KS BULL

Raffles Institution

(Year 5-6)

Knowledge Skills Department

Issue Two

2014

Foreward

Nobel Laureate Elias Canetti first started drafting the outline for *Crowds and Power* in 1925. It would take another 35 years before he completed and published the seminal work largely credited for winning him the Nobel Prize for Literature. If it took an eminent novelist more than three decades to produce his masterpiece, what can lesser mortals like us hope to achieve when given only one-and-a-half hours to complete a GP essay?

Yet, the challenge of writing under time pressure is a daily reality for many: the journalist rushing to break a big story, the architect preparing a brief for demanding clients, or the executive writing detailed reports for an exacting boss. The ability to write effectively within a limited time is a valuable asset and a skill that subjects like GP and KI seek to cultivate.

In this issue of the *KS Bull*, you will find a collection of student essays that we hope will interest and engage you. Articulately expressed and cogently argued, these essays are all the more remarkable given that they were completed under exam conditions. Learning to write well under pressure requires sustained effort, intentional preparation, and lots and lots of timed practice. We hope you will be inspired to put in the hard work needed to become better writers.

Incidentally, I wrote this Foreword under the duress of a looming deadline.

Happy reading.

Mrs Reavley Munn Ye
Deputy Principal, Curriculum

Contents

Contents

2014 Year 5 General Paper Common Test – Paper 1

Essay 1

Teo Wan Xin Phionna 15A01A

'Technological advancement has worsened the problem of poverty.' Do you agree?

An example of a common sight on social media feeds today is that of moving pictures of a frail woman carrying her malnourished baby. These pictures are usually accompanied by touching and sympathy-evoking stories. Because of technical advancements and the increase in pervasiveness of technology in people's lives today, poverty has been in the spotlight, garnering more attention than ever. While some may argue that technological advancements in the 21st century alleviate poverty because of their practical ability to increase standards of living of the poor and also to increase awareness of the issue of poverty, it has perhaps worsened the problem of poverty as it decreases social mobility, reduces job opportunities for the poor and creates a culture of "slacktivism" among advocates of poverty eradication.

Still, technology is recognised by the United Nations (UN) as vital in helping to fulfil one of its Millennium Development Goals: to eradicate absolute poverty by 2020, to lift everyone above the poverty line of US $2 a day. The UN believes that new technology has the power to improve the standards of living of the poor. More specifically, technological improvements such as new machinery increase the efficiency of poor people who depend on subsistence farming for survival. This allows them to put in relatively less effort for the same output, and allows them to grow their crops at a faster rate, pushing their income up and increasing their standards of living. Genetically modified (GM) food can also be said to alleviate poverty as it arguably produces more and better quality food, and fair distribution of food made from this technology can see the poor being fed and nourished. A recent breakthrough in using technology to aid the poor is the innovative creation of "The Water Book", which is made of pages that can be used as water filters so that people living in poverty do not have to worry about access to clean water. The pages in this book are lined with a type of chemical that allows water purification to take place, granting clean water to those in need. Furthermore, these books are cost-efficient and sustainable. Talks have already been in place with regard to the distribution of this latest technology to slums in under-developed countries. Technological advancement fuels innovation and this, combined with the desire to alleviate poverty, seems promising in raising the standards of living of the poor.

Efforts to help the poor have also been boosted by technological advancement and the pervasiveness of technology in people's lives. Social media, for example, has emerged as a platform for advocacy of poverty eradication. Technology has allowed for raising awareness on the issue of poverty to be easier than ever as it places poverty in the spotlight, garnering more support and more attention has been directed to helping the poor. For example, the campaign "Kony 2012" made use of social media to raise awareness of pressing global issues including children living in poverty and the plight of child soldiers. The campaign's publicity video reached more than 12 million views, indicating that, through the screens of technological devices, global issues that seem far away are placed right in front of us. Technological advancement also increases

accessibility in helping the poor. Online donations have made processes easier and more convenient, encouraging people to aid in alleviating poverty. Websites such as freerice.com engage people in quizzes: for every correct question the player answers, the organisation donates 100g of rice to the poor. Filmmakers such as The Jubilee Project use social media coupled with their expertise to make a difference: these filmmakers have pledged a $1 donation towards the eradication of poverty for every view that their YouTube film on poverty garners. Without technological advancement, these creative, innovative and convenient means by which to help the poor would not exist. Technological advancement can therefore be said to have played a huge role in the alleviation of poverty.

However, one may argue that the use of social media as a platform for activism and a means for the lobbying for donations only worsens the problem of poverty as it creates a culture of "slacktivism", such that no real help is actually given to the poor. Rather than going out of their homes or countries to help the poor, people now believe that helping the poor is a mere click away. This dissuades them from actively and physically aiding the poor. People are led to believe that they have already contributed to alleviating poverty by getting a question right on Freerice.com or watching a YouTube video that promises matching donations for the number of views. These people have an elevated sense of their apparent role in the eradication of poverty even when not much may actually be done to ensure that the aid promised by organisations reaches those in need. This lack of real help for the poor is further compounded by the fact that some of these organisations that engage in "slacktivist" and "feel good" measures are not effective in reducing poverty. For example, the underlying purpose of the Kony 2012 campaign was to expose the International Criminal Court fugitive Joseph Kony and for his crimes against humanity such as the abduction of children for the sex trade or to fight as child soldiers. Simply exposing the crimes of a single individual does not solve the problem of poverty – a pressing issue of greater depth and complexity than poverty arising from being entrenched in rogue regimes. Such unreliable organisations and campaign promises decrease people's trust in donating online, which may in turn limit the support that legitimate websites and organisations can gather. This makes it harder to gather resources and support, worsening the problem of helping the poor. Accordingly, this culture of "slactivism" brought about by technological advancement and technology may actually undermine the fight against poverty; it neither engenders real rather than apparent efforts in reducing poverty nor garners support for legitimate charities thereby hampering their efforts at alleviating poverty.

Also, technological advancement can be said to worsen the problem of poverty as it runs counter to alleviating the conditions of the poor. Innovation and the development of efficient machinery have reduced labour-intensive markets to machine-based economics. While this ensures efficiency, it robs the poor of job opportunities and renders them obsolete with the progression of technology. The poor, who already receive lower pay to start with, are further compromised as they may be left jobless and unable to sustain themselves and their families. Furthermore, such technological advancement arguably decreases social mobility, making it hard for these poor and unemployed people to find another job that matches their skill sets. This is because, in the light of technological advancement, well-educated people with a better command over technology are prized over those with lower educational qualifications who lack technological expertise. The poor, who are usually those with limited knowledge of technology, find it harder to secure jobs and therefore a certain standard of living.

This is especially true for the older generation of people as they are not well-versed in technology. Therefore, it can be seen that technological advancement has worsened the problem of poverty as it takes away the jobs and livelihood of the poor and renders them obsolete in the technology-dependent job market.

While technological advancement provides some promise and hope in the eradication of poverty, it has invariantly and unintentionally caused the problem of poverty to worsen. Technological improvements not only deprive the poor of job opportunities but also restrict social mobility, thereby causing a larger divide between the rich and the poor, especially between the technologically-savvy and the less so. It also creates a culture of "slacktivism", which may mean less help is actually given to the poor. However, we should not be discouraged by this but rather embrace technological advancement as a tool to continually seek solutions in alleviating the problem of poverty. I do believe that if technological advancement is put to good use, its benefits can outweigh its harm in alleviating poverty. Technological advancement should be embraced and fully utilised in eradicating poverty, in truly "making poverty history".

Comments:

A well-informed response, showing a good range of examples. Do ensure that topic sentences are written with precision, highlighting clear reasons that will justify your stand.

Essay 2

Chong Ee Hsiun 15A01A

Consider the view that multiculturalism inevitably leads to conflict.

Human history is filled with conflicts borne out of xenophobia, discrimination and paranoia. Such conflicts were seen in Rwanda where the Hutus and Tutsis clashed on the basis of ethnic divides. Such conflicts were seen in the Balkans where Bosnian Serbs led by General Ratko Mladic, massacred Bosnian Muslims in a devastating campaign of ethnic cleansing. Such conflicts are seen today between the Arabs and the Israelis in a protracted period of instability dominated by mutual suspicion that is founded on competing faiths and worldviews. In a world where people of diverse races, religions, ethnicity and beliefs coexist on one planet, the future seems bleak to those who believe that multiculturalism inevitably leads to conflict. While there are certainly grounds for such sentiments as the seeds of conflict are easily sown by humanity's fear of the foreign, I would argue that conflict is far from inevitable in multicultural societies as humanity is eminently capable of tremendous generosity and acceptance with sufficient support provided by the state.

It must be acknowledged that careless attempts at bridging divides between cultures can easily lead societies down the path to conflict. This is because the tendrils of discord insidiously infiltrate the minds of those stricken by fear or paranoia. Conflict then arises as an instinct powered by an individual's desire to shield himself from the source of this fear. Multiculturalism in the form of a rapid influx of individuals of a foreign culture into a society creates grounds for fear or paranoia to arise when inadequate attempts are made to promote understanding between different cultures. This is because the perspectives of the people are no longer shaped by the common humanity that undergirds all, but instead by false and derogatory stereotypes of those belonging to different cultures. Such stereotypes arise when individuals attempt to characterise a group which society does not understand. An innate fear of the unknown then serves to inject negativity into these stereotypes. The trend of Islamophobia across Europe today is evidence of discord sown by a fear of the unknown. Anti-Muslim sentiments are on the rise across Europe, with far-right xenophobic parties like Marine Le Pen's National Front of France, the Golden Dawn of Greece, and Jobbik of Hungary gaining sufficient votes to occupy significant numbers of seats in national parliaments. Conflict is bred when individuals act on their fears in an exclusionary and aggressive manner that brings psycho-emotional harm or even physical harm on other members of society. After Nigel Farage of the xenophobic United Kingdom Independence Party made insensitive comments denouncing certain practices of Britain's sizable Muslim minority, a group of aggrieved individuals led by radical preacher Abu Hamza held protests that resulted in skirmishes between members of both fronts. Indeed, these examples illustrate the propensity for conflict when multicultural communities experience incomplete integration, resulting in misunderstandings and discord fueled by stereotypes. Multiculturalism, when carelessly handled, may well lead to conflict.

Furthermore, it can be argued that multiculturalism may lead to conflict due to differences in beliefs and political outlooks that may not have been reconciled. The

premise of multiculturalism is the existence of individuals with different faiths, beliefs and values within a single community. Often, the beliefs that undergird the actions of one individual may be antithetical to the beliefs of another. This creates grounds for conflict. This was seen in 2005 in the rage-fuelled bombings that occurred after a Danish cartoonist published a comic depicting Prophet Muhammad, contravening the religious sensitivities of the local Muslim populace. Here, Danish values of free speech may have caused individuals to infringe on countervailing ideals of religious respect. From this, it can be argued that multiculturalism may pit conflict beliefs and ideals against one another, thus leading to conflict.

Yet, the perspective that multiculturalism inevitably leads to conflict is tremendously pessimistic and deterministic, thus constituting an insult to the dignity of the human race. Simply put, the human race is capable of far more than a blind and vicious fight against the unknown. Values of tolerance, acceptance and accommodation are eminently present in the better parts of human nature. As a human race, we are united by common threads of humanity like the aspiration for a better future, the love for our children, and the peace we seek for ourselves. The key quality that gives the human race its civility is the ability to empathise and care for others. This is why societies are formed with constitutional provisions for the protection of minority rights, because humanity understands that even in a system of democracy with majority rule, there are foundational liberties that should be accorded to all, even if they are of a different culture. It is thus a fallacy to assume that all societies will fall into conflict with the introduction of a foreign culture. A shining beacon of this hope for humanity is seen in Imam Layama and Archbishop Nzapalainga of the Central African Republic, two religious leaders of vastly different faiths who have united in search of common ground for people of different faiths to coexist peacefully. Before Egypt was plunged into the political chaos of the Arab Spring, the late Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Christian Church worked closely together with the Grand Council of Imams to maintain religious harmony in Egypt. Such examples illustrate that the human race will not always fail to seek peace when different cultures are brought together. Multiculturalism does not inevitably lead to conflict.

Moreover, governments, especially those of first-world nations, are well equipped to bridge the divides that lead to discord between cultures. With ample governmental resources, these governments are able to reach out to the people with interfaith dialogues and run massive educational campaigns to correct pre-existing biases, setting the ground for constructive relationships between cultures. A prime example of such peaceful coexistence is seen in the United States. In a society emerging from the devastation of the September 11 tragedy, when radical Islamists crashed the airliners into the World Trade Center, striking at the heart of America, it was easy for people to fall prey to xenophobic sentiments. The Americans proved themselves better. Emerging from the catastrophe as a united nation, the United States is now planning to build an interfaith centre at the site of the former World Trade Center to construct and strengthen the bonds between members of different cultures. Multiculturalism cannot be said to be an inevitable road to conflict because states are well equipped to take the people off the road to war.

Finally, in the long term, multiculturalism is slated to become more peaceful than ever due to the process of normalisation that takes place. Human beings are born free of the stereotypes and biases that afflict previous generations. Instead, discriminatory attitudes are picked up from society. This is supported by a study conducted by

researchers at the Binghamton University of New York reporting that adopted children of different races and sometimes even different religions who have lived together from a young age experience similar levels of sibling conflict as compared to homogenous families. Extrapolating from this conclusion, it can be inferred that the likelihood of peace between cultures will increase as humanity progresses due to the normalisation of the co-existence of different cultures. In societies that are multicultural for generations, like Singapore, sensitivity to cultural, religious, and racial differences is the norm for large swathes of society. As people live together for longer and longer periods of time, the invisible barriers that exist between different cultures are broken down to be replaced by mutual understanding and trust. This suggests that multiculturalism does not inevitably lead to conflict.

In the 21st century, the dream of one united human race is brighter than ever. The process of globalisation has brought people of different cultures together in a process that fosters interaction and promotes understanding. While some conflict may occur, I believe in the tenacity of the human race to struggle for peace and understanding. It is my sincere hope that the world 20 years from now will be dominated by societies like the United States, which has forged its identity around multiculturalism. Multiculturalism does not inevitably lead to conflict; it is instead a road to peace.

Comments

A well-written essay with a good range of examples. Local examples, however, could do with more elaboration and detail. Because your paragraphs tend to be long, you should ensure that what you set out to achieve at the topic sentence is fulfilled in the argument (e.g. In the second paragraph, your main idea is that 'careless attempts at bridging divides between cultures' can lead to conflict. However, in your illustration, leaders were not even attempting to bridge the divide.)

Essay 3

Wong Hong Zhe Gabriel 14S03O

Should governments prioritise social welfare above overall economic growth?

"A rising tide lifts all boats," John F. Kennedy once declared, arguing for how economic growth can benefit even the least well-off in the country much more effectively than expanding social spending. Governments have long debated the merits of both arguments, with the left generally favouring more social spending and expansion of the safety net, and the right focusing foremost on economic growth through the reduction of tax rates and welfare payouts to encourage hard work and entrepreneurship. While, generally, economic growth should be favoured to generate widespread prosperity, as countries become affluent economically, governments should then prioritise redistributionist policies to tackle a widening income gap that threatens social stability, and continue ensuring equal opportunity for all.

It is undeniable, though, that economic growth can help raise the well-being of the impoverished in less developed countries more than welfare spending. This is because breakneck economic growth will create employment for millions of the poor and also raise their incomes and purchasing power. This is especially so at the early stages of economic growth, where developing countries would mainly focus on the labour-intensive end of the value chain in manufacturing and production. In contrast, welfare policies are often too limited due to the small tax base of these less developed countries or prone to corruption due to the lack of public institutions in these societies. A case in point would be the comparison of China and India, two relatively impoverished countries in the 1970s. China embraced economic growth under Deng Xiaoping, while India stuck to its roots of populist welfare spending under the Gandhis and the Congress Party. As a result, for most of the 1990s, China's growth was double that of India, creating the much heralded economic miracle that lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty and gave middle class consumers access to Western creature comforts and technology. In contrast, India's rural backwaters continue to be mired in poverty, and India voters have begun clamouring for greater focus on growth as seen in the voting in of pro-growth candidate Narendra Modi as Prime Minister. Hence, for impoverished countries, economic growth plays a greater role in bettering the population's lives than welfare spending.

Furthermore, economic growth can better empower the poor than welfare spending. By creating jobs that give the poor the "dignity of labour", economic growth gives the poor the ability to learn useful skills through gainful employment, while welfare can foster a culture of dependency. Singapore, for instance, has always prioritised finding employment for the poor through economic growth over giving them handouts, and often handouts are structured by the government in a way that encourages work, as seen in subsidies for workers who seek to upgrade their skills. Hence, Singapore has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the world, at less than 2%. In contrast, in the US, which has employment tottering at just under 7%, excessive welfare may create the perverse incentive not to work – as was seen in a recent congressional Budget Office Report that projected that expansion in healthcare safety nets which result in more than 5 million jobs as many would prefer receiving handouts than work. Over time,

these workers' skills will atrophy and many may become depressed and discouraged from lack of work, as gainful employment is seen as a societal expectation. Hence, the poor are more likely to become empowered if they can receive jobs from economic growth rather than handouts from welfare spending.

