



ZENITH 2018

Dear Meridians, this is a compilation of some of the best essays written by your peers. While these essays are not perfect or model essays, there is a lot of merit in them, and they are clear evidence that there are indeed a number of good writers amongst yourselves!

In order for you to better utilise these essays, you could attempt to unpack each question or even try doing an outline before reading them. While you may find some of the examples and points useful for application to other questions, do be judicious in using such information in a manner that is relevant to the POC of the question you are answering.

Lastly, you should not attempt to copy or regurgitate them and hand them in as your own!

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**Any adaptation of a novel for film, television or the theatre is never as effective as the original.’ Discuss.
(GCE 2006 Q1)**

Novels and books are the fuel to ignite a young mind’s passion for reading. Novels are the gateway to an ever-expanding arsenal of vocabulary and the literary genius in youths. In the modernised society we live in today, the quality of adaptations has certainly improved over the years but have they become as effective as the original? Personally, I feel that the words printed in a novel are much more effective in its essence, sparking imagination and strengthening minds than watching any adaptation - be it film, television or the theatre - where people sit motionless for an hour or two as their brains rot from the inactivity.

Adaptations are without a doubt not as effective as the original novels or books. A typical movie runs for an hour and a half on average (and reaches two to three hours at most). How is that enough time to fit an adventure of a protagonist that spans around 300 to 600 pages, like that of Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling? Adaptations realise this problem, which is why the plot is usually reduced and thinned to fit into the movie. A great example of this is the recent debutant Justice League. The plot was very rushed and many backstories that would help the movie run a lot smoother were removed from the original cut. It left many DC Comics fans who follow the comics religiously feeling very dissatisfied and wronged. They were whining about how abrupt the sequences were and even petitioning for a reboot. This clearly shows that adaptations are not (and probably will never be) as effective as the original because it will eventually come to a point where the director has to rush the content.

In addition to my first point, adaptations are not as effective as the original content because a book can definitely enhance the overall experience. While it is true that movies have actual special effects and CGI (computer-generated imagery) to make it more realistic, adaptations cannot include something that a book can: emotions. A classic example is the novel-turned-movie *Gesundheit*, which was adapted into the movie *Patch Adams*. At its best, a movie can only include ‘inner thoughts’ as narrations, but there still does not exist a tangible way to relay the emotions expressed through writing. When strung in a quintessential order, the literary experience can make even a grown man cry. The emotions portrayed in the film can only be expressed through tone, body language, and facial expressions. However, it is more relatable in the novels as even things that are intangible can be written. Such phrases include ‘butterflies in my stomach’, ‘fluttering/palpating of my heart’ and ‘a chill running down my spine’. Adaptations simply cannot imitate that level of relatability with the audience, and thus are not as effective as the original.

Furthermore, novels are a good way to broaden one’s vocabulary and to learn more sophisticated writing techniques from the best. Sitting for an hour in front of an LED display screen with an all-surround sound system will not stimulate the brain that much as it only needs to comprehend what is seen and heard. A book, on the other hand, trains the brain to decipher the meaning of sentences and underlying meanings and maybe even wordplay. A book forces the brain to understand the level of literacy and literature in front of the reader. An exceptional example is the literature book ‘*Lord of the Flies*’. When a person does not understand a word, his curiosity grabs the better of him and he will decide to find out its definition. This helps one expand one’s vocabulary and literacy. When a person reads frequently, he will eventually become an avid reader and think like how the author wrote. None of these benefits can be achieved through the non-simulating adaptations and that is why the originals are much more effective.

