art experts cannot give us objective knowledge from art.

The author proceeds to examine the possibility that art may give us knowledge by provoking introspection and eliciting emotion. However, he dismisses this possibility on two grounds —that emotional engagement cannot justify objective knowledge, and that artwork could be propaganda and thus be divorced from reality. These are more valid criticisms, insofar as the knowledge concerned are factual claims about the world. Scholars have observed that two obstacles stand in the way of art giving us objective knowledge about the world—the 'Warrant Challenge' and the 'Uniqueness Challenge'. First, given that art need not be a faithful representation of reality (much like propaganda), it seems unable to justify claims about factual reality—for instance, it would be fallacious to conclude that Wakanda really exists after watching *Black Panther*, because film directors have creative licence to make up events, characters, and even countries depending on the story they wish to tell. Even if we could obtain justified true beliefs about the world from artworks, it is clear that artworks are far from the best source of knowledge about the world—even if *Interstellar* could tell us about time dilation, it is still, from an epistemic point of view, much better to justify one's beliefs about time dilation by referring to a physics textbook, a far more reliable source. As such, the claims that art can give us about the world seem neither warranted nor unique, making the author's claim that artworks (as potential 'propaganda') cannot show us anything about the real world a well-founded one.

Additionally, the author is right that emotions from art fail to justify our beliefs about the world—indeed, while emotions can provoke understanding, they cannot directly form the warrants to our claims about reality. For example, while I can gain an appreciation of just how oppressive totalitarian regimes can be by experiencing the horror evoked by Orwell's *1984*, the book cannot directly justify any claims about totalitarian regimes in the real world, inasmuch as the Big Brother of the book is merely a fictional character. Thus, the author persuasively demonstrates that eliciting emotions is not enough for art to be a source of knowledge about the world.

However, the author's overall argument has considered knowledge in too narrow a sense — while it may be true that art cannot give us objective knowledge about aesthetic properties or factual claims, it is also evident that art can be a source of introspective knowledge about our own dispositions, as well as tacit knowledge in the form of skills. For instance, reading Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can show us how we are, as readers, just as prone to premature judgement—as the author clouds our appraisal of Mr Darcy before revealing his meritorious character, we might be shown how we are also as prejudiced as the Elizabeth of the novel. While this is not "objective knowledge about the world", such revelations about ourselves certainly constitute knowledge as well. Further, art can also tell us about our own moral beliefs and intuitions—after reading Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est*, we might also gain the knowledge that we believe war to be immoral. Hence, art can still give us knowledge about ourselves, a possibility that the author too hastily dismisses.

Additionally, art can also give us tacit knowledge in the form of skills, which is non-propositional in nature but knowledge all the same. For instance, a pianist can listen to Lang Lang's performance or read any art expert's commentary on Joe Hisaishi's playing and gain a newfound awareness of how to improve his own playing. As such, art can also be a valuable

source of 'know-how', even if it cannot contribute significantly to objective knowledge about the world.

Thus, while the author's argument about the fallibility of art experts and the unrepresentativeness of art vis-à-vis reality is largely a strong one, he does not manage to adequately justify his rather absolute conclusion that no 'genuine' knowledge is possible from art. Even as he rightly observes the inherent subjectivity of aesthetic judgements, he clings too tightly to an extremely narrow view of what 'genuine' knowledge is, neglecting the capacity of art to meaningfully expand our knowledge about our own beliefs, skills, and dispositions.

Comments

An excellent piece that shows excellent awareness of the author's argument, and comprehensively deals with all the main premises and the warrant of the author's argument. Evaluation is clear, concise, and insightful, sufficiently discussing relevant issues to do with the nature and construction of knowledge in aesthetics, with several examples that support the argument well. Well done!

.

19

2023 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2

PASSAGE

Amid political turmoil, divided societies, and an alarming increase in unmet economic and social needs, many argue that drastic action is necessary to mitigate – and reverse – the effects of past bad governance. Given today's complex political landscape, however, it is crucial to examine the reasoning behind any drastic shift in policy. Take the issue of gun violence, for example. When shootings occur, many naturally call for stricter gun control. But this ignores other contributing factors such as social and economic conditions, mental health issues, and law enforcement effectiveness. When we oversimplify the causes of complex issues, we commit the false cause fallacies that undermine the need for comprehensive analysis and evidence-based solutions.

This does not mean that we sit around and wait for miracles to happen, as proponents of radical change often accuse us of doing. They claim that if we do not invoke radical change, society will eventually collapse because there is so much wrong with society today. But they also point out that our rationale for being cautious is misplaced; even a single alteration to society could still inevitably lead to an uncontrollable chain of events, ultimately resulting in societal collapse. For instance, if we entertain the idea of implementing a universal basic income, critics argue that it will create a culture of dependency and laziness, leading to economic ruin. But isn't this just an example of radical change? These scenarios reveal the inherent contradiction in their argument – in the first, radical change is what will save society, but in the second, radical change is what will doom society. What these people actually want is not radical change but the right kind of change that will not lead to societal collapse.