Lastly, certain governments cannot afford to prioritise welfare spending over economic growth due to dire economic straits of their countries. In these cases, due to previously wasteful spending, further increases in welfare spending will result in great financial ruin for the country, undermining the tax base that underwrites any social spending. This is because if these countries continue to spend beyond their means, investors would begin to withhold the lending of funds to these governments. Examples include the bankrupt governments in Greece and Italy, where governments are compelled to push through unpopular austerity cuts to entitlements to restore the economy; in less developed countries such as Venezuela, profligate social spending has resulted in galloping inflation and the prospect of an economic disaster for the government of Nicholas Maduro. Hence, for these countries where the government either lacks the funds to support welfare programmes and where there is no solid economic base to sustain such measures without adverse consequences to the country's macroeconomic environment, governments must emphasise economic growth over welfare spending to tide over the crisis and create the foundations of any future successful strengthening of the safety net.

However, there exists a very strong case for the emphasis on social welfare over economic growth in already affluent countries. Foremost is the spectre of rising social tensions as economic growth threatens to widen social inequality, forcing governments to intervene via welfare measures to rebalance the equation. This is because in many countries, economic growth is primarily extractive, favouring the increased extraction and utilisation of the country's vast natural resources to create revenue. Such growth generally favours the already wealthy who either own the land and the resources that are sited on it or who can provide the capital needed to fund the exorbitant explorations needed to harness them. As economic growth continues churning along, widespread resentment will ferment amongst the middle and lower classes, who believe they are unable to succeed because, in the words of US Senator Elizabeth Warren, "the game is rigged." Protests such as the Occupy Wall Street Movement have thus been spawned to address widespread discontent over rising inequality, which may further escalate social tension, as the wealthy begin to feel that they are under siege. Hence, an enlightened government of a wealthy country may choose to exclusively focus on addressing inequality through social spending to reduce simmering malcontent in society. For instance, the Saudi Arabian government exclusively focuses on social welfare over economic growth, channelling the country's vast oil wealth into creating a seamless social safety net which includes a lifetime of free education and healthcare for all its citizens, to prevent resentment towards the wealthy elite from boiling over. In such circumstances, prioritising social spending is therefore economically and politically more desirable.

Secondly, governments should prioritise social welfare as this helps foster a more equitable society, which can be argued to be an intrinsic moral good. Social welfare helps even the odds that are a result of the vicissitudes of life – innate talent, inheritance or luck – which an individual accrues through no hard work of his and hence is not morally deserving of. Furthermore, welfare can help create an "equality of opportunity", where people from less privileged social strata gain a better chance

of financial success in life due to extensive subsidies and handouts to support their education and employment. This is the principle behind the US Unemployment Benefits scheme, motivated by Franklin Roosevelt in the darkest days of the Great Depression, which provided monthly payouts for a fixed period of time if individuals become unemployed as many individuals lost their jobs through no fault of theirs, but rather through a negative prevailing economic situation. Hence, it is the moral choice for governments to prioritise welfare spending over the essentially amoral concept of economic growth.

Finally, after a certain degree of economic wealth is attained, economic growth generally provides diminishing returns to society and even the affluent individual. Psychology studies have shown that above a threshold of $500,000, further wealth does not bring additional happiness for the individual. Rather, it fosters ceaseless envy that is detrimental to well-being. As a result, countries where the upper class has already a considerable degree of wealth should focus on redistributionist welfare policies even if it undermines economic growth, which disproportionately benefits the rich. This is because a fixed sum, say a few thousand dollars, would significantly better the lot of the poor who would use it to give their children proper meals before school, rather than the rich, who may trifle it away on expensive cars or wines. For instance, the affluent Nordic countries have chosen to prioritise welfare, with their extensive social safety nets, over economic growth due to their very high corporate and personal tax rates resulting from their deep-rooted belief in an egalitarian society and how wealth redistributed can disproportionately benefit the less fortunate with little cost to the prosperous. Hence, it would be discerning for wealthy countries to favour greater welfare spending even if they pay the price of less economic growth.

In conclusion, economic growth and social spending are compatible for many poor countries, as it is only through creating economic prosperity can there be the resources to establish a meaningful social safety net. However, as a country prospers, governments must essentially consider whether further economic growth is necessary to better the well-being of its citizens or whether social spending would be more effective in creating a more harmonious and equitable society. This question is especially pertinent for countries with healthy budget surpluses, like Singapore, where the opportunity costs of further extending welfare benefits to the poor are relatively low. Hence, as economies prosper, governments must and should prioritise social spending because an equitable economic system is central to sustained economic vitality through the adequate harnessing of all human capital. Moreover, political stability is ultimately created through the establishment of a harmonious society free from excessive inequality. Perhaps wealthy governments could consider the maxim "Governments should take care of the poor because the rich can take care of themselves" when deciding whether to unlock greater welfare spending.

Comments:

More than ample content, with convincing range of examples and ideas as well as suitable articulation. Clearly argued and positioned. There is the occasional need for concision, but it is no major crime in the interest of flow and your passion for the topic. A piece worthy of emulation.

Essay 4

Kuek Jia Yao 14S03R

'The roots of terrorism make military response ineffective.' Do you agree?

The killing of Osama Bin Laden by US army operatives at his hideout in Abbotabad, Pakistan, was hailed by many as sounding the death knell for Al-Qaeda, and which dealt a severe blow to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the world. However, these celebrations have been premature, as seen by deadly attacks such as the Boston bombings perpetrated by the Islamic Chechen Tsarnaev brothers, or even the recent knife attacks in Kunming by Uighur Islamic separatists that left over fifty casualties. It can be seen that even as a military response can help win the war on terrorism, the fundamental basis of terrorism as an ideology driven by an extreme dogma of violence shows that military actions alone cannot solve the problem. Rather, solving the root causes of terrorism requires a concerted, wide-ranging strategy in the areas of education, societal participation and government policy. Only then will combating terrorism be a sustainable, successful strategy.

Still, many military experts would cite overwhelming military force as being the only feasible method of stamping out terrorism. This was the rationale behind US President Obama's planned 'troop surge' before the imminent American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Terrorists aim to achieve their goals via acts of extreme violence, or 'terror'. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that their extremism can only be countered with similarly strong-fisted actions by governments. Governments who have attempted to appease such terrorist movements, or even cooperated with them, now feel the lingering after effects of their policies. This is most apparent in Pakistan, where the Pakistani government for many years supported a wide array of Islamic terrorist groups, not only providing them with sanctuary, but also covertly sponsoring their activities. This has led to intermittent violence in the North West Frontier province, where recent attempts by the Pakistani Armed Forces to dislodge these groups have proved futile and deadly. On the other hand, a concerted military strategy that flushes out terrorist cells before they have a chance to grow into a more serious security threat has proven effective. Many quip that "desperate times call for desperate measures." At the height of the Malayan Emergency, the British herded entire villages of suspected Malayan Communist Party sympathisers into closely-guarded settlements. This has the effect of starving the MCP guerillas of supplies and they were eventually forced to capitulate, ending that period of terror. These examples seem to suggest that the use of force is the best course of action in wiping out terrorist cells.

However, military force alone cannot effectively root out terrorism. Rather, efforts have to be made in other areas as well. Terrorism is an ideology, not any particular individual or group. It cannot be truly eradicated as long as there remains valid cause for groups to utilise it as a means to an end. Hence, an effective strategy must remove any possible factor that encourages the growth of terrorism. This is done via two main approaches. One, the government has to relent to the extent that it is willing to concede to some of these groups' demands. Terrorism takes hold when

organizations have been given no means by which to express their dissatisfaction. When pushed into a corner, their only means of spreading their message is via acts of terror, as seen in the bombings and assassinations carried out by the Provisional Irish Republican Army, notably the brutal killing of Lord Louis Mountbatten. The British government eventually acknowledged the need for political dialogue, and the resultant Good Friday accords have led to a lasting, albeit tenuous, peace in Northern Ireland. Arguably, it is important that there is a spirit of give-and-take on both sides, which would remove the need for disaffected groups to resort to terrorist acts.

Secondly, it is also crucial for efforts to be made in the areas of education and communal participation. Detractors argue that it was precisely Pakistan's policy of appeasement that led to the burgeoning levels of violence in the ethnic Pashtun-dominated areas. However, the key missing factor was the lack of education and community engagement. I do not propose a wholesale policy of appeasement with a total disregard for the community. Rather, terrorism is rooted in the community, and often proliferates in environments where there is widespread disillusionment and dissatisfaction, as was the case with the rise of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Military actions only serve to scratch the surface, and cannot resolve terrorism's root causes. Conversely, if governments are ready and willing to pour resources and aid into the community, then resolving the problem becomes not so much an issue of 'combating' terrorism, but rather engaging the community to resolve their concerns. In addition, education is crucial in convincing citizens of the futility of terrorism. Resorting to terrorism only hardens government resolve, as can be seen by the US line that "America does not negotiate with terrorists". In the case of Afghanistan, various multinational attempts to develop infrastructure, schools and economic drivers of growth have yielded untold benefits. The local Afghan population has benefitted, yet remains wary of American aid as the US supports rebuilding efforts on the one hand, but launches frequent Unmanned Aerial Vehicle strikes that result in many civilian casualties, on the other. Rather, societal engagement efforts have to be made with the aim of getting the community onboard. In the case of the Malayan Emergency, General Templar adopted a concerted 'Hearts and Minds' strategy, by not only highlighting the atrocities committed by the MCP, but also rewarding villages that had proven loyal to the central government. Therefore, the way to eradicate terrorism has to involve the co-opting of the local community in being aware of, as well as supporting, government efforts. This works both ways, as it is precisely this same community that has the potential to aid and sustain terrorists, thereby rendering a military response ineffective due to the communal nature of terrorism.

In addition, terrorism is driven by violence. By countering violence with violence, governments run the risk of themselves being labelled as perpetrators of terrorism. To elaborate, this would not only render a military response ineffective, but also add to the damage dealt as a result. As part of their 'War on Terror', America invaded Afghanistan and conducted various covert operations to apprehend suspected terrorists. To incarcerate them, they had a special purpose-built facility constructed at Guantanamo Bay. However, various allegations of water-boarding, electric torture treatments and other incidents of prisoner maltreatment have shocked the wider public. In such a case, military efforts to combat terrorism have themselves led to more occurrences of torture. More poignantly, the constant psychological burden of combating the faceless, unseen Taliban in Afghanistan even led one US soldier to go on a killing frenzy in an Afghan village, massacring unarmed non-combatants, which certainly qualified as an act of terror. As Mahatma Gandhi famously commented: "An

eye for an eye makes the whole world blind". Therefore, the roots of terrorism being supported by a dogma of violence certainly render similarly violent military responses ineffective.

Furthermore, as aforementioned, the nature of terrorism is of an ideology not exemplified by any individual. Hence, a military response is ineffective as it only provokes further aggression and an avalanche of reprisal attacks. The new threat posed by terrorism is not of large-scale organisations, but rather, 'lone-cell' operatives who act alone. From a strategic standpoint, it is impossible to engage an entire population. The proliferation of information via the net has exposed large numbers of people to terrorist ideologies. In fact, a quick search of Google's Afghanistan page would reveal the Al-Sheba community forum, which details daily engagements with African Union forces. With a military response, as in the case of the killing of Osama bin Laden, other Islamic fundamentalist sympathisers were enraged around the world. The widespread availability of information merely gives these individuals a means by which to gather further support for their acts of terror. Hence, military response is ineffective as it would simply provoke a more serious backlash, as with the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby by two otherwise normal British teenagers. This is due to the widespread appeal of terrorism to disaffected and frustrated individuals, especially since modern cyber-technology has provided these lone, radical individuals with a means to commit terror.

All in all, a military response only scratches the surface of the problem posed by terrorism. While it has great strategic value in eliminating short-term obstacles, the roots of terrorism as a community-driven, violent and radical ideology with widespread appeal to any disaffected individual means that to truly stamp it out, we also require political concessions, improvements in education, as well as societal engagement. Terrorism can be stamped out, but to do so would require a cohesive strategy that does not simply rely on brute force.

Comments:

Well developed & well substantiated by relevant arguments.

Essay 5

Yang Yixuan 14A01C

'The roots of terrorism make military response ineffective.' Do you agree?

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize 2012, Barack Obama delivered a valiant defence of the American War on Terror, maintaining that it was only through swift and decisive collective military action that the threat of terrorism to global security could be weeded out. The armed retaliation he spoke of does successfully compel terrorism – fundamentally individual or collective action in employing violence to achieve one's means – to roll back. Yet, the deeper malaise which terrorism is often a symptom of cannot be easily solved by brute force alone. In reality, the deployment of troops and bullets has in fact caused terrorism to worsen and emerge in many new dimensions.

It must be acknowledged, though, that military action can be effective in reining back terrorist activity. Terrorists possess lethal weaponry and are often highly organized. Al-Qaeda, for instance, consists of a sophisticated network of messengers, foot soldiers and higher-tier leaders which ensures the secrecy of its activities, such as the planning process for the September 11 hijacking attacks, which had escaped largely undiscovered by the local and international authorities. This is precisely why military action and intelligence may be highly effective or at times even absolutely necessary if the goal lies in tracking down and stopping these extremists. America's decade-long involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has, at the very least, managed to contain the impact of terrorist attacks. Although localised suicide bombings are still daily occurrences in these nations, they rarely stretch beyond these regions on the scale which they had in the late 1990s and early 2000s – the London Metro bombings, the 9/11 attacks and assaults on American consulates all over the Middle East and Africa. The sheer sophistication of military tracking and combat technology and the scale of skilled personnel which have been involved mean that terrorists find it harder to communicate without getting tracked down or committing attacks without prompt retaliation. One example is that of drones, which are unmanned aerial vehicles capable of tracking the precise location of terrorist leaders and killing them with scarce collateral damage. This incapacitates terrorist networks by breaking their leadership structures. Hence, with the victory knell of Osama bin Laden's assassination, it seems that, if the aim of military action against terrorist groups were simply to reduce terrorist attacks and handicap them in the short term, such military action has delivered results.

In addition, military action in the form of support provided to local armies seems to offer a slightly more sustainable option. American combat personal in Iraq and Afghanistan did not engage in most of the ground combat – in fact, they had trained the local military forces to do so. Hence, when Obama announced that troops were to withdraw from the key areas in 2009, it was predicated on the seeming reality that previously ill-equipped and unskilled local forces bestowed with the weaponry and training were slowly wearing the insurgents down over time. This seems to point to the effectiveness of military intervention in providing a more long-term solution as well.

However, the impact of military response as stated above seems highly superficial. The root causes of terrorism – fundamentally the entire structure of society and, in many cases, religious extremism which perpetrated its rise – are completely unaddressed by armed responses. Moreover, military response has showed and it is still showing its treacherous capacity for aggravating terrorism and giving extremists their ammunition to emerge even stronger.

To understand the roots of terrorism, one has to look at its rise to prominence. Centuries ago, discontented men like Guy Fawkes had engaged in terrorism by bombing the Parliament House. Today, extremists such as the Urumqi Islamic fundamentalists take to the streets with knives and bloodshed. One consistent theme runs throughout these examples of terrorism – the systematic oppression of communities by authorities and the endemic socio-economic disenfranchisement of these people. This lies on two levels: domestically and internationally. Domestically, the rise of terrorism is often attributed to heavy-handed, autocratic governance and the government's failure to achieve the people's socioeconomic aspirations. In Urumqi, Xinjiang, Muslims have long since felt systematically marginalised as the Chinese government has curbed their religious freedoms and denied them a channel to legitimately voice these grievances. It was this sense of besiegement that led individual terrorist groups to believe in the justice of employing brutal violence, such as the mass stabbings in Kunming in 2014. Hence, it is the oppression inflicted by the authorities and the sense of disenfranchisement that lies at the root of terrorism. Military response adds to the malaise by employing even more aggression. In Egypt, in the 1960s, Abdel Nasser's iron fist against religious opposition such as Sayyid Qutb's Muslim Brotherhood did not resolve the problem of extremism. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood radicalised even more after Nasser's execution of Quit. This shows that military action belongs to the category of brute force, which perpetuates extremism in the long term, even if it were to roll back due to official clamping down, the sentiments of injustice still simmer in search of an opportune time to retaliate even more aggressively.

On the international level, the roots of terrorism can be attributed to the perception of a gross imbalance between the power of the "East" and the "West" and the apparent attempts by the West to foist its agenda and values upon traditional sources in order to exploit Eastern societies. Terrorism is often observed to be connected with religion – the idea that a war can be divinely sanctioned as a just war necessitating any amount of damages and fatalities has proven an appealing one to certain communities, and the military intervention of the West provides the exact ammunition which extremists need to justify "jihad". Never had anti-Western sentiments risen to such a climax as it did when Americans invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, symbolising American neocolonialism in the Middle East. This situation is often exacerbated by America's usage of drones. When drones are exposed to have accidentally killed innocent women and children, riots and acts of violence tend to erupt across the targeted countries. Beyond that, America's grievous human rights violations in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, where prisoners were brutally humiliated and tortured, further undermined the legitimacy of its military action. The resentment against such military responses can be seen in Libya, when the American consulate was bombed following US sponsorship of the toppling of Qaddafi. In many senses, this demonstrates that in an era where terrorism arises out of a keen awareness of the power imbalance between states, and uses religion to justify itself, the indiscriminate use of military force only serves to play into the rhetoric of terrorists. More potently, it erodes any remnants of domestic civilian

support for military action, and may even compel common civilians to be complicit in the crimes of terrorists or even offer support for it. The frequent burnings of the American flag should be a poignant reminder of that dangerous possibility.