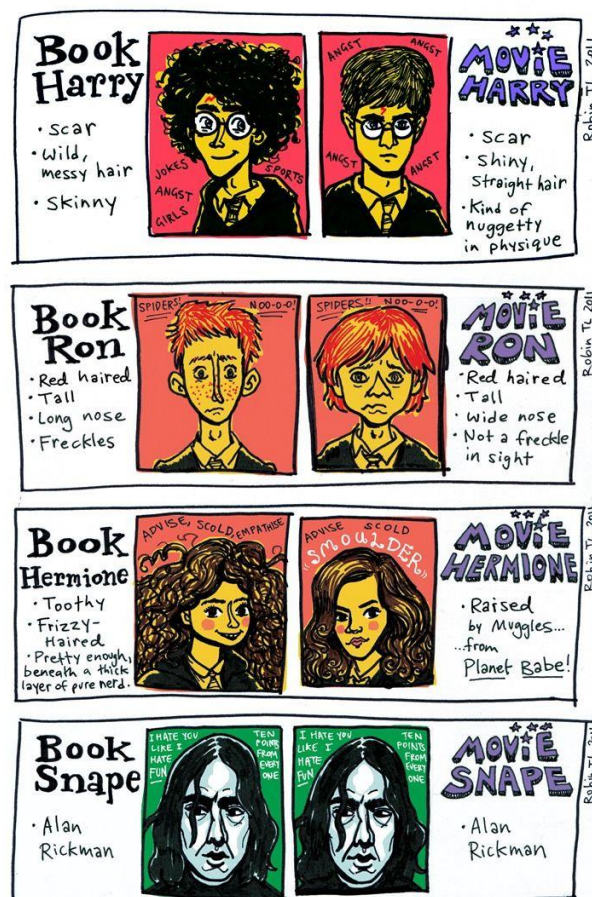
However, critics may propose that most people are audio-visual learners and can hence interpret an adaptation better as they can see and hear rather than read and be forced to imagine. The majority of the population really do prefer to have something where they do not have to put in the hard work to achieve a

level of satisfaction, even if the level is lower than if hard work was put in. I, for one, do not believe in such a claim. Imagination is much better than someone else's view of how it should be. 'You are your own being'. Each individual's imagination and interpretation of the novel may be different, but that is perfectly fine because as long as one gains from it, then that meets the author's objective. You might prefer the protagonist to be short and scrawny, but the adaptations may cast a tall, blonde, athletic actor with an extremely robust figure such as Andrew Garfield to play the 16-year-old teenager Peter Parker, even though the author may not have stated so. Hence, it is evident that an adaptation is never as effective as the original.

In a nutshell, I really strongly feel that adaptations can never live up to the originals and people's expectations of it. The whole point of a novel is to enjoy it as a whole, no matter how long it takes and that cannot be done with films or television series. Novels can also make a person more knowledgeable and intellectual, and lastly, it can make a person feel what the character is feeling. Yes, a movie or television series is easier to comprehend and can adapt to a generation's ideas, but at the end of the day, it is much more fulfilling to read a novel as one's imagination is the greatest weapon.

Ritzkey Pelasuri Bin Mohd Farid (18S308)

Editor's comments: Clear comparative structure, with clear signposts. A good range of examples from both novels and their adaptations make this a competent essay.



Consider the view that we can no longer trust the media to tell the truth. (MJCJ2MYE2018 Q2)



With the increasing prominence of red tape in this world, it is of little wonder that the media has become an unreliable source of information. One may parallel such observations to that of the draconian Soviet Union decades ago, where the rampant use of the media for state propaganda convinced the citizens of falsified beliefs. Yet, given today's context, I would argue that we are still able to put our trust in the media to tell the truth.