So, while political change is essential for societal growth, it is imperative that we do not entertain illogical reasoning that can plague political debates. Thoughtful analysis, evidence-based approaches, and a wide range of perspectives are necessary to foster more effective political discourse that truly serves the needs of our society

20

2023 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2 **Keith Chan Soong-Lin | 23S06Q**

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

The author argues that while political change is essential to social growth, it is imperative that we do not entertain illogical reasoning that can plague political debates. This is because seeking radical change, as opposed to logical, reasoned and balanced change, for the sake of saving society from collapse is a self-contradicting argument. Further, false cause fallacies undermine the depth of our solutions. Ultimately, I think that depending on how the author's conclusion is read, the author either fails to support his conclusion or makes so vague a conclusion that it has little meaning.

Firstly, the author refutes the idea that radical change is necessary to prevent societal collapse. He says that proponents of radical change simultaneously claim that society is on the verge of collapsing anyway, so, we should not be cautious about it, and that if we do not make radical change happen, society will collapse and so, we should choose radical change. While he claims that this is self-contradictory, I do not believe it to be—proponents of radical change are not saying that their radical change will not lead to massive change, while smaller, unintentional changes will. They are saying that society will change anyway, and there is always risk involved, so why not make a radical change that they believe will help?

Further, in making this point, the author paints radical changemakers as homogenous—it is by doing this that he makes them seem self-contradictory in believing that the radical change of universal basic income does the opposite of the radical change of dependency and laziness. No proponents of radical change would disagree that what they want is the right kind of radical change—different people just have different beliefs on what the right kind of change is. Without showing that all radical changes are based in illogical reasoning, the author cannot paint them all with the same brush of illogicality.

The author also mentions the risk of oversimplifying complex issues with false cause fallacies. While he does bring up examples of how one issue (gun violence) can have many contributing factors, he does not manage to make the imperative case that one ought not make the decision based on one factor alone. For example, whilst it is certainly the case that lung cancer is the result of a confluence of factors, including genetics, diet, overall health, stress etc., one would not take issue with a doctor asking a smoking patient to stop smoking to lower the risk of contracting lung cancer. The author needs to show that false cause fallacies may lead to more risks in society, thus, we should avoid taking dramatic and unconsidered change.

Ultimately, one can read the author's conclusion two ways. First, the author is saying that we should not entertain illogical reasoning in political debates. Whilst this might be true, it does not seem much as it does not necessarily portray drastic action as illogical. If we read the conclusion as one against dramatic action, however, as in "dramatic action is dependent on

illogical reasoning", then for the reasons above, the author fails to make a strong link between drastic action and illogicality, and his argument does not hold.

Comments

A good response that considers the author's suggestions and that examines why they are or are not good. Good insight is shown at times.

21

2023 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 2 **Rachel Niu Zi Yuan | 23A01A**

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

The author's main conclusion is that we need thoughtful cautious analysis rather than entertain illogical calls for radical change. He acknowledges the call that many make for more radical action, before exposing the illogical bases of calls for radical action. On this basis, he concludes that such illogical calls for radical change should not be entertained, and that we should favour more evidence-based analyses. Ultimately, the author's argument perplexingly oscillates between a thoughtful call to consider the complexities of issues and a dismissive strawmanning of alternative perspectives, rendering it weak overall.

To the author's credit, he correctly recognises that some calls to radical action might be prone to oversimplifying issues, making such calls undesirable. His example of gun control is a largely apt one—it is true that while gun control laws might address the issue of gun violence in the States, there are other factors that must be examined. For instance, guns might be crucial for self-defence in rural communities where law enforcement might be over half an hour away. Additionally, gun control might not solve the root causes of gun violence—the causes of school shooters' disillusionment should be tackled. Thus, the author's overall point—that thoughtful, cautious consideration of many perspectives is needed to solve complex problems—is a fair and compelling one.

However, it is less clear whether the author is consistently successful in supporting this conclusion when he lapses into dismissive critiques of other points of view. For instance, he dismisses calls for radical change by claiming its proponents contradict themselves when they criticise caution—sometimes they claim that radical change can save the world and sometimes it can ruin it. This is, perhaps, an excessively harsh judgement—of course, there is no obligation for advocates of 'radical' action to defend every kind of radical reform. Climate activists might demand the shutting down of coal power plants, but they would certainly not defend radical action for the opposite purpose—to tear down all wind farms. The author's argumentative move here—to show that if advocates of radical action want only the right kinds of action, that they should advocate for prudent consideration—is perhaps too simplistic, insofar as the author conflates the call for radical action with the dismissal of all caution—perhaps many of these advocates have cautiously considered these issues but still decided that radical action is necessary. Hence, a large change does not have to be a hastily drawn conclusion—radical action is not the same as imprudence.