Finally, the roots of pervasive modern terrorism also lie in the rise of new media. Whereas in the past, terrorism was often conducted as an organized group, we see more and more cases of individuals self-radicalising on the Internet, which is something that rifles and drones are powerless to respond to. The Tsarnaev brothers, for instance, had lived in the United States for most of their lives, gaining their senses of injustice and anguish for their Chechen counterparts from the Internet's many echo chambers of extremist sentiments. They consequently taught themselves to make a bomb using ball bearings and a pressure cooker using Internet sources. Anders Behring Breivik similarly launched his appalling massacre of seventy over students after exposing himself to white supremacist and extreme Islamophobic sentiments on the Internet. In an age where "lone wolf" terrorists find it extremely easy to cultivate their warped sense of vigilante justice via sources found on new media platforms, conventional military responses are simply hamstrung in their reactions.

In conclusion, military responses are rendered ineffective because it is precisely this perception of oppression that fuels terrorism and honors "martyrs". Furthermore, the roots of terrorism often lay in much more endemic and complex social and political injustices. Perhaps the only way for terrorists to beat their swords into ploughshares is to offer active engagement, as the UK offered to the Irish Republican Army and Spain to the ETA Basque separatists. Both parties eventually pledged to renounce violence, and it is this kind of genuine political participation that can ultimately eradicate the appeal of and need for terrorism.

Comments:

An intelligent, well-informed & persuasive response. Your use of arguments and apt examples is very impressive. Good work, Yixuan!

Essay 6

Bridget Zhang Lechen 14S03C

'No country can really develop unless its women are educated.' Do you agree?

Since the feminist movement, women have been greatly empowered and many opportunities have been opened up to them. More so than ever, women, especially those in the developed world, are receiving higher education, entering the workforce and ascending the social ladder. With so many women holding key positions in governments, such as Hilary Clinton and Angela Merkel, and in corporations, such as Tease Holding's Ho Ching, the importance of women in society is increasingly evident. Women thus seem to be an essential part of ensuring economic prosperity, alleviating poverty and improving social issues, and the education of women appears to be crucial for a country's development. While some may argue that countries can continue to prosper economically without the need for women to be educated, the education of women holds the key to solving the many issues faced by developing nations and has become a necessary element for the development of a country.

It cannot be denied that countries have managed to prosper without all of its women having received education. Thus, it seems as though the education of women is not key in the development of the nation. Thanks to their rich natural resources and ability of political leaders to put them to good use, countries have managed to attain economic prosperity. This in turn has been used to develop the social infrastructure of such countries, generating social development at the same time. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, in particular, have achieved notable economic growth by tapping on the oil reserves available. This has all been done without prioritising education for women, many of whom are restricted to household roles and do not even have the independence to drive or go to social gatherings in the absence of a chaperone. Thus, it can be argued that it is not critical that a country promote education for women if it can still develop with sufficient natural resources and economic acumen on the part of men.

However, there are many instances in which the lack of education of women has contributed to failing economies in many developing countries. Countries without abundant natural resources are especially impacted by the lack of educated women. In the case of scarce natural resources, a country has to tap on manpower and human capital to get the country going. Education is key in providing the skills needed for women to join the workforce. By confining half of its working population to domestic roles, many countries have limited their own growth and development. In contrast, women make up 40% of developed countries' workforce, driving economic activity and thus furthering the development of the country. Indeed, by depriving women of education, some developing countries deprive themselves of further economic growth as they severely under-utilise the available human capital in their countries. Furthermore, educating women and empowering them to enter the political arena would allow for greater consideration of problems faced by families in society. This is because, as the main caregiver in households, females are arguably most aware of such issues and best able to represent other women who are facing such problems in

households. Women have the potential to contribute as much as men, and educating them would grant them the knowledge and skills to do so.

Additionally, the development of a country also includes social development. Many social issues in developing countries have arisen from the lack of education of females, and such education can be seen to be of upmost importance to solving them. Problems involving women in the developing world are often due to the lack of empowerment, which would otherwise enable females to stand up to oppression and protect themselves as well as their children. Educating women of their rights will encourage women to stand up against commonly-held beliefs and build a better future for themselves and their family. Social issues that can be potentially solved by educating women include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, bride burning, and female genital mutilation, amongst others. Take sex trafficking, for example. Many women turn to selling themselves so as to alleviate the financial burden of their family. As a result, nearly 4 million girls and many more women are trafficked each year. However, the education of women on other possible ways to earn a living, as well as the detriments of sex trafficking, will no doubt make women rethink before going to such extremes. This would thus help to solve social issues that hinder the social development of many countries. Indeed, the education of women in countries such as India has led to more women standing up against social problems that they are subjected to. More women who have been gang-raped have chosen to fight for their rights through the judicial system instead of choosing suicide as a "way out" of their problems. By empowering women to stand up for themselves so as to address social problems in developing nations, education holds the key for greater social development in countries. A country with economic progress, but which suffers from multiple social problems, cannot be said to be truly developed until it tackles these problems.

Some erroneously argue that such problems can be tackled without the empowerment of women. The government, they assert, can step in to solve them. However, such social issues often exist alongside corruption and inept governance, and thus are hardly ever tackled effectively. It is thus necessary for a bottom-up approach to begin the process of eradicating such social problems. Creating a generation of women who are willing to stand up against such social issues would help in moulding social change. In addition, educating women can go far in tackling issues such as healthcare and sanitation. Indeed, it stands to reason that social problems relating to health care, infant mortality and life expectancy should be tackled through the main caregivers in developing countries – women. Educating women on basic sanitation and healthcare will allow them to better take care of their family. Stressing the importance of seeking medical attention when necessary will encourage more women to actively and proactively do so. Informing women about the need for careful family planning will alleviate the financial burden on families as they choose to have fewer children. Spreading knowledge about sexually-transmitted diseases will allow women to take necessary measures to protect themselves and their spouses. Hence, it can be seen that the education of women is the key to solving many of the healthcare and sanitation problems by tackling them through the caregivers in the family unit. The importance of women in solving these issues is further supported by UN, which states that the education of women would greatly decrease infant mortality and death from treatable illnesses. For a country to really develop and improve socially, the education of women is essential.

The role of educated women in the holistic development of a country both economically and socially cannot be underestimated. While some countries are able to achieve economic progress without the education of women, greater prosperity and social stability can be achieved if educated women are allowed to play a greater role in society. The education of women allows for a bottom-up approach which, given the nature of social problems, is more effective in allowing for the development of countries. It is worth noting, however, that the education of women is not the "be all and end all" solution to the problems in the developing world. It is a key component in allowing countries to develop and would certainly expedite the process, explaining the increasing emphasis on women's education in global movements today. The education of women is thus necessary for countries to really develop.

Comments:

Clearly an issue you are knowledgeable – and passionate – about, and you generally make a compelling case. What is lacking is some balance that might have come from considering the possible negative impacts of having more women who are educated. Also, reference to specific societies in the supporting details paragraphs 3 and 4, in particular, would make your arguments much more concrete.

Essay 7

Angelica Chong Wen Xin 14A01B

'Multiculturalism has failed utterly.' Is this an accurate assessment of societies today?

The national pledge of Singapore, recited in unison at important public events, represents an oath of allegiance to Singapore and what Singapore stands for – a united country of Singaporeans who are equal "regardless of race, language or religion." It would seem that, given the emphasis placed on cultural integration and the celebration of differences in Singapore, our country is a prime example of the success of multiculturalism in a society. However, a deeper consideration of both Singapore and other countries that fly the flag of multiculturalism will reveal flaws in this supposed ideal. While there are scenarios in which multiculturalism can be said to have succeed to a certain extent, hence making the statement true more often than not, the ideal state of a truly multicultural society, when all cultures and ethnicities and beliefs are equally validated and accepted, is one that is hard to achieve.

Advocates of multiculturalism will point to countries like Singapore, where the state has specifically enunciated that all ethnicities and their closely associated cultures are equally worthwhile. In fact, these differences are even encouraged in order to create a richer diversity of beliefs and history. For Singapore, the success of multiculturalism is important due to its relatively short history and a still nascent sense of national identity rooted in the fishing port's beginnings as a melting pot of immigrant communities. Rather than trying to subsume these disparate socio-cultural identities under a single one that puts the nation before oneself, what Singapore has done is to allow space for all cultural norms. Key examples are that of the proximities of Indian and Chinese temples in Chinatown, the celebration of Racial Harmony Day, etc. All these instances show us that the government has tried very hard to normalize the notion of four distinct cultures coexisting – and commingling – in a very small space. Singaporeans are not just advised to tolerate other cultures; they are actively encouraged to find out more and learn to accept them as their own. Given that it is hard to accurately quantify the "success" of multiculturalism, perhaps anecdotal evidence might be more compelling: the relative success of multiculturalism can be seen every year as Chinese Singaporeans celebrate Hari Raya with Malay neighbours or when Indian Singaporeans go house visiting during Chinese New Year. The ease with which this happens is a testament to the normalisation of the acceptance that diverse cultures are of equal legitimacy in Singapore.

However, there are caveats to this rosy picture. While on the whole it is easy to wax lyrical about Singapore's multicultural society, there are definitely problems which can be raised. After all, one would be hard-pressed to say with certainty that multiculturalism has utterly succeeded in Singapore. As with any official state policy, no matter how natural it becomes, there are naysayers and voices of dissent. For example, NTUC spokesperson Amy Cheong was recently upbraided for her Facebook post that commented insensitively on the 'noise' that her Malay neighbours were making in a public area during a traditional wedding. Her lack of cultural sensitivity and tact regarding the cultural activities of her Malay neighbors reveals that while

different cultures may not be directly polarised in Singaporean society, there still exists an underlying, perhaps insidious form of resentment and prejudice against members of other cultures. Multiculturalism, after all, is in and of itself an artificial construct, dictated by an authority to be upheld or generated by the consensus of the people in charge. The acclimation of individuals of different cultures, who belong to disparate communities, to each other is not natural because not only does each community not understand, and hence respect, the other, but also because each community also feels an instinctive need to protect its own culture from assimilating with the other's. In extreme cases, the existences of both cultures are mutually exclusive – clearly not a situation where one could claim that multiculturalism has succeeded, even though it may not be a total failure.

Indeed, the success/failure of multiculturalism is not a dichotomy. It exists on a continuum where some societies understand the importance of multiculturalism but are simply impeded by conflicting national goals, thus leading to a general failure of multiculturalism. For example, while Malaysia is historically and currently home to a generous mix of Malay, Indian, and Chinese peoples, it is made abundantly clear that the accepted form of "multiculturalism" is one that must remain strictly outside of political and economic realms. Malaysia has never, in fact, tried to enforce a policy of multiculturalism. From the mid-'90s, it has always firmly and transparently adopted a policy of affirmative action for the Bumiputra majority in terms of job opportunities and political power. While there is no attempt on the part of the state to erode or subsume say, Chinese culture into the predominantly Malay one of the country, there is equally no room for an equalization of the legitimacy of each culture. After all, multiculturalism is not just about the sharing of a physical space, but rather the acknowledgement that all people from all cultures are allowed to practise their unique and individual beliefs, yet still be seen as equal. Not only that, all these distinct cultures cannot be assimilated into one identity, but they must be accepted and actively engaged with one another for a society to be truly multicultural.

Naturally, multiculturalism often fails simply because the conflicting cultures are too disparate. Not only is there no common denominator that could potentially serve as a unifying factor, the ideals that those cultures values might be diametrically opposed, leading to suspicion, distrust, even outright antagonism – patently not a situation where one can claim the successful co-existence of different cultures. For instance, the European states have had a long tradition of being white and Christian, with their own set of cultural norms. They are not interested in multiculturalism because this is perceived as a mixing of immigrants, who are deemed "foreign invaders". Hence, there is an increasing level of xenophobia in many European states like France and Germany, which are facing an influx of immigrants from the Middle East. These immigrants bring along with them their own cultural beliefs and practices that the Europeans fear might undermine the sanctity of their own. A clear example of this is the German, or more appropriately Bavarian, aversion to the size of mosques outstripping that of Catholic cathedrals in fear that this would undercut the dominantly Catholic beliefs that the majority of the population holds. While this is a direct example of a dominant culture restricting another culture's practices, there is a more insidious form of the failings of multiculturalism: nominal multiculturalism, often seen in American or European cities that do not really want an integrated Malay/Chinese/Other community and thus assign to them small concentrated spaces – the Chinatowns and Koreatowns in London and New York for instance – where the people belonging to these communities can show their niche beliefs without intruding on the spaces of the majority population. Clearly

multiculturalism here is a failure, for the token acknowledgement of other cultures in the form of designated, often exaggerated and stereotyped, spaces and ideas in society is nothing but a caricature of the respect and understanding that makes up the multiculturalism.

Finally, multiculturalism can be considered to be an utter failure when the dominant culture actively takes steps to eradicate smaller communities without even an acknowledgement of the importance of each individual culture's heritage and tradition. Rather these dominant cultures seek to assimilate smaller groups against their will. This can be seen since the rise of the Tsars of Russia till Russia today, where the expansionist policies of the Tsars meant the devouring of neighboring countries like the ex-Czechoslovakia and Ukraine, and the forceful imposition of Russian values, language, and religion in place of their native cultural practices. The homogenisation of all these disparate communities and cultures into one monolithic Russian bloc is seen even today, where Putin's government continues to enforce harsh regulations on official Russian ideology, religion, and values, so much so that the unique cultures of the communities in the farthest reaches of Russia have been all but eradicated. Accordingly, the international community sees a Russia that is not encompassed of largely disparate and marginalised cultures, but a centrally enforced and consistent portrayal of what the Kremlin wants Russia to be. The destruction of native cultures is also evident in the subjugation of Native Americans when America was first colonized, and the appropriation of various culturally significant costumes or symbols by popular culture today. Not only was the destruction of Native American culture a significant failure on the part of multiculturalism, the current indiscriminate usage of items like feather headbands and body paintings in fashion, and racist logos of sports teams like the Chicago Blackhawks, shows how casually America takes the commodification and inappropriate usage of cultural symbols. Not only has multiculturalism failed, oppression and racism have taken its place.

Evidently, multiculturalism seems to make a poor case for itself given the inherent difficulty of achieving the ideal it sets out to achieve. Moreover, multiculturalism is faced with exogenous and contextual problems that may restrict the success of such policies. It is important to remember that multiculturalism is not just the superficial congregation of different people in one space, nor is it the making of allowances for a particular group. Rather, it must mean more than that: there needs to be a common understanding and genuine acceptance, even a celebration of diversity, where all cultures are given legitimate space, yet are not separated from other cultures. It is difficult to achieve as it is not a natural progression for a nation to give way to different ideologies and beliefs, but given that some countries, like Singapore, have made important if small steps towards it, it cannot be said that multiculturalism has failed completely and utterly.

Comments:

This essay raises valid points and attempts to be nuanced in its argumentation and approach, employing a good range of examples. There is good command of language shown and a personal voice present. However, focus on the question is not consistent, especially in the earlier paragraphs, where the extreme nature of "failed utterly" was not addressed in a sustained, direct way.

Essay 8

Jeremy Khoo Jia Hern 14A01B

'Multiculturalism has failed utterly.' Is this an accurate assessment of societies today?

A liberal, fair and secular society has been the ideal model for many nations around the world which have sought to offer their citizens a society where individuals with all kinds of cultural and religious identities can lead flourishing lives. This is the essence of multiculturalism. In principle, this is a just and noble conception of society, but in practice, multiculturalism has been plagued by a whole host of problems that stem from the failure to integrate immigrants into society as it exists. Ultimately, irresponsible policies of multiculturalism only end up fracturing society. Multiculturalism has not been an utter failure, but it is at best a very qualified success story.

In principle, there is no reason why different races, religions or ethnicities cannot exist harmoniously. We need look no further than Singapore, where the government very successfully dealt with the racial and religious tensions from the pre-Independence era. By banning racially and religiously inflammatory speech, treating all races and religions fairly, and embarking on a policy of actively encouraging citizens to see themselves as Singaporeans rather than as Chinese or Malay or Indian, Singapore has kept the multicultural peace for many years. For example, the government established racial quotas for public housing to ensure that all races would live together rather than form enclaves. Through recognising each race's cultural festivals as public holidays, and using Social Studies and Civics lessons to encourage schoolchildren to learn more about other races, the government has reinforced its vision of a multicultural society by ensuring that all races interact daily and no ignorance or misguided perceptions of each race ever forms. Singapore demonstrates that governments can, with sound policy, make multiculturalism a success.

Furthermore, other societies like the United States are often considered multicultural successes because they welcome immigrants of all origins. When rooted in not just a tolerance of people different from oneself but also the knowledge that immigrants often bring valuable talent and cultural perspective, multiculturalism can be a success. The US embodies these values, right from the Statue of Liberty's welcoming motto – "Give me your poor, you're hungry and I will feed them" – to a meritocratic societal dream that considers talent and hard work, not race and religion, as the defining features of a person. We can see this in how immigrants like Henry Kissinger a German Jew fleeing Nazi persecution rose to become a Secretary of State, or how the US is continually able to attract talent from all over the world to places like Silicon Valley. In a society where personal identity and attributes are prized over one's ethnicity, multiculturalism can be a success.

Of course, there is another side to the story. Multiculturalism may be a live option, but it is by no means an easy or convenient success. Even in the societies I have just highlighted – Singapore and the US – multiculturalism has its problems. In Singapore, the influx of foreign labour has put pressure on many ethno-cultural faculties because foreign workers are not well-integrated into our society. The recent Little India

riots had, of course, multiple and complex causes, but it at least in part is due to an outpouring or backlash of rage from the workers our society treats like servant class. Singaporeans complain when foreign worker dormitories are built near their homes (as did the residents of Serangoon Gardens in 2009) and there are often stories in the media of employers mistreating their workers. All of this is dehumanising. In the US, there are both structural and societal barriers to integration. For instance, Kissinger may have risen to the position of Secretary of State, but he could never have become President because he was a naturalized citizen. More recently, doubts about President Obama's religion and nationality led to highly offensive calls for him to produce his birth certificate. There was a massive outcry over the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero in New York City because, apparently, it was "disrespectful" – implicitly accusing all Muslims of complicity in the 9/11 attacks. These examples do not refute the idea that these are still, on balance, successful multicultural societies, but they show that even in the most successful and integrated melting pots, multiculturalism is by no means a guarantee.