Critics who believe that the media is no longer trustworthy may argue that

censorship has forced some media outlets to be restricted in the content they publish. This is especially so in Singapore, where the media has been labelled 'essentially a state organ' by writer William Gibson. While the nation-state lays claim to being a bustling open port, international business hub and financial centre, it lags behind in terms of transparency - the Human Development Index ranked it 154 out of 184 countries, taking into account the degree of freedom extended to netizens, journalists and reporters to express opinions, as well as the efforts taken by the government to respect such freedom. In turn, this has severely restricted the ability of local media to disseminate truthful information on contentious issues such as the recent deaths of national servicemen, thus rendering them unreliable outlets. However, I would challenge this view, and instead argue that unless they are being used to spread propaganda, these limitations faced by the media do not undermine their credibility. In fact, despite censors clamping down on critical voices, reporters have found ways to bypass them. For example, many local journalists have turned to blogging instead of plying their trade with The Straits Times or other traditional media outlets. Similarly, many Chinese journalists have taken to microblogging site Weibo as a way to circumvent the Great Firewall and have become an invaluable source of news to netizens far and wide. Furthermore, it is also only fair to note the fine line between publishing everything one knows and responsible reporting. While it is important to report facts, one must also recognize that the journalist is ultimately responsible for bringing certain issues into public consciousness, some of which may have devastating repercussions on the community. For instance, reporting on suicides remains a highly sensitive issue in many countries due to the potential threat of copycat suicides. Since having contentious issues splashed across the front page of a newspaper may offend public sensitivities, the media must balance between reporting facts and exercising due care in what it reports in order to prevent serious outcomes or public outbursts.

Others may also contend that the media has now become an untruthful relay of information ever since the emergence of 'fake news' in recent years. In a world where the goal is to capture the most eyeballs in the quickest time possible, news outlets have been guilty of not verifying their facts and publishing content which later turned out to be untrue, or simply deliberately releasing hoaxes and disinformation to attract web traffic. The endless rumour-mongering in the wake of terrorist attacks such as the 2015 Paris bombing or the London Bridge attacks in 2017 are unfortunately only the tip of the iceberg. Tabloid journalism that sensationalise crime, celebrity gossip and extreme political views further undermine the trustworthiness of the media. With conflicting reports and claims made by news outlets, television and satirical newspapers on the net, it is of little wonder that it is now more difficult to trust the media. Despite this, I would argue that such instances are being called out by media watchdogs and a growing number of people tired of being constantly fed



clickbait. Efforts are made by members of the public to educate themselves and each other on how to discern falsehoods through fact-checks by microblogs and writers. Closer to home, the recent controversy over historian P. J. Thum's academic writing has led to numerous articles headlined in the likes of 'What You Should Know About Operation Coldstore', permitting the public to learn more about the issue and edge closer to the truth. Hence, while the issue of fake news may lead to the media becoming more difficult to trust, such instances are becoming less prevalent in today's context where facts are now more easily accessed to validate the media's claims.

Indeed, with the increasing universal usage of the Internet, it is now easier for the media to be transparent in their claims. With increased access to information, the media is now more wary of hawk-eyed netizens who can shut down their allegations with the tap of a fingertip. This is often displayed in Japan, where online platforms are largely unregulated, save for websites featuring obscene images. This transparency has provoked outbursts regarding the local media's whitewashing of historical events such as the Nanking Massacre and the exploitation of comfort women. Rather than keeping the citizens within a facade of untruthful reports, the openness of the World Wide Web has instead raised awareness of such instances of false reports and further instigated official requests by government ministries to alter such narratives. Likewise, the lack of restrictions in the Swedish virtual space has made the country a pioneer in media transparency, with open discussions on various issues except for sensitive ones such as those concerning the local military, as photographs of military installations published by the media are said to violate national security. Therefore, the media can be relied on to tell the truth since the rising access to information has forced the media to speak the truth to avoid social repercussions.

I posit that we can still trust the media to perform as a vessel for the dissemination of information. The entire media industry should not be judged by its worst practitioners for journalistic integrity thankfully still exists today. Media outlets are still able to present truthful content to its readers and provide concrete evidence that bolster their claims. For instance, the news organization Channel News Asia has been credited for shedding light on little-known issues within the Asian region. Their series 'Insider' presents documentary-style reports on social issues such as elderly poverty in Vietnam, where the subjects of the report are found to earn less than USD\$2 a day and continue to work up to 14 hours a day as street snack sellers. Similarly, Al Jazeera's 'The Big Picture' examines global issues such as the rise of the far right in Europe as well as the recent surge of populism, and has been lauded for its strong reporting and incisive analysis. Such media reports cannot simply be done by hiring actors and staging the videos, and thus allow the media to be trustworthy in shedding light on such issues. Moreover, statistics presented by the media are a summary of lengthy research findings by reputable companies that cannot be altered: a recent Channel News Asia video clip on rising depression rates among local millennials cited numbers and percentages from an Institute of Mental Health report. While it has its critics, such efforts by the media to touch on once taboo topics should be recognised as a step towards illuminating its readers. Hence, the media can be trusted to provide the truth given its inherent function of raising awareness on factual occurrences around the world.