Hence, the author's overall conflation of two distinct concepts—radical change and throwing caution to the wind—makes his argument dismissive of those who advocate radical change, rendering his argument weak.

Comments

Perceptive piece that rightly identifies the inherent vacillation the author makes in this passage. Concise and insightful response that thoroughly evaluates the main premises and overall approach the author takes.

22

2022 | Y6 | KI Prelim | Paper 2 | Question 3

PASSAGE

Many agree that biodiversity conservation is important, but few step forward to do anything about it. Stricter conservation measures might hinder resource extraction and economic development, and few want to be responsible for potentially lower Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that might led to political instability. No one also wants to take responsibility for potential fallout from land-use conflict, especially when it concerns indigenous populations. In the face of resource scarcity and considering issues surrounding the global healthcare crisis, some argue that biodiversity conservation is not as important. But adopting this viewpoint is myopic and ignores the long-term consequences of biodiversity loss.

Biodiverse ecosystems provide vital services like pollination, water purification, soil fertility, which are essential for agriculture, human health, and overall ecosystem resilience. Biodiverse forests and wetlands act as carbon sinks, helping to regulate the climate by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide. If we are actively working towards reducing and reversing the impacts of climate change, why shouldn't we also actively conserve biodiversity? The loss of biodiversity could also mean the loss of potential future treatments of diseases since many pharmaceuticals are derived from natural sources. Shouldn't we preserve biodiversity to tackle the global healthcare crisis? Furthermore, biodiversity in crops and livestock ensures a diverse range of genetic traits that are crucial to changing environmental conditions and disease outbreaks. We would hate for the day when livestock and crops suddenly die, and people start questioning why we did not take action sooner.

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

The author's main conclusion is that we should take more action in biodiversity conservation. He first examines potential reasons why there has been inaction in conservation, namely that it might slow economic growth, leading to political instability, and create conflict with indigenous communities. However, he concludes that biodiversity conservation remains a pressing priority as biodiversity safeguards ecosystems and contributes to treatments for diseases. Ultimately, the author rightly articulates the value of biodiversity conservation, but his argument is weakened by a failure to weigh his claimed beliefs against the detriments raised by the detractors.

The author correctly notes that biodiverse ecosystems are important for the environment—pollination, water purification, and soil fertility are all important functions played by flora and fauna in the ecosystem. In fact, loss of biodiversity often has ripple effects across the entire ecosystem—given the highly interconnected nature of the food chain, threats that decrease the population of plants often threaten animals in higher trophic levels. This is why a small rise in temperature has the potential to wipe out 25% of species if global warming is not contained. Additionally, the author is also right in saying that preserving biodiversity could contribute to future treatments for diseases—many pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Bayer often reference the traditional herbal remedies for diseases, studying plants with pharmaceutical properties in the early stages of the drug development process. Hence, the author's argument has some credit—he rightly recognises the benefits of preserving biodiversity.

That said, the argument's main weakness is a failure to compare the benefits and costs of biodiversity conservation. Structurally, the argument merely lists potential costs before 'counterbalancing' them with benefits—there is no reasoning for the dogmatically asserted conclusion that biodiversity conservation is more important. In fact, there are compelling reasons to believe the costs of biodiversity conservation are severe too—lower GDP could mean millions of lost jobs in America, where unemployment is already skyrocketing today. Land use conflict with indigenous communities could mean the eradication of traditional practices and cultural heritage, such as Inuit seal hunting should Alaskan lands become protected reserves. Thus, it is not trivially the case that these harms are less serious than the benefits—the author needs to actively show that.

Perhaps the underlying reason for the argument's weakness is its rather extreme, unqualified conclusion vis-à-vis biodiversity conservation. Certainly, it is an important cause to fight for, but action to conserve biodiversity should also be balanced against measures to mitigate the negative externalities and impact of such conservation efforts. In many cases, this is the reason for the ostensibly 'slow' progress on biodiversity conservation—governments are consulting with indigenous communities before deciding on new nature reserves or providing transition schemes for workers affected by new conservation laws to move to new

industries. Thus, slow, considered action in conservation is not necessarily a bad thing, inasmuch as it allows for better trade-offs to be made on conservation—it is this nuanced recognition of the need for prudent rather than fast action that the author lacks.

Ultimately, even though the author makes good points about the benefits of conservation, his hasty dismissal of the real negative consequences of conservation without much comparison against his benefits renders the argument rather unpersuasive overall.

Comments

Good response that shows good understanding of the author's argument and its main weaknesses. The issue of prioritisation is well-considered, and the reasoning given for why the individual points made by the author are not wrong per se but are not weighed to fully support his main conclusion.

KS Bull 2024 | Issue 1

Editorial Team

Mrs Ruth Koh

Mr Alvin Leong

Mr Adrian Tan