More disturbingly, there do exist societies in which the results of multiculturalism have been dismal. These more often than not result from society's failure to integrate new immigrants or fairly balance the interests of different cultural groups. This can take the form of a distortion of the value of tolerance into a milquetoast "sensitivity" to cultural practices, even those that are immoral and even illegal. For instance, for many years British authorities have refused to prosecute cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) because they do not want to be seen as racist or intolerant. But while respect for cultural differences is a valued part of multiculturalism, it surely cannot abrogate the more fundamental idea of equality before the law. Because authorities saw immigrants who practiced FGM as alien-others merely resident in the same society rather than part of it and subject to the laws of that society, they are willing to give them a pass on a "cultural practice", rather than acknowledge a horrific and cruel crime. This kind of "sensitivity", is a definitive failure of multiculturalism.

On the other hand, much of Europe is not guilty of too much "sensitivity", but of a genuine lack of tolerance. It appears to be the case that when immigrants come into a society and are perceived to be alien rather than new parts of community and society, the core of that society feels threatened and lashed out. The most extreme example of this is Anders Behring Breivik's massacre of politically active Norwegian youth, who supported multicultural policies, ostensibly in defence of Christian Europe. But even the French ban on wearing the burqa in public represents a desire to bludgeon new immigrants into accepting a single set of social values. One could argue that this is a successful multicultural integration as all are forced to accept the prevailing social consensus, but, to me, religious discrimination and illiberalism seem too high a price to pay. We might well then describe fascist states that enforce a single, monolithic personal identity on everyone as successful multiculturalism. Successful multiculturalism has to respect a range of cultural identities rather than coercing them out of existence. It is precisely because this is no easy task that so many stabs at multiculturalism, including the French one, are mired in deep trouble.

Moreover, it is a mistake to think the only multicultural problems have to do with immigration. Many countries have tried multicultural solutions to the problem of preexisting ethnic or religious tensions within society that have gone awry. Rather than actively promoting integration, as Singapore's government did, these countries often simply throw disparate groups together, usually under some sort of power-

sharing agreement between their leaders, and hope everything will turn out fine. Because these "solutions" merely paper over the ethno-cultural facilities in society, the peaceful equilibrium brokered by such arrangements is unstable and temporary. For instance, Lebanon's government was set up in such a way that a Christian would become President, while the Prime Minister and legislative would be controlled by the Muslims. Because this solution failed to resolve the underlying problem – ethnic and religious tension – the rise of religious fundamentalism precipitated Hezbollah's takeover of the country, where it is now the de facto government in some areas. Ultimately, Israel invaded Lebanon in 2006 to attack Hezbollah after numerous terrorist attacks, an event that confirms the failure of the multicultural solution to bring peace.

In conclusion, there are quite simply, many ways for multiculturalism to fail. Government action or inaction that promotes division rather than integration cannot lead to a multicultural success because it is not enough for different groups to reside in the same geographical location. Multiculturalism can only unite a fissiparous collection of individuals with different ethno-religious identities when all of them share in a common identity, which is the very essence of integration. This is only possible if a society's government remains vigilant in integrating different groups and if society itself remains tolerant of differences, but at the same time, not so fearful of offense that it permits crimes under the umbrella of cultural sensitivity. Abraham Lincoln suggested that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." The same is true of multiculturalism. There have been multicultural successes, but the path to successful and lasting integrations is fraught with failures and missteps. Multiculturalism has not been an utter failure, but it is far too early to celebrate its success.

Comments:

Good range of ideas and examples, though at times the reason/s behind the examples of failed multiculturalism should be more clearly articulated.

Essay 9

Darrion Mohan 14S07A

'Future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology.' Comment.

A mere week ago, a new chapter in the South China Sea drama unfolded when China towed a billion-dollar oil rig into waters Vietnam had claimed was its own. Vietnam also alleged that the rig was accompanied by a flotilla of Chinese vessels, including navy ships. This incident was one of many disputes between China and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states over territorial claims in the resource-rich region. History is littered with examples of resource claims precipitating inter-state tensions, sometimes to the point of outright hostilities. From the colonial frenzy to exploit Africa's precious metals in the 18th century to the threats of withdrawing oil that were the impetus for the Yom Kippur War in 1973, natural resources have always had the potential to make states use the most extreme foreign policy options in their arsenal. Thus, it is no surprise that some realists assert that future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology because of the increasing scarcity of natural resources, coupled with ideology's ability to polarise – ending with the Cold War in 1989. However, I opine that these realists are too dogmatic in their provincial belief that scarcity of natural resources will be a sufficient casus belli (meaning justification for going to war in just war theory) in the future, particularly given post-Cold War democratic norms. Instead, I posit that future wars will primarily arise due to ideological differences or the "clash of civilisations", as articulated by Samuel Huntington.

Realists who claim that future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology assert that the increasing scarcity of natural resources, together with exponentially-increasing global production and consumption, makes conflict between states inevitable. As Thomas Malthus famously put forward, the increase in the Earth's population is steadily outstripping the ability of our planet to support this huge population. Perhaps most dire of all is the state of our energy resources, with oil expected to be depleted globally by 2060. At the same time, the problem is compounded by the astronomical rates of industrial production, with some economies' outputs increasing by more than 10% annually. Thus, as states desperately compete for increasingly scarce resources, it is inevitable that wars will be the ultimate outcome. This argument is all the more convincing when one studies history and realises that wars between states over natural resources have already been occurring with alarming prevalence. Many international relations theorists now consider America's 2003 Operation Desert Storm, in which the American military invaded Iraq, to have been undergirded by the need to secure oil in the Middle East; the official line about Weapons of Mass Destruction was merely a duplicitous pretext. Moreover, inter-state tensions over natural resources, such as the multiple territorial claims in the South China Sea, are surfacing with greater frequency. It is not inconceivable that in a future, resource-scarce world these may eventually amount to war. Therefore, pugnacious foreign policy over natural resource disputes is already evident. Coupled with the increasing scarcity of natural resources, there is certainly a strong possibility that future wars may be fought over natural resources.

Secondly, those who allege that natural resources will be the primary cause of war in the future assert that the power of ideology as a casus belli died with the Cold War in 1989. In his magnum opus entitled "The End of History and the Last Man", Japanese American historian Francis Fukuyama claimed that the end of the Cold War had brought about the "end of history" as we know it. By this he meant that ideology would no longer have the polarising power necessary to precipitate serious conflicts as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had indicated the supreme triumph of Western liberal democracy. He believed that the prevalence of Western liberal democracy would inexorably increase over time until it became the very foundation of the post-Cold War zeitgeist. Fukuyama's claims are validated by the Economist's Global Freedom Index, which shows that the number of democratic countries in the world has been steadily increasing since 1990. Thus, Fukuyama's arguments lend credence to the claim that with ideology no longer a significant casus belli, the increasing scarcity of natural resources will be the primary impetus for wars in the future.

However, these realists who hold that future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology are too hasty in jumping to the conclusion that the increasing scarcity of natural resources will necessarily lead to wars over them. Furthermore, they may also be overly myopic in asserting that only wars over natural resources will fill the vacuum left by the death of ideologically-motivated wars. However, I believe that wars need not be fought over increasingly scarce natural resources or over ideology, but instead what Samuel Huntington referred to as the "clash of civilisations".

It is precisely because of the norms, practices and institutions of Fukuyama's liberal democracy-dominated world order that wars will not be fought over increasingly scarce natural resources. Democratic peace theory states that modern democracies will only go to war ultima ratio, that is, as a last resort only when all other possible courses of action have been explored. The problem of dwindling natural resources is one that can be addressed by many different means, such as investing more in renewable energy. Compared to ten years ago, there is a much greater level of international co-operation in addressing the problem of scarce natural resources. The European Union, for one, now has a common energy policy and all of its member states have to comply with the European Commission's directive of investing in renewable energy research annually. Therefore, it is evident that dwindling natural resources is not a significant casus belli; within the current paradigm of international relations, states would sooner co-operate on the problem of resource scarcity than go to war over it. War, after all, according to the democratic peace theory, is ultima ratio.

Yet, I believe that future wars will be primarily caused by neither ideology nor natural resources, but by the inevitable ossification of ethno-cultural differences. In his seminal work "The Clash of Civilisations and the New World Order", Samuel Huntington argued that the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War era would be warring "civilisations", each with its own ethno-cultural peculiarities. In particular, he identified the clash of Islamic civilisation and Western civilisation as potentially the most explosive. Following the paradigm shift that the 9/11 terrorist attacks brought about, his theory has gained credence. From George W. Bush's "War on Terror" to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front declaring war on the Philippine government, it is clear that the wars of today are primarily due to the ossification of ethno-religious

differences. Thus, should this trend continue, future wars are likely to be caused fundamentally by Huntington's "clash of civilisations".

In conclusion, the increasing scarcity of natural resources is indeed a serious problem. However, taking into account democratic peace theory, it is likely that this will prove to be an insufficient casus belli in Fukuyama's liberal democracy-dominated world order as states only go to war ultima ratio. Instead, future wars will primarily arise from the ossification of ethno-religious differences on a global scale, as per Huntington's "clash of civilisations" theory.

Comments:

Excellent command of language & wide historical knowledge distilled to future scenario postulations; engaged the two key themes well.

Essay 10

Park Han Min 14S07A

'Future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology.' Comment.

After the end of the Cold War, the Japanese American historian Francis Fukuyama published a best-seller titled "The End of History and the Last Man". He signalled the end of war and conflict based on ideology, and emphasised the global dominance of capitalism. Wars are the use of force and military aggression in order to settle disputes between states and any non-state actors involved. War happens along the fault lines where signs of potential wars become pronounced such as harsh sanctions, acts of terror, expansionist behaviour. Fukuyama suggests that capital and resources will be increasingly transferred across the globe and hence there are possibilities of future wars and conflicts over natural resources. However, this essay posits that it is naive to believe that future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology. Even though the importance of ideology as justification for war might have declined, it is still an important force and justification for war. In fact, wars are fought for both ideological reasons as much as they are for the acquisition of resources, and often both these factors work together in fuelling wars.

In an age of the potential shortage of natural resources, one could argue that future wars are likely to be fought over scarce resources for survival. Economists and geologists have been warning the world about oil and water shortages in the future. These warnings have influenced states to take expansionist actions in order to claim unexplored and yet-to-be-claimed lands and waters. As each state tries to assert its claim and control over the natural resources, tensions have increased, leading to potential military conflicts. For instance, China claims the whole of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Its claims are disputed by Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and the Philippines. This has led to China and these countries increasing the presence of their military in the region, thus increasing the possibility of military skirmishes and even regional conflicts. All the countries involved in the South China Sea dispute are concerned about potential underwater resources like oil and fish which could help improve their economy and security in future. Similarly, in the Arctic Circle, America, Russia and the Nordic countries are competing to lay claim to unexplored oil reserves of the Arctic which has recently melted enough for underwater exploration. In such unexplored lands with ambiguous boundaries, inter-state tensions are high and military conflicts are probable as each player asserts its claim and tries to undermine others' claims on natural resources. These tensions are mostly over natural resources rather than ideological differences; therefore, one might be led to believe that future wars are likely to be fought over natural resources rather than ideology.

Furthermore, as natural resources are important for a state's survival, any state exporting natural resources can use them as leverage and threats against relatively resource-poor states. Since their people are at risk of suffering shortage of resources, these resource-poor states will do whatever possible to ensure their survival. This includes the use of military force. History demonstrates that disputes over natural resources could lead to future wars rather than ideology since ideology presents less of an imminent threat as

compared to conflicts over natural resources. During the 1973 and 1979 Oil Crises, the Arab states employed oil-related threats against oil-dependent countries like America and Europe as a means of expressing their unhappiness over Western support for Israel. According to the US State Department's declassified documents, America and her allies considered using military force to resolve the oil embargoes. Such a possible scenario shows how natural resources can lead to military conflicts. When Iraq invaded oil-rich Kuwait in 1991, America and its allies felt threatened as Kuwait was a major oil-exporter and they relied on Kuwait for much of their energy supply. This led to the Gulf War which drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait. This further emphasises how natural resources and security concerns can easily escalate into wars and further reaffirms some people's belief that wars are more likely to be fought over natural resources rather than ideology.

However, the fact remains that even though major wars and conflicts of the past five decades or so have been increasingly fought over the geopolitics of natural resources, ideology still remains a strong source of conflicts and wars. Small resistance movements are mostly ideologically driven. Sometimes, conflicts seemingly based on natural resources have underlying ideological dimensions. Thus, it is inaccurate and naive to say that future wars will be bought over natural resources rather than ideology. The opposite may be equally true.

Increasingly, wars between states and non-state actors are ideologically motivated as opposed to being fought over natural resources. Non-state actors are often part of resistance movements against states. The militant Islamic fundamentalist groups like Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab are clear examples. They fight against Western influences like America as they believe in the purity of their religious ideology. After the 9/11 Terror Attacks, America and its allies launched a "War on Terror", targeting Islamic terrorists. The name of the war itself demonstrates how future wars can be ideologically driven in order to eliminate another opposing ideology. And in India, even after the end of the Cold War, there are significant Maoist-Communist militants along the Red Belt, fighting with the Indian government to establish a communist state in North-Eastern India. This is known as the Nexalite Movement. These wars are clearly not motivated by greed for natural resources. The non-state actors' main motivations for war with states are ideological, and similarly for states to maintain their ideological status quo, they engage in a war of ideology with the non-state resistance movements.

Lastly, certain conflicts seem to be a result of disputes over natural resources but they have ideological dimensions such as nationalism and expansionism which undergird these conflicts. This implies that as tensions escalate in these conflicts, future wars can be fought over ideology rather than natural resources. For instance, China appears to be involved in the South China Sea disputes because of the potential underwater resources. However, analysts from the Council on Foreign Relations in 2010 claim that China's innate desire to expand into the South China Sea is to reassert its power in the region and the world and to go back to the glories of the past when China was indeed the "centre" of the world. Likewise, Russia tries to expand into the Arctic Circle in order to reaffirm its status as a world superpower when it was part of the former Soviet Union. As can be seen, there are ideological motivations behind tensions which seem to be purely due to natural resource issues. Furthermore, as these tensions escalate into more serious forms such as wars, states would increasingly rely on ideology such as sovereignty and territorial rights to justify the wars to the international community as well as use ideological means such as an appeal to nationalism and national pride

to gather domestic support for it. Hence, the fault lines of wars would be ideologically defined as tensions escalate. Therefore, it is possible that future wars will be fought over ideology rather than natural resources in the long term. Natural resources could be an initial trigger, but ideology would be the long-term driving force that sustains the conflicts.

Historian Samuel Huntington said in his book, "The Clash of Civilizations and the New World Order", that conflicts and wars would be fought along cultural and ideological fault lines and the world would never be as simple as what Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" suggests. To conclude, it is superficial to believe that future wars will be fought over natural resources rather than ideology. It is equally valid, if not more accurate, to argue that natural resources could be the source of wars but that what will drive the underlying tensions towards actual wars is usually ideological in nature. The 1973 Oil Crisis was in fact politically and ideologically formulated by the Organisation of Petrol Exporting Countries (OPEC) to pressure America into forcing Israel to return lands to the Arab states. Also, tensions might seem to be due to natural resources but often there could be ideological interests motivating them. Lastly, ideology is still an important source of tensions, particularly in anti-state resistance movements. In short, future wars will be due to the interplay of geopolitics of natural resources and ideological differences.

Comments:

Mature & concise writing; able to engage the two key themes in an almost effortless way. A few more concise examples on secessionist tendencies and the unilateral blatant war on terror will add value.

Essay 11

Lee Chin Wee 14A01B

Can the death penalty still be justified in today's society?

Two weeks ago, the badly botched execution of a prisoner in Oklahoma State Prison made world headlines on The Guardian and The New York Times. A horrified public was confronted by the grisly details of this tragedy: how the prison wardens injected a cocktail of lethal drugs into the prisoner's raw tissue instead of his bloodstream, how he was left writhing in agony on the prison gurney for 20 minutes before being declared dead, and how prison officials orchestrated a partial blackout of the news at a time when transparency was of paramount importance. This sobering story sparked intense discussion over the death penalty both within America and throughout the world – a debate that has shown no signs of abating. In my opinion, as much as this incident illustrates the potential brutality of the death penalty, it does not automatically mean that capital punishment is completely unjustifiable. As the justice system seeks to strike a fair balance between retributive punishment and rehabilitation, I feel that the death penalty is still a justifiable punishment in cases where exceptional amounts of harm have been caused, such as first-degree homicide.

Opponents of the death penalty have dubbed the death penalty an anachronism in today's progressive social climate, a barbaric and inhumane punishment that does not cohere with our collective human values. These individuals point to legislation against cruel and unusual punishment to defend their claims, arguing that the death penalty is akin to torture in terms of the degree of harm – if the state is prohibited from waterboarding or physically abusing its prisoners, these protections should naturally extend to banning the death penalty. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (UCLU) recently published a statement condemning the persistence of the death penalty, calling it "nothing more than state-sanctioned murder." As we pass international legislation and declarations like the UN Human Rights Charter, it appears hypocritical of states to pay lip service to these protections while signing away the lives of their own citizens.