In conclusion, I believe that we can still trust the media to reflect the truth. While it is true that censorship has prevented the media from providing the absolute truth, such instances are but a narrow conclusion of happenings around the globe. After all, the truth continues to be necessary in the reports by the media: even the Soviet censorship crumbled once rising awareness stilted the state media's attempts to suppress information from its citizens.

Dylia Ang (17A201)

Editor's comments: Valid, well developed and layered arguments give this essay depth and substance.



How far is science fiction becoming fact? (GCE2017 Q7)

From Mary Shelley to Isaac Asimov, science fiction writers would captivate readers from all walks of life by marrying fantasy elements with the solid base of science. In the story of Frankenstein, Dr Frankenstein would bring together an age-old trope of the dead coming back to life, instead of the use of wonderful and mysterious magic, he would use the oh-so familiar scientific method. This use of science over magic creates an air of 'what if's' amongst readers, inspiring people around the world to transform fiction into fact. With technological advancement at its peak, and inventions being discovered that mimic the stories of science fiction, it is thus my belief that science fiction is becoming fact by a large extent.

In the real world, scientists and engineers create inventions by drawing inspiration from stories and nature. Just like how the fallen apple is said to have inspired Newton to discover the concept of gravity, science fiction writers, with their boundless creativity, serves as a major source of inspiration for inventions of the past and present. Notable examples of this would include the invention of the submarine, inspired by the book '20 000 Leagues Under The Sea', and the design of the cell phone being inspired by the handheld devices used in Star Trek. By serving as inspiration to creators around the world, the conversion of fiction to fact seems almost inevitable, as more and more fictitious technologies become grounded in reality every day.

While the amazing new technologies were the highlight of any science fiction story, these stories often times carried cautionary tales, moral and ethical dilemmas that do not exist yet. Isaac Asimov popularised the idea that science fiction should not only predict new technologies, but to also predict the unforeseen circumstances that might come attached with them. Written in a science fiction story, Isaac Asimov devised three laws that are popularly termed Asimov's Law of Robotics today. These laws dictated the behaviour of robots in the stories, setting up the groundwork for the dilemma that Asimov proposed. The laws are as follows: Firstly, no robot may ever harm a human, or through inaction allow a human being be harmed. Secondly, a robot must obey human orders, unless it contradicts the first law. Lastly, a robot must protect its own existence, without conflicting with the first and second law. Some examples of the dilemmas proposed were this: Can a robot be a surgeon, given that it might contradict the first law? What should a robot do when the laws will be violated regardless action or inaction? The questions posed by the works of Asimov still echoes till today, where programmers must decide what action a self-driving car should take given that a car accident is inevitable. Another notable example would be in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). As AI gets increasingly intelligent, the question posed by science fiction writers of the past that we now have to answer is whether or not we should be so reliant on AI in today's world. Big players in the tech industry like Elon Musk have publicly spoken out against the development of AI, fuelled by worries that such intelligent technology could potentially threaten Mankind. What were once fictional plotlines to sensationalise a story have now become a real dilemma in today's world of technological advancements.

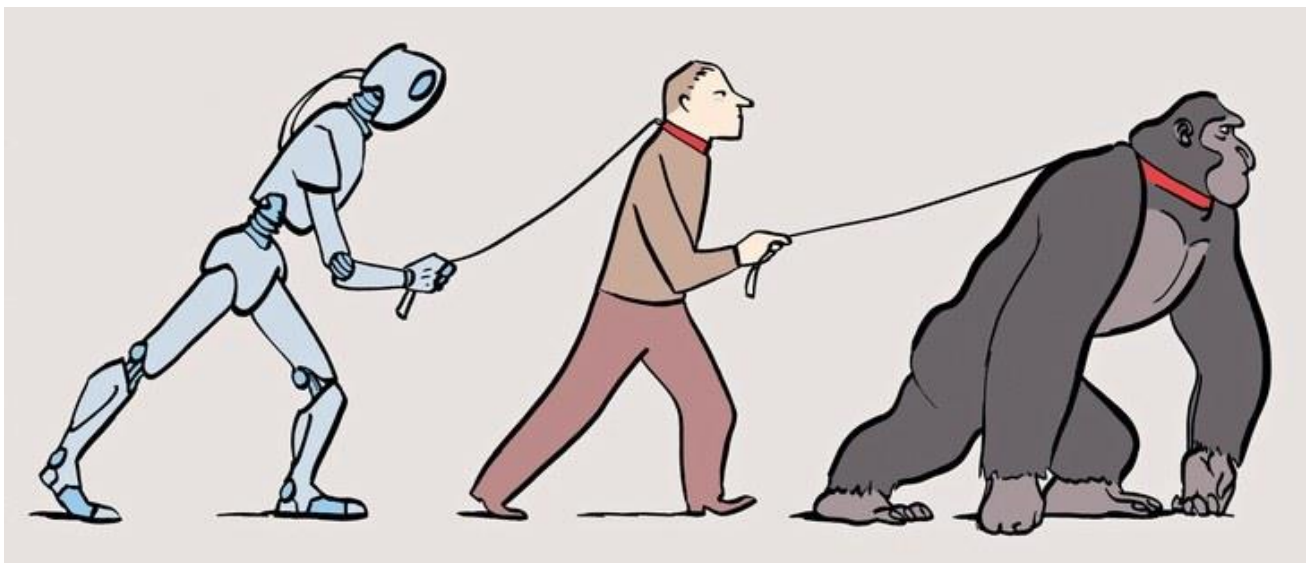
Critics of science fiction would argue that is just as its name implies, fictional. While occasionally some fictional inventions get realised, most fictional technology never gets realised and remain as pure fantasy. Science may be in the title of the genre, but the stories are almost never scientifically accurate. While some may argue that that is the point of science fiction- to create unreal science- they still should not break the fundamental laws that govern our very existence. Notable examples include loud laser battles that happen in the vacuum of space, despite the lack of air for sound to propagate, as well as faster than light travel, despite the speed of light being the physical speed limit of the universe. However, one can argue that we simply have not reached the level of technology that will allow inventors to turn fiction to fact. Just as how we first thought the sun revolves around us or that elements simply consisted of earth, water, air and fire, science has and can be revolutionised, and through a certain scientific breakthrough in the future, what remains as fiction now could very well be ubiquitous in the future.

Another argument that detractors would present would be that science fiction is fictional in not just in its science, but also in its depiction of human societies. With the income gap growing ever wider as humanity progresses, science fiction often neglects or simply glosses over the impoverished in society, and mainly focuses on the wonder and splendour of the hyper developed worlds they are set in. It is simply unrealistic to assume that future technologies will be able to solve this issue of inequality when history has proven time and time again that technological advancements has only led to greater disparity. Another issue that science fiction ignores would be religion. Religious extremity is a growing concern for many countries, as radicalisation of citizens can sow the seeds of discourse among the people, leading to social instability. Science fiction either assumes that religion does not exist in their utopic worlds, or even create new ones to fit their narratives. Given how deeply ingrained religions are in societies today, it is unlikely that they simply are cast off once technological advancement is achieved. While admittedly certain issues and circumstances of societies today are ignored, science fiction has represented other issues that plagues societies today. Problems that have been around since the founding of societies such as avarice and discrimination is very well represented in science fiction, with shows like Star Trek boasting a diverse cast of various species and genders that attempt to showcase a world where humanity achieves technological advancement without the discrimination that pervades societies today.