Moreover, many argue that the death penalty runs counter to the principle of rehabilitating criminals, which is a key tenet in our modern justice system. Human society exists not merely for the functional, utilitarian purpose of economic advancement, but also because we believe that there should be an aspirational quality to our institutions and codified norms. This is why prison systems have been gradually transitioning from the highly dehumanising and Spartan penitentiaries of the 1930s to the more human prison facilities we see today. Norwegian prisons, for example, provide each prisoner with their own television set and personal shower, in an attempt to respect their human dignity. This is because a large proportion of liberal societies today reject the vengeful and transactional conception of justice which the death penalty promotes, in favour of a system that seeks to rehabilitate criminals and empower them with the skills required to self-actualise. For instance Anders Behring Breivik, the white supremacist serial killer who gunned down dozens of young people on an island off Oslo, was not sentenced to death, but rather handed a 30 year jail term which was

to be spent in a personal cell equipped with an Xbox console and reading materials. This is because opponents of the death penalty believe that human dignity is not surrendered even when someone commits a heinous crime – the state still has a duty to protect their interests appropriately.

However, this is a rather extreme stance that does not fully consider the competing priorities of the justice system, and the other actors involved. The death penalty can still be justified in the instances of grievous harm, because the justice system should not ignore the competing principle for retribution. When an individual actively decides to inflict intolerable amounts of harm and grief upon other people, the state has to step in so as to redress this injustice, through punitive action. This is why many societies today endorse prisons and corporal punishment within the justice system: we recognise that it is equally important to punish criminals for their wrongdoing as it is to rehabilitate them. In so doing, a reasonable balance between rehabilitation and retribution is struck. For instance, committing petty theft or arson in South Korea carries a relatively short jail term, but kidnapping an innocent victim warrants the death penalty. This demonstrates the importance of proportionality under the law – while it would be barbaric to apply the death penalty in all cases of criminal activity, some crimes are such an assault on the human conscience that their perpetrators should face the death penalty. For example, Saddam Hussein was executed by the United States in 2003 for perpetuating a despotic and autocratic regime in Iraq, sanctioning atrocities such as the massacre of 2000 Kurds in 1998. When certain crimes move past the threshold of our collective tolerance, the death penalty can thus be justified.

Furthermore, we should also consider the deterrent effect which the death penalty may have on would be criminals, lowering the incidence of crime and therefore benefitting society in general. This is because the death penalty poses the greatest possible imposition upon someone's freedoms, raising the potential cost of committing a crime. This can be demonstrated through Singapore's zero-tolerance stance on drug use, which has resulted in the government mandating that drug traffickers and distributers be punished with the death penalty. As a result, the level of drug use amongst youth in Singapore is one of the lowest in the world (0.2%) resulting in former US President Bill Clinton hailing us as "the only country to have won the war on drugs." Thus, by altering a criminal's cost-benefit calculus in favour of abiding by the law, the death penalty is still justifiable in today's society, especially for particular crimes that threaten society's well-being.

Finally, the victims of heinous crimes should be considered in this discussion as well. When a criminal commits a capital offence, the resultant effects of his or her actions are incalculable. The tremendous grief suffered by a family torn apart due to murder to the complete psychological degradation inflicted on kidnap victim can often have a lasting effect on a person's psyche. The death penalty is thus justifiable in cases where it could bring the victims of such terrible crimes some degree of closure in the knowledge that the perpetrator of those crimes has been duly punished. In a recent interview with The Guardian, Michelle Knight, a kidnap victim who suffered in captivity for 15 years, revealed that she experienced an "overwhelming sense of catharsis and finality" when it was revealed that her tormentor, Ariel Castro, was found dead in his cell. The death penalty can therefore provide a unique degree of finality to such crimes, helping deeply traumatized victims or their relatives to move on with life.

In conclusion, it is clear that while the death penalty may not be justifiable in all instances of harm, there are some crimes that would be best handled through this mechanism. It must be noted that all societies in today's world are not made equal – the Nordic countries such as Finland and Norway might prioritise the rehabilitative purpose of the justice system due to their more progressive social climate, while more conservative nations like Singapore and South Korea consider the death penalty to be justifiable punishment within the spectrum of permissible state action. This is because different states come to different conclusions as to where the line between retribution and rehabilitation should be drawn. While some decide to prioritise intrinsic human dignity and worth above all else, others take a more pragmatic attitude toward crime and punishment. Ultimately, the world is not a monolith – the death penalty can still be justified in today's context if it is implemented in a legally proportionate manner, and carried out responsibility to minimise potential barbarism.

Comments:

Fluent & well argued. Still, for a more nuanced response, you could also reflect on what the continued use of the death penalty implies about the state's relationship with its citizens. You could have also considered the perspective of human rights, to give the essay better balance.

Essay 12

Jade Tan Si Yu 14A03A

'International cooperation has not solved the global problems of today.' Do you agree?

We live in an increasingly interconnected world where problems affecting one nation end up affecting the rest of the world. Some of the biggest global problems of today include environmental issues, poverty in both developed and developing countries, and economic crises affecting several countries at the same time. In the light of such a situation, international cooperation has become incredibly prevalent. Governments are extremely willing to gather their forces and organise international communities, a sign of collective effort and collaboration to tackle these issues. Yet, one cannot help but wonder if such organisations and forces have been truly effective, given the massive scale of global problems and inherent conflict of interests that underscore some of these measures. Inevitably, many problems have not been completely solved by international cooperation due to the inability of governments to cooperate effectively. However, it is not right to generalise that any attempt at international cooperation is fruitless as there have been many instances of success proving that international cooperation still has the potential to resolve our problems.

It is inevitable that international cooperation has been unable to solve many of the global problems of today because of the unavoidable fact that different governments have different viewpoints on the same problems. This is the biggest obstacle to international cooperation because countries face different social and economic realities. This results in conflicts between national and global interests that undermine the effectiveness of international platforms meant to solve global problems. Take for instance the Kyoto Protocol which was meant to be a platform for all governments to create an environmental framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally. To date, one of the biggest flaws in the protocol is that the United States, one of the world's biggest emitters of carbon dioxide, has not ratified the treaty. Given that greenhouse gas emissions directly result from industrial activity which is closely related to economic growth, the United States, by delaying its ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, has effectively indicated that it does not intend to reduce its emissions and place its struggling economy at risk. This clearly indicates a dichotomy between global and national interests – a state of affairs that inevitably hampers international cooperative efforts to solve a global problem. When fundamental national interests thwart international cooperation, global problems are likely to remain unsolved especially if there is a lack of contribution from some of the bigger nations, or certain nations simply refuse to cooperate at the expense of short-term national goals.

Another reason why it is valid to say international cooperation has not solved the global problems of today is that international measures aimed at tackling problems that exist on such immense scales are simply not efficient enough. Whilst international organisations may have the potential to pool resources and use these resources wisely, not all international organisations successfully do so. This is possibly due to political rivalries or other forms of bureaucracy that come about when there are too many member states involved in the collaborative effort. One key example of inefficiency is

reflected in the Alma-Ata Declaration that was aimed at promoting "Health for All" by the year 2000. This sought to galvanise governments and the global community into attaining a level of primary health care – especially for third-world nations – that would enable people around the world to lead socially and economically productive lives. This is a problematic goal because it is extremely idealistic and was doomed from the start by an initial lack of focus by the signatory nations in dealing with a problem of such magnitude. Indeed, although the signatory nations came together in 2008 to celebrate the success of this cooperative measure, the problem of insufficient health care still exists globally. About 2.6 billion people still lack access to sanitation and several hundred thousand remain destitute and ill due to HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in developing countries such as Nigeria with average life expectancy of 55 years. International cooperation, in essence, is about uniting countries to generate solutions, but because some of these problems only affect largely less developed countries or because solutions cannot be carried out under overly broad agendas, international cooperation ends up failing to solve the global problems of today, ending up merely pushing back deadlines and spiraling into inefficiency.

However, it would not be right to say that international cooperation has not been useful in solving global problems at all. While it is almost impossible and impractical to completely eradicate certain problems, international cooperation is still one of the most powerful tools to alleviate global conditions of suffering and injustice as it involves nations putting aside their differences and recognising the universal nature of such problems.

International cooperation has come close to solving certain global problems, and should measures be well designed, there is no reason to lose faith in such efforts as they can still be extremely effective. When governments are aware of how best to utilise their resources, they can be relied on to resolve global problems given their power to influence their own citizens on a large enough scale to overcome global obstacles. An example would be the 2004 Montreal Protocol where the UN member states and put in place measures to cut global production and use of ozone-depleting substances known as Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). To date the 191 countries have managed to achieve at 95% reduction in CFCs. The reason for their success is the consensus that an environmental problem of such a scale was detrimental to all nations. The recognition that all nations had a stake in preserving the environment compelled many governments to force influential domestic companies such as Dupont and Imperial Chemical Industries to completely stop using CFCs. This reflects that it is not impossible for governments to put forth efficient cooperative measures given a focused framework. Therefore, although international cooperation may not completely resolve certain problems, international cooperation under the right conditions may perhaps be the best tool for solving global problems today.

Furthermore, international cooperation bridges divides between countries, in that they form the same outlook towards global problems and decide to deal with them together. One of the clearest indicators of how countries have the same ideas about global problems is when they begin to adopt the effective solutions utilised by other countries and channel enormous amounts of money, time and effort to replicate such success on a global scale. Looking at the case of Kenya, we see how international cooperation is well on its way to solving global problems. In 2006-2007, Kenya's then-Minister for Health Charity Ngilu spearheaded the mass distribution of free bed-nets to alleviate the problem of malaria. Soon after, the international community,

upon recognising that Kenya's solution was effective, stepped in to do the same. The World Health Organisation helped to distribute 300 million bed nets which to date has led to a 51% drop in malaria incidence in Kenya and other parts of Africa. International cooperation of this nature reflects a willingness to learn from other nations, regardless of their international clout, in order to solve global problems. This reflects how international cooperation has been successful in preventing the spread of global diseases such as malaria. Therefore, international cooperation has huge potential to solve global problems of today.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that while it may appear on the surface that international cooperation has been ineffective in solving global problems, other factors often come into play to limit the effectiveness of international cooperation. Take for instance how the G8 countries agreed to remove up to US $55 billion from the debts of all Heavily Indebted Nations in 2005, allowing these nations an opportunity to channel resources to infrastructure, industry, education and other sectors of human development. International cooperation in this sense could have solved problems of national debt, thereby affording developing countries scope for development which could have had the run-on effect of solving the global problem of inequality. However, in many of these Heavily Indebted Nations, more deep-rooted problems remain such as corruption and civil unrest that stands in the way of the developmental goals of international cooperation. Yet these are not issues for the international community to deal with. Instead, they are problems that only countries themselves can truly solve, given that they boil down to individual leadership and circumstances. Therefore, we cannot simply generalise that any failure to solve global problems arises due to ineffective international cooperation.

In conclusion, international cooperation is not always successful in tackling global problems of today, and often the lack of progress is due to flaws such as competing stakeholder interests and a lack of collaborative focus that may be difficult to overcome. However, we live in a globalised day and age where collaboration, not competition, is soon becoming a necessity. Whilst flaws in international cooperation pose huge challenges for governments all over the world, it is not impossible to overcome them. In fact, in the future, countries may realise that they have to overcome them no matter what. In essence, governments need to break down the psychological barriers between them to deal with global problems that know no boundaries, so that international cooperation can reach its full potential.

Comments:

This was generally well written and well argued. You make good use of the facts to highlight your arguments. A thoughtful & sensible piece with some insight. Keep it up!

Essay 13

Png Shan Shan Dolly 14S03P

'International cooperation has not solved the global problems of today.' Do you agree?

As we move towards a more globalised world, international cooperation has become more highly prized by governments and citizens alike. Instead of competing with one another over limited natural resources, and waging needless wars, perhaps we should look to collaboration and cooperation between nation-states in order to tackle cross-border global problems such as climate change, poverty and terrorism. While I believe that international cooperation, facilitated by global institutions such as the United Nations (UN), has great potential to amicably resolve conflicts and work towards win-win solutions for all nations involved in response to the world's most pressing problems, to claim that it has already solved these problems is far too idealistic. To a large extent, international cooperation has not solved the global problems of today, but is a step in the right direction towards a better future.

One main reason for the argument that international cooperation has not solved global problems is that national interests usually take priority over global interests, or the so-called greater good. Therefore, despite countries' willingness to come to the negotiation table, it is extremely difficult to reconcile their diverse viewpoints and national interests to come to a global consensus. It is therefore not uncommon to hear of international summits and conferences lasting for days but ending with no clear agreement made or treaty signed. One clear instance of this would be the Kyoto Protocol as nations have failed to arrive at a consensus on global warming gas emissions. Since each nation seeks to maximise economic development while balancing their environmental responsibilities, many were unwilling to compromise on their rate of industrialisation which involves the burning of fossil fuels such as coal or oil. Indeed, Japan, Russia and other developed countries have pulled out of the second round of negotiations. This is understandable, as governments do have a moral obligation to look after their nation's economic well-being first. Their mandate to govern, entrusted to them by the electorate in democracies, means that they have the duty to speak out for and defend their national interests on the global stage. Yet, it is precisely because of these self-seeking tendencies of nation states that international cooperation has failed to achieve progress on some of the most pertinent problems facing the world today, such as climate change. Without a clear achievable common goal, and a willingness to trust and support fellow nation states in solving global problems, the international effort becomes rather muted. Currently, it is only the European nations that are taking carbon emissions and other environmental issues seriously enough to take concrete and concerted action.

Furthermore, the existing power dynamics between nations on the international stage disadvantage the less developed countries, exacerbating the rich-poor divide – a key problem today. Although international cooperation seems to have benevolent intentions, in reality, it is the wealthiest and most politically influential nations which stand to benefit the most. Europe's Common Agriculture Policy is a prime example. Despite the large amounts of funds that have been given to many African nations as humanitarian aid through global agents such as the African Development Bank,

economically dominant nations still insist on their own protectionist measures which severely disadvantage and stifle developing economies. With high import tariffs levied by European nations on coffee, grain and other goods, which are the main exports of the agrarian economies of African states, prices of such goods are artificially driven up and these goods then become unable to compete with the more inefficiently-produced local European crops. Furthermore, monetary aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also comes with conditions attached, some which are detrimental to local economies, such as the mandatory privatisation of the basic utilities sectors, which have caused great harm to the poorest in these countries who then could not afford water and electricity when the prices of these utilities got driven up With economic might and influence in the hands of a few wealthy, dominant nations like the United States of America, France, and Germany, smaller nations have to play by their rules and pander to the interests of the major global players. This uneven balance of power thus works against the concept of international collaboration, where a few nations dominate and try to impose their ideologies on others or seek to safeguard their economic interests at the expense of others. Thus, nations are unable to work together to create feasible solutions to problems like poverty; the so-called collaborative measures with the supposed purpose of international assistance instead widen the rich-poor divide amongst countries, worsening yet another global problem.

Another contributing factor to the ineffectual nature of international cooperation is the increasing power of the non-state actors and discrete individuals in creating trouble. Terrorism has come to haunt many nations today and has made headlines worldwide as the greatest threat of the twenty-first century. Given the amorphous nature of the threat, and the potential the Internet offers in perpetuating extremist ideologies, international organisations or intergovernmental talks and agreements are unable to properly resolve this issue. For example, terrorism cannot be easily resolved by military threats as terrorist suspects are very difficult to identify. In the 2005 London bombings for instance, what was startling was that the culprits turned out to be second-generation Muslim migrants, born and raised in London. That terrorism is a threat from within the target nation – perhaps borne out of radicalisation of citizens through mediums such as online sermons – as well as a threat from external nations – such as Afghanistan or Pakistan where terrorist groups have managed to intimidate and dominate the entire society– makes it a problem far more difficult to target. The potential of an individual, any individual, to cause harm and wreak havoc by bombing or setting public property on fire due to misguided beliefs or anger has increased given how the Internet has facilitated the rapid spread of ideas. Persuasive ideologies by groups such as Al-Qaeda have far greater reach and are thus more likely to be able to reach and influence vulnerable communities around the world, such as the marginalised, the oppressed, and the angry, and convince them to set the world on fire with their hatred. International cooperation by nation states is still unlikely to be able to solve this problem, given that there are no clear targets; how does one attack an ideology? Terrorism is a problem caused by extremist ideology, and the idealized vision of peaceful cooperation between nations, or governments, and terrorist groups is unfortunately, far from realistic in dealing with this very complex problem. Despite the USA's best efforts in the so-called "war against terror" – seeking military support from allies and killing extremist leaders by drone strikes – their attempts to lead the global fight against terrorism are far from effective in solving the problem.

However, international cooperation on a global platform such as the UN has proved to be an effective form of conflict resolution through the promotion of non-violent

diplomacy between nations. In seeking to negotiate and establish common grounds, member-nations have managed to avoid all-out conflicts or wars. While it is true that war has not been completely avoided, some clashes over territories have been settled more peacefully without loss of civilian or military intervention through agreements to bring forward territorial disputes to international courts such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for adjudication. Singapore and Malaysia, for instance took the conflict over Pedra Branca to the ICJ, and both nations eventually accepted its ruling. By agreeing to be bound to international standards, these nations successfully reached a compromise, thus avoiding aggressive military displays of power and war. This is true even today, with China's conflict with the Philippines, Japan and Vietnam over islands in the South China Sea. Granted, China is unwilling to budge on the issue and therefore could be seen as uncooperative. Yet, all parties, though keen to claim territorial rights, have thus far refrained from resorting to military attacks or forced takeover of these lands, perhaps due to the recognition of the international community's rebukes, and often this leads to a willingness to discuss and reach an amicable resolution to the conflict. Nonetheless, the relative peacefulness of the global political state of affairs without all-out wars, in different parts of the world, can be largely attributed to the willingness of all nations to work together rather than against one another.

Overall, therefore, international collaboration has not been able to solve many pertinent problems of today. Given that nations are still bent on advancing their own national interests at the expense of the greater good for the global community – especially so for the more powerful nations like the USA and the European nations – negotiations and diplomacy will not yield concrete actions. Rather, this is simply limited to condemnations or criticisms that the UN issues. Yet the potential of international platforms as a conflict resolution mechanism underscores the immense potential they have to resolve global problems. This ideal state will only be achieved if all nations involved demonstrate a genuine, keen willingness to cooperate.

Comments:

You have a lovely writing style that allows you to explain issues very clearly while providing insight. Good work!

Essay 14

Wong Hong Zhe Gabriel 14S03O

Is patriotism still relevant today?

Samuel Huntington famously coined the term the "Davos Man" to refer to the new emerging global faceless elite who owe greater allegiance to the global community than to their own individual nation-states. Such individuals are playing a greater and more prominent role in international geopolitics, both in supranational organisations such as the United Nations and at the global platforms such as the prestigious World Economic Forum in Davos, where the aforementioned moniker was derived from. Thomas Friedman, however, recently countered with his own analogy, describing as "Square People" those patriotic young individuals who are expressing their love for their country through demonstrations and revolutions the world over. Rather than being part of an elite forum, the Square People inhabit the streets of Tahrir in Egypt and parks of Gezi in Turkey. This emerging dichotomy highlights how the centrifugal forces of nationalism are competing with the centripetal forces of globalism. Hence patriotism, the love of one's country, exists today as a channel for the emerging aspirations of a growing middle class in many countries despite the push towards globalisation and regional integration.

Patriotism has diminished relevance in modern society due to the increasing influences of globalisation. Globalisation has reduced cultural and economic barriers between nations through free trade and liberal cultural exchange. As countries become closer politically, economically, and culturally, the divisions that define nation-states narrow, and hence the justification for patriotism based on the uniqueness of one's culture and identity. Many upwardly mobile upper-class people, having worked and studied the world over, primarily identify themselves foremost as global citizens, cross-pollinated by many ideas and cultures, rather than as citizens of their nation-state. This can especially be seen in their flippant attitudes toward immigration, viewing it as a tool to achieve their personal and economic ambitions rather than citizenship as an expression of loyalty to one's nation. For instance, when President Francois Hollande announced a 70% tax rate on the highest bracket earners, many of the French elite openly protested and threatened to immigrate. In protest, the French actor Gerard Depardieu took up Russian citizenship, and was warmly received by President Putin. Hence, by tearing down political, cultural, and economic barriers between countries, globalization has rendered patriotism increasingly obsolete as individuals can now immigrate for personal reasons and easily integrate into their new country, thus reducing incentive to be patriotic to a home country.

Moreover, the reduced relevance of patriotism is buttressed by the growing importance of regionalism. This is driven by growing economic imperatives to tap comparative advantages between different nations within the same region, as well as increased economies of scale from a single market and production base. Hence, the development and strengths of regional trade blocs are most notably epitomised by the European Union, which has a stable currency, open borders and independent decision-making bodies such as the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. Individuals within the trade bloc are expected to view themselves

first as Europeans, then as citizens of their country, in order for the EU's success. This is because the constitutional bodies of the European Union such as the European Court of Justice and European Council are constitutionally superior to national institutions. National bodies are therefore bound by the acts and decisions of EU bodies. Hence, individuals must forgo their sense of patriotism, embrace a wider community, and accept a loss of national sovereignty in otherwise sacrosanct areas, such as national judicial autonomy and domestic economic policy. The fact that ASEAN is emulating the EU through the creation of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 and the creation of a single market and production base suggests the growing importance of regionalism due to imperatives of economic integration and consequently, the diminishing role of patriotism, which must be sacrificed to a significant degree in order for the aims of regionalisation to succeed.

Additionally, the rise of individualism is further reducing the relevance of patriotism. This is because the intellectual underpinning of patriotism is the placing of national priorities over individual aspirations – even the willingness to die for one's country. However, individualism argues that individual interests should be placed before that of the wider community and only through the pursuit of individual self-actualisation can the greater welfare of the community be realised. Hence, patriotism is less relevant to individualists and even when these individuals express patriotic sentiments, it is for personal advancements. This can be seen in the targeting of Chinese factories in Vietnam by purportedly "patriotic" citizens, who are more likely expressing frustration over the economic competition and dominance of the Chinese, and hence the specific targeting of economic symbols of China. If these citizens were truly patriotic, they would have ceased their attacks upon instructions by their governments to do so, as these attacks damage business confidence and hence their country's economy. The fact that they persisted highlights that they prioritised personal economic interests – elimination of domestic competition from Chinese workers and firms – over national ones. Hence, individualism threatens the foundation of patriotism – society before self – as it reduces the moral need to placing the country's interests over one's own, thereby reducing the relevance of patriotism.

However, patriotism can be argued to retain its relevance in the use of greater civic consciousness and even revolutionary activism. The Social Contract that underpins the idea of patriotism is the fact that citizens have a stake in their society and hence can willingly love it and defend it, even at tremendous personal costs. Because the country represents certain inalienable values, individuals treasure it. For the Americans, it is the "inalienable rights" such as "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", and therefore the significant surge in signings on with the US Army following the 9/11 attacks even though many Americans know that they may lose their lives in an impending war. Such patriotism was also demonstrated in the streets of Kiev, where democracy activists braved sniper bullets to safeguard their idea of a democratic European-aligned Ukraine against an overbearing government supported by Russia. Given the growing trend towards democratisation such patriotism can be viewed as both relevant and desirable as it fosters greater civic participation and individual stakes in society for national development and plurality of voices and ideas.

Furthermore, despite the rise of globalisation many countries retain unique cultural and historic identities that are worthy of loving and being patriotic about. This is especially since many countries adapt their cultural and economic practices around global trends. For instance, in Korea, K-Pop retains both linguistic and stylistic

uniqueness, despite heavily drawing on Western pop-culture in the dance routines and videography. Likewise, despite India being a regional IT and commerce hub, it retains much of its cultural and historical diversity, which remains highly venerated. This can be seen in the recently concluded Indian general elections, where virtually all major parties had politicians paying pilgrimage to the "Mother Ganges" to honor their traditions. Hence, despite globalisation, significant cultural and historical nuances are retained within a country, or evolve with global trends to create a new unique style which defines the country and society and is deserving of patriotism towards.

Lastly, patriotism remains relevant in so far as countries' tendency to phrase individual sacrifices – for the national good – in patriotic terms. While global peace reduces the likelihood of wars and hence the need for individuals to sacrifice their lives for their countries, the economic malaise in parts of the West and economic underdevelopment in the East justifies some form of significant redistributionist policies to achieve economic growth and create equality. Without an overriding patriotic sentiment to help the less well-off, excessively high taxation to close the budget deficit or expand social welfare programs can be viewed as unjust as they are stripping individuals of their justly earned and distributed assets, as Nozick famously argues in his critique of John Rawls. The introduction of patriotism as an overriding concept is able to right this perceived injustice: due to an intrinsic sense of duty to their fellow, less well-off citizens, individuals sacrifice portions of their own assets in order to achieve the greater goal of equality within society. For example, Norway's citizens willingly vote for high top-tier tax rates to support extensive social welfare programmes for the less fortunate within the society and former Italian Prime Minister Mano Manti encouraged citizens to perform their patriotic duty by paying for raised highest bracket tax rates instead of illegally evading them. Hence, in the new global landscape where inequality is a growing concern and equal development a rising necessity, patriotism is highly relevant for a society to support just redistribution of assets and higher taxations to right these problems.

In conclusion, the forces of the modern age have not consigned patriotism to the dustbin of history. Rather, patriotism is evolving with the times, changing from its previous incarnation as sacrificing one's life and interest for one's country to a broader spectrum that encompasses a broader participation within the civic affairs of one's country, even at significant personal costs, and economic sacrifices to ensure greater equality and economic growth. Rather than entirely counter it, globalisation reinforces some aspects of patriotism by accentuating the uniqueness of some aspects of one's culture. While regionalism calls for us to sacrifice some patriotic love for a country for a wider regional good, it does not deny individuals the right to retain love of their county's culture, people, or history, but rather recognises common interests and values within a wider community. Therefore, this new social compact of patriotism is both highly relevant and desirable to an increasingly interconnected world, respecting individual rights and hence promoting democratisation of societies as it moves away from the hard-headed, bellicose nationalism or the rootless culture of the "Davos Man" toward a compassionate patriotism that can be both felt viscerally and eloquently articulated.

Comments:

Excellent arguments. A mature response that shows you are well-read. Strong personal voice also comes through.

2014 Year 6 General Paper Common Test 2 – Paper 1

Essay 15

Zhang Boyu 14S06Q

'Real art is something that makes us uncomfortable.' Do you agree?

The meaning of art has been a widely controversial topic. In his arguments on "Aesthetic Judgement", Kant contends that the value of art is always subjective but nonetheless, there exists a universal set of standards which makes an artwork "real" art. Certainly, with the wave of modern art washing over museums, avant-garde is all the rage. In fact, it may even seem as if the more shocking an artwork is the more artistic value it holds. However, it would be extremely narrow-minded to say that real art is something that simply makes us uncomfortable, and such a claim does justice to neither the artist nor the audience. To me, real art is something that either impresses us through the sheer magnificence of the technique or stimulates our intelligence to the extent where it may even change our views about the world.

That is not to say that real art must always be a pleasurable sight. Half a millennium ago, that may have been the case as artists strived for technical mastery to perfect a flawless portrayal of things that exist in reality. Later, however, the intrinsic meaning of art changed as movements like Surrealism and Dadaism encouraged artists to create pieces which invite viewers to ponder and reflect instead of merely mirroring reality - show, not tell. Sometimes, these artworks do make us feel uneasy. Picasso's "Guernica" is a brilliant piece of art that uses the viewer's discomfort to emphasise the message it embodies. The navy palette, blatant usage of chiaroscuro and distorted figures of Cubism seek to create a frightening image that exemplifies the hate and violence of war. Through making the viewer uncomfortable, Picasso manipulates the viewers to relate better to the horrors and atrocities committed during the bloody Spanish Civil War. Hans Holbein's "The Ambassadors" is another painting that employs death as a terrifying concept to bring out the central theme of the artwork. Between two wealthy, elegantly-dressed ambassadors, a distorted skull is splashed across the painting. As the viewer walks away from the piece, the skull "pops out" from the artwork, tumultuously changing the viewer's impression of the seemingly innocuous artwork. Through the use of vivid imagery, Hans Holbein contrasts the wasteful opulence mankind indulges in with the inevitable fate of all humanity - death. The unease that the audience feels serves to emphasise the message that the arts contain, perhaps granting them new perspectives.

The flawed view that real art is something that discomforts us perhaps stems from the fact that shaking someone to his core is one of the easiest and fastest ways of making him lose his footing and change his staunchest beliefs. When we feel uneasy, we are forced to reflect on the causes of these emotions, and more than that, our reflections and thoughts can help us better empathise with and comprehend the artist's message. There is a famous saying that "art seeks to disturb". While that saying generalises art quite a bit, it is incontestable that by "disturbing", art incites change.

Nonetheless, real art is not only limited to things that disturb and make us uneasy. Real art should certainly include pieces which impress us with excellent aesthetic value.

Dissenters may claim that art only seeks to reassure or copy what we see in quotidian life. This is because the former holds no surface value and only reveals its significance upon deeper inspection. Hence, this type of art is more "real" because it invites more scrutiny and thought. However, while art can be about its shock factor, it can also be about pleasure. The aesthetic value of an artwork is just as important as the message that it conveys. Pragmatists claim that all art is quite useless. While this is a hefty generalisation, there is some truth in that. Many works of art exist not for a purpose, nor for social commentary but to please our eyes and allow us to enjoy their artistic merit. Perhaps that in itself is a purpose. Leonardo da Vinci was one of the greatest artists in history who took pride in the aesthetic value of his art and the impeccable mathematical proportions demonstrated in his works of art. It is a silly argument to claim that "the Mona Lisa is not real art because if fails to make us uncomfortable". The clever usage of the triangular composition, the careful application of the golden ratio and the emphasis on the noblewoman's mysterious smile build upon each other to create one of the most aesthetically pleasing and arguably the most famous artworks of all time. Even in music, before the advent of modern music, composers during the Baroque and Romantic periods extolled the usage of harmonious chords to produce melodious soothing sounds that could enchant the ears of even the most common layman. It is both unfair to the artist and the audience to dismissively argue that real art must incite discomfort. Art should not only be celebrated for its message but also for the aesthetic merit it holds and its ability to enrapture us with its masterful technique and quiet beauty.

In addition, it is not necessarily true that the message art provides must make us uncomfortable. Even without seeding unease, art can be a powerful social commentary through a variety of other means by evoking a range of other emotions. Upon examination of human nature, curiosity and joy may be even more powerful emotions than mere discomfort and through eliciting such responses from the viewer, artists may also successfully weave together the theme of the artwork. Michael Craig-Martin's "An Oak Tree" is one such artwork which banks heavily on bafflement and then sudden epiphany to make the installation more memorable. Upon hearing the installation title, audiences expect something at least vaguely reminiscent of a tree but instead, Craig-Martin presents a cup of water on a cheaply made shelf. Only when audiences read and ponder the interestingly-worded artists' statement about his work of art do they realise that "An Oak Tree" is a commentary on the seemingly arbitrary nature of modern art and its heavy dependence on the artist's mood. The glass of water is only an oak tree when Craig-Martin wishes it to be, an analogy to the randomness of modern art. Andy Warhol, the hero of avant-garde art, uses images of everyday objects to triumphantly announce the democratisation of art. Pictures of gaudily coloured Campbell Soup cans induce a sense of familiarity, allowing viewers to comfortably relate to the piece of pop art in order to decipher the message Warhol paints. Real art may seek to incite paradigm shifts and trigger revolutions in thinking, but it is inaccurate to limit the cause of such change to discomfort. Artists, like viewers, are flexible in their thinking and hence can effectively use a variety of emotions to create an impact much larger than that which uneasiness brings.

Ultimately, it is rather disappointing that people continue to see art as something single-faceted. Real art is not so easily classified, especially not under the guise of an emotion. Art, despite a certain fundamental basis of aesthetic standards, is largely subjective. Duchamp's "Fountain" may be seen as a deep example of social commentary by some and as a mere puzzling urinal by others. Generally, art may create discomfort in the

heart of one person yet elicit responses of joy and awe from another. Real art should use a variety of techniques to enable the viewer to understand the artist's message. Even portraits like the "Mona Lisa" have a purpose - Da Vinci hoped to emphasise the subject's beauty through his artistic talent. Sometimes, the message of the art piece may resonate with the viewer as he holds similar perspectives to begin with and sometimes it could overturn everything the viewer thought about life and death, war and peace. While many modern artists choose to use the shock factor, like Jamie McCartney, to create a heavier impact, we should remember that before art was social commentary, art was beautiful. Real art is not something easily compartmentalised into a tiny niche but rather, a larger concept that encompasses artistic skills, emotions and relevance to society.

In conclusion, it is inaccurate to claim real art as something that makes us uncomfortable. Indisputably, certain artists choose to do so but beyond discomfort, real art draws its truth from other aspects and extracts a gamut of responses from viewers. Pieces like "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" holds a different meaning to almost everyone who has seen it due to its bizarre nature and sheer unpredictability, and it is this diversity of thought, ability to create change, interesting conception and skilful composition, not just an ability to incite discomfort, that crowns a piece of work "real" art.

Comments:

Quite an enjoyable and clearly developed essay. While there are some fumbles, it is good that you engage the question and discuss how art which seeks to create discomfort is not the only basis to judge art, rather than merely describe disturbing art pieces and leaving the marker to infer why these are instances of art. Structure is good, with no major errors.

Essay 16

Cai Minglu 15S06O

'Without complete certainty, we cannot claim to know anything at all.' Discuss.

Knowledge has been traditionally defined as justified true belief, but sceptics argue that we can know a proposition only if it is also completely certain. In fact, Descartes claimed that without complete certainty, we cannot claim to know anything at all. Given that knowledge is possible, it is important to examine if completely certain knowledge is possible in the first place, and whether knowledge is possible without complete certainty. This essay will be examining the justification condition, by discussing three arguments against Cartesian doubt, and the two structures of knowledge that have surfaced in the search for philosophical certainty.

In the search for absolute certainty, philosophers have attempted to find justification for knowledge claims, which require further justification for said justification, and so on. For example, how do we know that the Earth is round? This is possibly because one has read about this in geography or astronomy books. How then do the authors of these books then know that the Earth is round? Given that most of these authors have not seen the Earth from outer space, they have possibly been told so by astronomy experts. But how would these experts know that the Earth is round? And so on. This results in an infinite regress of justification. In order to put an end to the infinite regress, philosophers have searched for a foundation of indubitable beliefs, to serve as the ultimate justification for other super-structural beliefs. We will now examine if these foundational beliefs are able to produce completely certain knowledge.