All in all, the role that science fiction has played in actual scientific developments simply cannot be downplayed, and the ideas and concerns that it carries will continue to translate into reality, just as it has been in the past. Although certain areas of science fiction may seem physically impossible to recreate now, and that certain important aspects of society are left unaddressed, new scientific breakthroughs in the future may provide the opportunity to change fiction to fact, and what science fiction lacks in certain areas is made up for in the representation of the numerous other issues and characteristic that makes up society.

Wayne Lim Zong Wei (17S208)

Editor's comments: The writer has a good command of English, which makes his essay an interesting read. In addition, his knowledge about the ethical dilemma concerning scientific research allowed him to provide the relevant details to fortify his arguments.



Can the use of animals for scientific research ever be justified? (GCE 2017 Q2)

From the dawn of time, humans had been using animals to our advantage, be it the deer we hunted for food, the cows we reared for leather, or the dogs we trained to help us hunt in the wild. In today's age, animals still play an important role for our development and advancement as we use them for scientific research, in order to develop new medicines and to test the safety of products. While some may say that this is justifiable since animals share some similar DNA with us and is thus an effective method to progress in science, the way animals are treated in research is inhumane due to the pain they often experience, and the reduced quality of life as a direct result of these experiments. Since there are other alternatives to using animals, I am of the view that the use of animals is, to a large extent, not justified.

Some may say that it is justifiable to use animals in research as it is the most effective way to get reliable results. Many animals, especially mammals, have the same sets of organ systems as humans do, such as a nervous system and a circulatory system and are very similar genetically. As a result, these animals are also susceptible to illnesses humans suffer from. According to them, by using animals in research, we are able to reliably find a way to treat these illnesses and help us find a cure. Animals such as chimpanzees share 99 percent of our DNA while mice are 98 percent genetically similar to us. Furthermore, many animals have a lifespan shorter than us making it much more efficient to carry out research that involves a lifetime of treatment, such as cancer. Hence, some may think that it is justifiable since it is the most effective way to get good results. However, despite the similarities between animals and humans, it may not be the most suitable to use animals to get reliable results since what works on animals may not always work on us. After all, we are of a different species, which means that we are fundamentally different in physiology and genetics. For example, the sleeping pills Thalidomide, found in the 1950s, was discovered to have caused birth defects in new-borns when taken by pregnant women to relieve pregnancy nausea. The same drug, however, showed no side effects in the offspring of tested mice, rats, hamsters, cats and guinea pigs. Conversely, chemicals that are useful and harmless to us have shown to be lethal when used in higher dosage in animals such as cats. In these cases, using animals for research may misguide scientists into thinking that a certain method does not work and thus stopping research instead of continuing development. Even if the chemicals are not harmful to both humans and animals, a drug can be helpful to animals but have no effect on humans. Over 100 drugs for stroke and 85 drugs for HIV have shown to be effective in only certain animals while not in humans. This shows that while animals are similar to us, it is still not a foolproof way to find reliable results by using animals in research.

Next, some may say that it is justifiable to use animals in research as the results yielded have proven to be beneficial to both humans and animals alike. Many vaccines, such as the polio vaccine which was tested on animals, and the Hepatitis B vaccine which was tested on chimpanzees, have helped both humans and animals in our fight against these diseases. Animals also benefited from research which help fight against diseases commonly found in animals such as rabies, feline leukaemia and Canine Parvovirus. While I agree that research have benefited these animals, it has also caused harm to many animals since research methods are usually cruel and inhumane. Animals as test subjects are forced to feed, inhale substances, or are deprived of food or water or suffer injuries or burns inflicted on them to study the healing process. In a test called the Draize Eye Test used by many cosmetics companies, rabbits have their eyes held open while irritants are introduced into their eyes to determine the effects of cosmetics if our eyes were to come into contact with it. Other tests include LD50, which means 'Lethal Dose 50 percent', which is used to determine the concentration of toxin required to kill fifty percent of a population of test subjects of animals. This process often involves rats or mice, and is carried out without pain relief, to ensure the integrity of the experiment. However, this causes severe discomfort and extreme pain in these animals. Hence, while using animals in research can benefit both humans



and animals after a cure is developed, many animals suffer in the process of finding a cure or even finding results that are irrelevant to animals, such as in the case of cosmetic products.