Rationalists claim that reason is the primary source of knowledge. Indeed, analytic truths (propositions that are true by definition) such as "a triangle has three sides" seem eternal and certain, given that the definition of a triangle is "a figure with three sides". Truths of reason are known a priori, and are known prior to any experience of the world. Such knowledge claims seem intuitively certain. However, truths of reason cannot produce knowledge about the external world. Truths of reason are necessary truths which cannot be contradicted without negating the truths of reason themselves. For example, "A bachelor is an unmarried man" and "A bachelor is not an unmarried man" cannot both be true at the same time. On the other hand, knowledge of the external world consists of contingent truths, such as "the sky is blue", which can be contradicted without negating itself. Since reason cannot produce contingent truths about the world, the rationalist approach threatens the trap of solipsism, where a rationalist can only know that "I exist". The rationalist cannot be certain about any knowledge claim about the world.

Empiricists believe that experience is the primary source of knowledge. John Locke claimed that our minds are all "tabula rasa" – blank slates at birth – and argued that one's mind only gains knowledge in degrees through our sense data. However, while I can be certain that I am having sense experiences, I cannot be certain of my interpretations of the sense data. Previous beliefs and pre-conceived notions may affect my interpretation. For example, if I am having a toothache but my doctor tells me that my condition is really caused by a headache, I may change my mind about

my sense perception. In this way, sense experience is not incorrigible. The empiricist approach thus also threatens the trap of solipsism, where the empiricist can only know that he is having sense experiences. In this way, the empiricist cannot be certain of any knowledge claim about the world.

From the rationalist and empiricist approaches, we can see that there are no absolutely certain beliefs about the world that can ground our super-structural beliefs. Setting aside the foundationalist response to the infinite regress of justification, let us now look at another structure of knowledge, and whether it is able to produce knowledge of absolute certainty.

Coherentists claim that there is no ultimate foundation of indubitable beliefs in which to ground our super-structural beliefs. Rather, the justification of a belief comes from how well it coheres with the system of our other beliefs; in other words, whether or not it is supported and explained by our other beliefs. Coherentism seems to produce a holistic, interdependent web of beliefs that mutually support each other, giving rise to certainty. However, coherentism only gives rise to consistency, not certainty. Two different systems of beliefs can be equally coherent separately, but be unable to coexist. For example, religion and science both coherently explain properties of the world and the phenomena in it. However, they disagree about many salient points, such as the creation of the world. Religion refers to a creator for the universe, while science refers to the Big Bang. This contradiction between separate belief systems undermines the certainty of each web of beliefs. As such, coherentists cannot be completely certain about their knowledge claims.

While there are different approaches to resolves the infinite regress of justification, it is clear that neither foundationalism nor coherentism is able to produce absolutely certain knowledge about the world. Is complete certainty then necessary for the construction of knowledge? Let us now examine whether knowledge is possible without complete certainty.

According to Hume's mitigated scepticism, there are beliefs that we cannot but believe in – even if they are not 100% certain – in order to live our daily lives and function as human beings in this world. For example, we have to believe in the existence of the physical world, in order to continue living in and interacting with our physical environment. If I see a dog charging at me and hear it barking at me, I have no choice but to believe that the dog exists and infer that it is attacking me, in order to make the decision to run away. In this way, Hume resolves that we have to continue believing in our basic beliefs, even if they are not completely certain, in order to continue surviving and living our daily lives.

Common sense also argues against 100% certain knowledge. The common sense argument claims that the justification for a belief comes from whether it makes sense to us in a common, day-to-day setting. If there is no good reason to doubt it, then it is certain enough to be accepted and used in daily life.

Lastly, the argument for ordinary language states that we need only take the meaning of "know" as the ordinary, layman definition of knowing, without 100% certainty. After all, words only hold meaning if they are used in a way that has been socially agreed upon. Thus, I can know something without being completely certain of it, in the ordinary sense of knowing something.

- Using the three arguments against global scepticism, I have proven that complete certainty is not necessary to produce knowledge, or at least useful knowledge that can be used in daily life in a pragmatic manner. Since I have proven previously that we cannot hold any completely certain knowledge claims about the world, I conclude that without complete certainty, we can still claim to know things about the world.

Comments:

Good attempt. Key points regarding whether knowledge is possible even without complete certainty have been sufficiently dealt with, although it was unclear initially how the bits on justification were linked to certainty. The question is not about justification as much as it is about certainty in being a key criterion for knowledge. Also, last three arguments deserved more attention.

Essay 17

Amanda Chung Hui Xin 14S06P

'Knowledge is possible, even when it depends on that which is unknowable.' Discuss.

Knowledge is justified true belief. Or, perhaps, it might be more accurate to describe what the world regards as knowledge as what we believe to be true and with adequate justification. The difference exists in the truth condition. Definitely, we think that whatever is deemed "knowledge" is true, and logically speaking, what is knowledge must be true. However, while the former is a given, the latter is uncertain, or perhaps even unknowable: that what is considered to be knowledge is indeed true, or corresponds to an objective reality external to the subjective mind that claims to hold said knowledge. What we believe to be true may not actually be true. But given the impossibility of such rigorous justification so as to actually prove "truth", can we still "know", especially since that we cannot know our justified beliefs to be true?

The concept of knowing something to be true is intricately linked with our knowledge about reality; the correspondence theory of truth posits that it is reality in which the truth resides. Be it the world of ideal forms, residence to perfect formal entities or the physical reality that we believe we exist within – none of these can be proven to exist at all. Whatever we experience of the world is merely what we perceive, and this does not necessitate a direct link to the physical world. When it is argued as such, the surety we have is only from our sensory experience, and we are henceforth denied knowledge of an actual reality that we claim to know about (hence certainty of knowing that we know, or knowing our claims to be true). A larger problem exists at a higher level of doubt: if we know nothing about how our perception corresponds to reality, then can reality exist at all? And if reality does not exist (or it does but we cannot access it), what are we claiming truth to be? Truth means a correspondence to reality. For example, in science the knowledge of gravity means a knowledge-claim that correspondence to gravitational forces as they exist in reality. Indeed, we cannot know if the Newtonian concept of gravity exists in the real universe, and hence cannot know that our knowledge-claims are actual. What of the possibility that gravity does not exist at all? What do we have knowledge of then? It may seem that the acquiring of knowledge necessarily depends on truth, the fulfilment of which is unknowable or may not be possible.

The implication of accessibility and confirmation may be quickly resolved when one realises that knowing something does not require the knowing of the knowing. In other words, to know A, it is not necessary to know that A is true. If we are justified in believing A, if A is true, we have knowledge. But if A is not true, then we don't. Not knowing if A is really true or correspondent at all does not affect our ability to know A (if it is indeed true). This quickly resolves the problem of uncertainty in correspondence to a reality we cannot access without the lenses of our perception. Hence the unknowability of correspondent truth claims does not hinder the possibility of knowledge.

What of the latter question? The phenomenalists take an anti-realist approach towards this and yet do not discredit the possibility of knowledge. Although we may not have

a real world that can be proven, we have sense experience; in fact, we have consistent sense experiences across space and time. Perhaps correspondence need not mean correspondence to a physical reality, but an experienced phenomenal world that, though viewed through the lenses of perception, can still be known about through claims that are true by correspondence to this phenomenal reality. This seems to easily subvert the necessity of a world to know about. It is not necessary to know whether the phenomenalists' anti-realist concept of the world is correct, or the realists' belief in a physical world is true. Although resigned to the fact that such a claim is ultimately unknowable, truth can still exist and hence knowledge in terms of true claims is possible. Knowledge hence does not even depend on the unknowable existence of a real world, but is possible in either belief.

Were the unknowability of correspondence to affect the possibility of knowledge, as often as we begin to doubt the authenticity of our knowledge, the truth condition need not be fulfilled by the correspondence to a reality at all. From a formalist perspective, the field of mathematical knowledge merely involves an axiom-theorem system. Mathematics is simply a sequence of deduced theories and equations based on several axioms, broadly coupled across the mathematical paradigms. Hence, we can postulate that the entire mathematical enterprise is a constructed system held in place by the limitations of basic axioms. There seems to be a lack of a reality to which mathematical claims can correspond with. Yet, it would be bizarre to claim that 1+1=2 is not true, or that 6-7=10 is true. It would be even stranger to claim that mathematical knowledge is possible. What, then, do their claims correspond to? I argue that mathematical claims correspond to the very same constructed system they originate from, and are true if they agree, mathematically and logically, with the axioms in place. Such knowledge generated not only has a high degree of certainty but is also consistently useful in areas such as architecture and accounting which correspond to an external world where the possibility of knowledge has already been argued for. Correspondence to a common, objective construct can also bring about true claims and hence enable knowledge.

It would also be interesting to analyse the possibility of knowledge that does not depend on the unknowable at all. This possibility can be encountered under the coherence theory of truth. Truth here comes about as a scale rather than an absolute dichotomy of true and false, fact and fiction. It is resultant from a central idea in a web of beliefs that mutually reinforce and cohere with other beliefs. Hence, the belief system in itself creates truth. Justification comes from the agreeable and coherent supporting ideas or concepts, and truth arises from the coherence with the entire paradigm or web of beliefs, and hence knowledge can arise from coherence alone. However, such a concept is widely debated. While in truth much of the furthering of our knowledge come from such a system of thinking, the core, central claims are taken as true not as a result of their centrality, but rather are the cause of their centrality. Their credibility as claims with high truth-value arises from elsewhere, perhaps from correspondence or other further evidence. It could thus be seen from this that beyond the foundational knowledge at the core of our knowledge field, much knowledge does not even depend on the knowable issue of correspondence. Truth is possible in many ways, as is knowledge, as we understand it to be.

Knowledge is always possible, even when it depends somewhat on unknowable claims. We do not need know or justify everything in order to know; knowledge of certain truth is unnecessary and limiting to the construction of knowledge. Furthermore,

perhaps knowledge is not really as dependent on such unknowable things as we imagine. Indeed, when employed in a totally pragmatic system, knowledge can survive on alternative theories of truth for the sake of furthering that we can reasonably consider knowledge.

Comments:

Your essay is effective in addressing the core issues of the question, and the argument is developed using plausible conceptions of the key terms: "knowledge" and "unknowable". While the penultimate paragraph on coherence is not as well developed, the essay as a whole has satisfactorily addressed the core issues of the question.

Essay 18

Hui Fang Zheng Andre 14A03A

Is history fiction? Discuss with reference to the nature and construction of knowledge in history.

History, often described as being written by the victor, has at various times been described as mendacity, saddled with a political agenda, "unfair" to those not in power, or even rather harshly as a "pack of lies". Yet, history cannot be said to be indeed a pack of lies. While history is fictive in structure, one must realise that it is not fictitious in nature. History does seek to explain why events happened in a certain way, and is not merely about "cold hard facts". It demands an answer to the question of "why" and "so what", and seeks to understand more about what drove and motivated those who came before. In that sense, history is bound to the form of a narrative, where a story is told – complete with beginning, middle and end. And it is also true that history can never fully encompass the wealth of facts of the past – there are simply too many different pieces of evidence for one to conclusively declare that "The History" has been completed. But that does not make history any less true, or any more false. History has its origins in concrete evidence and facts that are not wild, speculative flights of fancy, but rather real events and occurrences that happened in the past. History, too, is continually in a process of negotiation and renegotiation – but a lack of utter certainty does in no way mean that we do not know, or that what history does is false. History is fictive in structure but not fictitious in nature.

History demands an explanation for what happened in the past; it seeks answers to the myriad of "whys" and "why nots". It is not about dredging up relics and records from the past, and placing them on the table or in a museum and leaving without any further explanation – rather, it seeks to understand the causal connections between events of the past. Neither is history mere chronology; rather, history deals with the significance of past events; what they meant then, and mean now, and hence why they happened. When the Spanish Armada fought the British fleet and got defeated soundly by them, historians do not just seek the names of those who fought, and the rulers of England and Spain at that time, but rather the reasons behind the conflict, whose impact sent great shockwaves rippling throughout Europe. History asks why England and Spain fought; and whether there were any other considerations that they took into the picture. Was it because Spain wanted to dominate England and usurp her position as queen of the seas? Was it because Elizabeth I had slighted the Spanish monarchy by denouncing bull-fighting as barbaric? History seeks to establish causal relations between event a and event b, which resulted in significant impact upon potentially not just the immediate community, but the rest of the country, continent, or even world. This leads on to why history, then, must follow a narrative- and hence fictive- structure.

For if history seeks understanding, then in the telling of its findings, history must present it in such a way that it explains the motivations behind actions, and, in doing so, necessarily adopt a point of view. Ranke said history aimed "only to say how it really was"- but to whom? When history interprets and explains events, they are always from a particular point of view about the subject. It is impossible to adopt an

omniscient perspective in order to "tell history"; rather, a particular perspective is needed, and narrative structure and enplotment must be followed. The purpose of the historian, then, is of great importance here – not only does he or she determine what to tell (which will be explained later), but he or she must also decide how to tell it. For example, let us consider the Second World War and the Holocaust. What were these events? Was it the story of the Aryan race tragically defeated by a horde of lesser beings who could not see the light? Or, as most people would accept, was it the story of an insane dictator who nearly single-handedly conducted one of the most systematic genocides in human history? It depends on the perspective one takes. For to the Nazi historian, the former was truly the case; the Aryans were only doing what their destiny as the master race required them to do. To the Jewish historian – and most other historians – the latter was the case, and the impact of such a genocide is still being felt today. Yet, to others, there are still other points of view – perhaps to smugglers and human traffickers it was one of the best and most prosperous times of their business, and to a Jewish refugee a time of pure horror and fear. What something meant to someone depends on the perspective one takes – and those who would criticise history as fictitious point to this as evidence.

History, too, must also decide what to tell, seeming to support the stance that history is fictional. Records from the distant past are too scarce, and a great deal more creativity in trying to reconstruct why certain events happened must be employed; records from the not-so-distant past are too abundant, and a great deal more discretion must be had in choosing the sort of evidence to select to tell a story. No story can ever take into account every single happening. Some parts receive greater focus and attention, whilst others are neglected or consciously excluded. Carr uses the analogy of a fisherman looking for fish (which represents historical evidence). A fisherman must decide where he fishes and what type of bait he uses (how), depending on what fish he wishes to catch. Inevitably, some fish are not caught; on the other hand, some are caught that the historian discards back in the sea. An example: a historian starts with the role of ascertaining the impact of the arrival of Jesus upon the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the religious teachers of the law in Israel. That same historian would probably not spend much time examining Jesus' childhood, or of the subsequent proliferation of the early Christian Church, but rather examine the teachings of Jesus and how it contradicted or supported (the former more than the latter) the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Conversely, a historian seeking to trace the development of Christianity as a religion would focus upon what that previous historian either ignored completely or simply glossed through. This process of the selection of facts hence leads some people to conclude that, since history leaves out certain facts, together with the earlier argument about its narrative structure depending highly upon the perspective of the historian, that history is biased, and hence untrue, that is, fictitious in nature.

Yet, that is not the case. It is true that a certain amount of bias is always present, and that some bias will inevitably remain. But the presence of bias does not mean that an account was untrue. History, while fictive in structure, is not fictitious in nature because it is based upon facts – real events that happened and had real impact upon real people. This is what sets history-books apart from the science-fiction or fantasy books in a bookshop. Where the latter deals with imaginary people and imaginary events that did not actually happen, history deals with people who were once (or even still) alive, and what they did. It does not attempt to speculate and create events that did not happen, but rather to guess at and ascertain the reasons for events happening in the past. Historical interpretation and the construction of historical knowledge

are always bound up with the facts of what happened. For example, the American historian does not chronicle "history" so-called on the basis of what would have happened to America as a nation should they not have had the support of the French to resist the British (at least, he/she does not pass it off as history). Rather, the American historian writes about why the Americans had French support, and offers arguments for or against the stand that French support contributed significantly to the success of the Americans by presenting past records demonstrating French support through troops, munitions, supplies, or even just money, and the difference it did or did not make. This very fundamental grounding of historical interpretation in historical fact is evidence for the case that history is not about the bias and "false" interpretations of "false events", but rather about the likely explanations about the events. History is not fictitious in nature.

That leads us to the last point about the nature and construction of historical knowledge, and hence why it cannot be said to be fictitious in nature – the fact that history is always a continuous and evolving process that can never have been said to have ended – or to end. The significance of certain events changes; new facts and evidence from the past come to light, and this in turn potentially affects how one views the same events. There is hence a continuous renegotiation of what could be a likely interpretation of the facts, but this uncertainty in historical knowledge in no way implies its falsehood. Historians are consistently on the lookout for new facts that can have an impact on and alter the way in which we understand the past – they do not claim to be infallible, but only that the explanation that they arrive at to be likelier, if not the likeliest, given the evidence that they have at the moment. The historian hence desires and seeks truth; he does not run away from, but rather runs toward, what can more likely be taken as the truth. Take the Spanish Inquisition, for example. Initially, we believed that it was a means for the Spanish Church to weed out heretics, those who did not believe in the same religious principles as they did. However, further evidence on the way in which the Spanish Church interrogated and killed those they branded "heretics" reveals that they simply tortured a lot of people who were enemies of the church, but who did not oppose the religious principles which they had, in order to ensure less trouble for the church. Another example: the colonial powers writing native and indigenous tribes off as barbaric, uncivilised, and uncultured, and arguing that by colonising them they were uplifting the natives from a "pitiful" state of barbarism. Yet, an exploration of Mayan and Aztec temples indicates that their civilisation and culture was considerably more advanced than they had been given credit for. Faced with evidence that demands a revision of history as it is known, history has no choice but to acknowledge the existence of such facts that prove another interpretation and narrative of history that much more likely. History does not attempt to suppress the truth. Rather, it aims to tell what coheres with the evidence, whatever that evidence may be, should that evidence be of relevance to the claim that is being made.

To conclude, it is true that history is fictive in structure. Due to the nature of historical purpose and interpretation, it is inevitable that an individual perspective will come into the picture. The fisherman chooses where he will fish, and how history is told (from whose viewpoint) and what is told (with what facts) is not universal, but rather dependent upon the purpose of the historian. What is significant to one may barely be worth mentioning to another. Yet, to say that history is then fictitious in nature would be going a step too far; the historian must ground his/her interpretation in real historical facts and not flights of fancy, and also be very open to the real possibility

that real evidence might emerge that forces a revision of his/her interpretation. A fisherman cannot sell beef, or chicken, and he cannot claim that beef or chicken is fish if it is not! Bound by such constraints, the historian is hence free to posit causal links between events, but ensure it is based on real facts. History, then, is fictional in structure but not fictitious in nature.

Comments:

Excellent argument that is focused on answering the question. Key issues are addressed. Points could be made in each paragraph with greater economy. However, you could be more judicious in your choice of examples. The Nazi example, for instance, is somewhat problematic: it is difficult for any reader to acknowledge the plausibility of the "Nazi historian's" perspective. Probably better to cite examples where opposing viewpoints are both plausible. The other example that is problematic is the historian choosing what to tell about Jesus: this really belongs more in the context of theology or divinity rather than history. Despite the issues with the examples, your arguments still stand.

Comprehension Passage

Even before Plato conceived of the philosopher-king, people yearned for clever, dispassionate and principled government. When the usual run of rulers proves cowardly, indecisive or discredited, turning to the wisdom and expertise of a technocrat, as both Italy and Greece have done in recent years, is particularly tempting.

Part of the attraction of the term "technocrat", however, is that the label is so stretchy. Does it mean just any expert in government, or one from outside politics? How many technocrats, and in which positions, justify a government's "technocratic" label? Does such an administration operate within the political system, or supplant it? For how long? Can a technocrat evolve into a politician and vice-versa? The answers are imprecise and shift over time.

Technocracy was once a communist idea: with the proletariat in power, administration could be left to experts. But the application of science to politics was popular under capitalism, too. A full-fledged technocratic movement flourished in America in the inter-war period: it believed in an economy based on measuring energy input rather than prices, and in what would now be called crowd-sourced solutions to political problems.

This paper first used technocracy in March 1933, when a book reviewer bemoaned the "lurid prominence" of the term. He derided its proponents as "half-scientists...half charlatan", decried their "indefensible" conceptual basis, and ascribed their popularity to "extraordinary" American credulity. Howard Segal, a historian at the University of Maine, says the movement imploded when its leading light, Howard Scott, was unmasked as a failed wax salesman, not the great engineer he claimed to be.

Technocracy and autocracy have long been natural bedfellows. When political power is not publicly contested at all, electability is irrelevant and expertise can give the ambitious an edge. In China, all but one of the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee are engineers. This marks a shift: many of Mao's revolutionary generation had no higher education at all. In contrast, Li Keqiang, who succeeded Wen Jiabao as prime minister in 2013, has degrees in law and economics. Other upcoming leaders are similarly schooled.

However, such unconstrained technocracy is no guarantee of good ideas or decisions. China's engineer-kings threw their weight behind the Three Gorges Dam, for example, despite the prophetic advice of some more eminent scientists. In the SARS epidemic in 2003, the technocrats were initially inept too, putting face-saving ahead of epidemiology. A rapid rollout of China's high-speed rail network was followed in July by a slowdown after a fatal train crash: technocracy did not prevent corruption and poor quality control.

It is not only one-party states that like technocracy. Military officers justifying a coup may use technocratic parlance[1] when they highlight their independence from lobbies and their focus on national interest. Such juntas often bring civilian technocrats into government, or hand over to them when they step down. A common outcome is a technocratic-military hybrid where civilian experts have the economic and social portfolios, but military men the defence and interior ministries.

Singapore is perhaps the best advertisement for technocracy: the political and expert components of the governing system there seem to have merged completely. British-ruled Hong Kong would be a runner-up. The leadership of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has evolved from revolutionary generals to lawyer-politicians and finally economist-technocrats, but with less success.

Countries where electoral mandates are the ultimate source of political legitimacy usually turn to full-scale technocratic governments only for a short time, under a specific mandate and in unusual circumstances. Even a wholly technocratic government can never fully escape politics. In any country, powerful lobbies bargain and wrangle. In a parliamentary system, technocrats must deal with the partisanship and intrigues of an elected legislature (in Athens and Rome, lawmakers are eagerly waiting to trip up the newcomers). They also face public ire if they are seen as sharing out gains or pains unfairly. A brilliant economist sees exactly the needed fiscal adjustment. But deciding how and where to cut spending or raise taxes requires acute political senses. Few technocrats arrive in office with those; learning them can be a slow, costly and politically fatal process.

To overcome these obstacles, a technocratic head of government needs personal stature: such clout makes up for the lack of a formal electoral mandate. A second important condition is a clear external constraint, widely accepted at home by both the public and other political parties. This can be meeting the tough conditions of an IMF bail-out or surmounting some other financial crisis. It can also be joining a club: several ex-communist countries turned to technocratic governments as they struggled to meet the membership standards set by the European Union. Failing that, political backing at home – usually from a popular monarch or president – can give a technocratic government political ballast.

The best kind of technocrat is uneasy about being in power at all. Jan Fischer, the Czech Republic's chief statistician, became an acclaimed prime minister in 2009 when the government collapsed in the midst of the country's six-month stint running the European Union. His main message, he says, was to tell everyone to "protest against this kind of government"; it was a lamentable departure from normal democratic principles, justified only by the most serious circumstances

History suggests that technocrats do best when blitzing the mess made by incompetent and squabbling politicians. But the problem for the technocrat leaders of Greece and Italy is that the source of their woes, the Eurozone's design flaws, stems from mistakes made in Brussels – not least by other unelected experts. Remedying that will take many years, far longer than technocrats' usual political lifespan. And it will need more than just brains and integrity.

[1] *A particular manner of speech, or use of words*

19

Angelica Chong Wen Xin 14A01B

Application Question

The Economist assesses the effectiveness of technocratic governments in different societies.
How applicable are these observations to your society?

The Economist argues that technocracy and autocracy have long been natural bedfellows, implying that they are forms of government naturally suited to each other. I feel that this is applicable to Singapore, given international and domestic criticism of the incumbent People's Action Party (PAP), which has been in power since independence. The PAP is accused of maintaining a stranglehold on domestic politics, thus depriving opposition parties of any reasonable chance of getting a foot in the parliamentary door. These allegations are not baseless. The PAP is definitely technocratic, with its party members and Singapore's ministers all highly educated, often in prestigious universities overseas. The PAP also behaves in an autocratic manner at times: the government has been known to carve up electoral territories come every election to suit their own campaign and maintains the party whip that essentially ensures a PAP-based majority within Parliament when voting on issues. Indeed, the PAP justifies this autocracy by flaunting their technocratic credentials. They maintain that party members are the best people for the job with their economic and technical expertise, and use Singapore's exemplary track record as proof of their effectiveness and therefore the acceptable compromise of less freedom for more progress.

However, this almost dictatorial view of Singapore's government must be qualified. Perhaps in the past, when Singapore was a fledging country surrounded by potential threats and with no economic resources, the expertise of technocrats and the authority of autocrats were essential for success. However, in recent years the PAP, cognizant of public discontent with their power, has relented in its strict controls of political discourse and opposition. The most recent 2011 General Elections, for example, saw a record number of seats in Parliament won by various opposition groups, and even the more balanced coverage in traditional media of the Workers' Party and the Singapore Democratic Party relative to the normally disproportionate focus on the PAP in the lead-up to elections shows us that while technocracy and autocracy are natural bedfellows, it is not always so.

The Economist also asserts that "unconstrained technocracy is no guarantee of good ideas or decisions". While true, this is only slightly relevant to Singapore, given that our politicians are suitably adept at negotiating the political sphere while still making use of technical expertise. For example, while our Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong is undoubtedly knowledgeable, he also is able to make good judgments for the nation and keep corruption at a low – something which is almost unheard of in the world. Rather than simply dealing with the economic side of things, he keeps his pulse on the ground so that public sentiment can help inform his policy decisions as much as quantitative data can. Being rather tech-savvy, he set up a Facebook and Twitter

page to invite young Singaporeans to engage him in conversation about Singapore, therefore opening up avenues for opinions and genuine discourse. What this means is that with the information on the electorate's opinions and raw economic data, our government can then distribute wealth and introduce tax schemes to satisfy both the economy's needs and the people's wants. As The Economist rightly puts it, it seems as if "the political and expert components of the governing system have merged completely".

However, it must be said that despite the expertise of the government and its general political competence, low corruption does not mean no corruption. In recent years, there have been a number of corruption charges filed against officials and highly regarded education officers, from an NUS law professor to the former Singapore Civil Defence Force chief, who were accused of accepting sexual favours as bribes. In these scenarios, it is then relevant for Singapore to remember that technocracy does not automatically exclude moral and political failings. Also, another failing of the PAP is its poor public relations record, which has generated agitation amongst the public. One example is the government's disproportionate focus on a "6.9 million-strong populace" when they released a recent White Paper, which was immediately picked up by society and which caused a rain of criticism to fall on the PAP's head. This unsavoury and insensitive way of announcing information very pertinent to all Singaporeans demonstrates that the technocratic capabilities of our leaders do not necessarily translate into politically astute decisions after all.

In conclusion, I feel that The Economist's arguments are largely applicable to my society, given our technocratic government, with the caveat that not everything is relevant wholesale.

Comments:

Good evaluation of the local political situation. Your response shows sound knowledge of local politics. To improve, do stay away from making mere assertions. Do provide clear reasons (e.g. instead of just stating that "low corruption doesn't mean no corruption", you should have provided your readers with clear reasons to help them understand where you are coming from).

20

Law May Ning 14S030

Application Question

The Economist assesses the effectiveness of technocratic governments in different societies.
How applicable are these observations to your society?

The Economist proclaims Singapore as "the best advertisement for technocracy", and this implies that we have, to some degree, overcome typical challenges faced by technocratic governments. While I agree that, as a whole, we have overcome several hindrances the author lists as roadblocks that impede the effectiveness of other governments, I feel that he fails to take into account the uniqueness of our political climate and overlooks many flaws when deeming it a hallmark of success politically.

The Economist talks about the technocratic movement in the United States of America and how it collapsed when the "leading light...was unmasked as a failed wax salesman, not the great engineer he claimed to be". In that, he emphasises the importance of official qualifications and academic experience in a technocratic leader of a country. Going by this qualification of "success" in an efficient technocratic government, Singapore must have succeeded. Our Cabinet is filled with highly well-educated scientists, doctors, and scholars. For example, a candidate standing for election for President must submit proof of having management or industrial experience, such as having run a company for a certain number of years with a set amount of profits. This, going by The Economist's definition, would then equip our country's government with the ability to seemingly navigate effortlessly through political issues.

The analysis might have been especially relevant to Singapore many years ago when, as a small, new independent nation, we faced external threats from Malaysia and the like due to scarce resources or the lack of established systems. However, given today's relatively stable economy, we now lack the "clear external constant" The Economist lists as an accepted problem to garner support for technocratic governments, thereby rendering the issues discussed in the above paragraph less relevant. Given this unique shift in the political climate of our society, there has thus been growing dissent amongst the people, bringing out one big flaw in the advent of technocracy: that elitism, by virtue of the white-collared, educated nature of technocrats, can result in so-called "ivory towers", to the extent that technocrats are no longer able to relate to the electorate and therefore do not cater to their demands. Given the lack of any pressing external crisis, the focus of the electorate turns to local issues, and without any "popular monarch or president" to "give the technocratic government political ballast" as The Economist puts it, the people can grow disillusioned with the nature of the technocratic government. This can be seen in the recent election of political candidates in the General Election in 2011 from the Workers' Party, who generally have fewer academic qualifications than PAP candidates. In the past, the ruling party would cater to the electorate by releasing, for example, other parties' members O-Level scores or certificates, illustrating poor academic qualification and therefore winning votes in

their favour, but we can now see that it is rapidly shifting. Thus, precisely because of the lack of a "clear external constant" mentioned in The Economist, its fervent claim that Singapore is "the best advertisement for technocracy" is significantly weakened, since "best" implies ongoing success and popularity – something which has been quick to change.

Another relevant observation The Economist discusses is how the "technocratic head of government needs personal stakes". This is something I fully agree with. Our former Prime Minister, now Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, was renowned for his charismatic and resounding personal presence; it is precisely because of his personal competence and influence that the technocratic government may have retained its power. However, with the passing of time his personal presence has done little to stop the declining popularity of the ruling party, possibly because, as The Economist aptly puts it, "the best kind of technocrat is uneasy about being in power at all". Instead, as some online citizens have put it, the ruling party was becoming conceited in power, with even Lee Kuan Yew – in the 2011 General Election – saying that Singaporeans "would [learn to] repent" should they not re-elect the PAP in the Aljunied GRC, which was eventually won by the Workers' Party. This hardly seems like one feeling "uneasy about being in power" but rather a situation in which power has been taken for granted. As such, the unhappiness that the populace now feels with the government was manifest in how the PAP only won 60% of the contested seats in Parliament, as compared to their landslide elections before. Thus, The Economist's arguments definitely apply to Singapore, particularly about the nature of a leader needed for success.

The Economist presents many arguments and conditions needed for a technocratic government to succeed. While some such as competence may be less relevant issues in a more stringent Singapore, it might appear that at first glance that our government has succeeded: the incumbent PAP has brought financial stability to Singapore and has been in power for a long time. This is perhaps, as The Economist puts it, "the best advertisement for technocracy". However, things are changing. Given the issues raised by The Economist and analysed above, it seems that technocracy may no longer be the most relevant political ideology in Singapore. And when our system of governance does change, it will ultimately invalidate The Economist's former premise that we are "the best advertisement for technocracy".

Comments:

Your response shows a good understanding of local issues. To improve, do go on to highlight the reasons why you agree with some of the points raised in the passage.

21

Wee Yen Jean 14A01A

Application Question

The Economist assesses the effectiveness of technocratic governments in different societies.
How applicable are these observations to your society?

The passage makes many observations about the effectiveness of technocratic governments. The most notable ones are that such systems do not necessarily translate into good political leadership (as seen in China), can make costly mistakes (as seen in the Eurozone), and are limited in their effectiveness by their lack of acute political senses. It also observes that they are most effective in solving problems caused by politicians themselves. However, these observations are mostly of limited applicability in Singapore's context due to the success of technocracy in Singapore, making it "the best advertisement for technocrats".

First, the passage's assertion that technocracy is often ineffective as it does not lead to good political leadership does not really apply to Singapore as the People's Action Party (PAP) has had a glowing track record thus far. It supports this by stating that "unconstrained technocracy is no guarantee of good ideas... [and does] not prevent corruption and poor quality control". Although it has made its share of mistakes, the PAP has certainly maintained its performance through consistently delivering impressive economic progress and effective policies. There are significant reasons for the PAP's political dominance and continued support from the people, as the majority of the electorate is satisfied with its governance. It also has had a clean track record relative to many other countries for openness and transparency in governance, which is a continued pull factor drawing investments into the country. In Singapore, therefore, our technocratic government has produced "good ideas and decisions" on the whole despite occasional errors, transforming Singapore "from Third World to First", and maintaining its competitiveness.

Next, the statement that technocratic governments can make costly mistakes is also not really applicable to Singapore. The Economist cites the Eurozone as an example, stating that many of its problems stem from "mistakes made in Brussels – not least by other unelected experts". While the PAP has made costly mistakes, such as arguably allowing an overly rapid influx of foreign immigrants into Singapore that has severely strained its infrastructure, and its inconsistent policies towards population issues, such as "Stop at Two" and "Three or more if you can afford it", these mistakes have hardly been as damaging as those made by the Eurozone governments. Moreover, the PAP government is usually quick to respond with new policies to mitigate any harm. In response to previously ineffective population schemes, the PAP recently introduced an enhanced Baby Bonus Scheme to encourage higher fertility rates and improvements in infrastructure to meet demand arising from a growing population. Thus, the severity of errors made by other countries' technocrats has not directly affected nor is significantly applicable to Singapore's technocracy.

Thirdly, the assertion that technocrats need "acute political senses" is more relevant to Singapore's context. Despite the competence of the PAP, the public has often taken issue with its seemingly bold decisions that sometimes seem divorced from ground sentiment, generating dissatisfaction. The Population White Paper and the recent budget cuts for schools are some examples of the PAP packaging and framing policies in a way that make them harder to accept. It is also an example of the PAP misjudging the climate of unhappiness and dissatisfaction that may make society – or sectors of it – unreceptive. This does therefore affect the effectiveness of technocracy in Singapore.

In conclusion, Singapore is, in many ways, unique and exempt from the many challenges faced elsewhere. Yet it still depends on the quality of technocrats themselves. They must balance technical and political needs with the needs of the populace, and this certainly requires "more than just brains and integrity", but also empathy, sensitivity, and accuracy. In Singapore's case, the skills of technocrats have certainly contributed to their effective decisions and policy making, but it does not guarantee the government's effectiveness on the whole as this depends on other factors as well.

Comments:

You have provided an insightful analysis of the local political situation. You have provided a good range of examples to support your view. To make it even better, do state clearly your reasons for believing that the points in the passage are relevant to Singapore. Refrain from merely relying on examples to prove your point.