Furthermore, it is not justified to use animals in research since there are increasingly more alternative methods to carry out research as technological advancements continue to take place. 'In-Vitro Testing', which involves using tissues grown in laboratory conditions, can be used to determine the effects of drugs at the cellular level. Researchers also found a way to grow human skin artificially in the lab, known as EpiDerm, which can be used to determine effects of irritants on the skin. With the rise of artificial intelligence, scientists can also use computer simulations to predict the impact of drugs on the human body. Other methods include Microdosing, which involves introducing a very small dosage of drug into volunteers after which their blood samples are then extracted to analyse. While animal testing may have been the most viable option in the past when such technology was not available, with increasingly more alternative methods made possible by advancements in science and technology, we are increasingly running out of excuses to use animals in our research which hurt them or end their lives without them knowing.

Lastly, it is costly for governments to allow the use of animals in research. To prevent animals from being mistreated in terms of living conditions such as space, ventilation, food and water, some governments require veterinarians to conduct regular checks on companies that use animals in research, incurring costs on the government. Also, to ensure reliable results, a large population of animals is required to be tested on, which translates to the high cost needed to grow and feed these animals in government-run research projects involving animals. This is much costlier as compared to other ways of research. One such example is the biotechnology company Empiriko, which produces synthetic livers that can predict liver metabolic reactions. This has reportedly successfully saved them the cost of conducting experiments on roughly a thousand rats and a hundred dogs. Since it has been proven to be viable and less costly, it is definitely not justifiable to use animals in research as it is very expensive to do so as compared to other synthetic simulations.

To conclude, using animals in research is unreliable, cruel to animals and costly. Since there are other alternatives to using animals, I am of the view that it is increasingly not justifiable to use animals in scientific research. As we accord more rights to various groups of people in the name of social progress, perhaps it is also time for us to start accepting and protecting the rights of animals too.

Goh Yong Jing (17S201)

Editor's comments: An effective evaluation throughout the essay fortifies the student's arguments and strengthens the rebuttals presented. This, coupled with extensive details to support his arguments, enables the student to present a strong case for his stand.

To what extent is clean energy the answer to the problem of climate change? (MJC2MYE2018 Q6)

Climate change or global warming, as it is more commonly termed, is one of the greatest dilemmas humanity is facing today. It refers to the increase in global average temperatures, which is often attributed to human activity, with the increased production of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. This can lead to dire impacts such as erratic weather patterns, rising sea levels, poor harvests and food insecurity. In an attempt to address this problem, governments and organisations have come up with a multitude of proposals, with one main solution being clean energy. I take the stand that clean energy is not the answer to the problem of climate change as there are substantial difficulties in successfully and completely implementing it worldwide.



Environmentalists argue that clean energy directly addresses the root of the problem of climate change. Climate change is caused by the constant and excessive release of harmful gases, such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which trap excess heat on the earth's surface and break down the ozone layer. These gases are commonly released in large quantities due to the burning of fossil fuels in many day-to-day activities. Fossil fuels are used extensively in transportation, industrialisation and their usage has increased drastically in the past 100 years as humanity pursues oil-extensive industrialisation. By making the switch to clean energy in the form of wind turbines and hydroelectric dams, producers and consumers alike would be able to decrease and eventually overcome their over-reliance on fossil fuels. This would then result in the decrease of harmful gases released into the planet's atmosphere, promptly solving the problem of climate change. However, this seemingly perfect solution would not play out so seamlessly in reality. Clean energy, unfortunately, does not produce as much energy as fossil fuels and there needs to be a substantial number of wind farms and dams in order to completely eradicate the need for fossil fuels. Rapidly developing countries, such as India, who require as much energy as possible to achieve their ambitious advancement plans, may not be willing to make the switch to clean energy. Even some developed nations would be unwilling to give up their competitive edge by switching to a less efficient source of energy. There are only a few examples of countries who have managed to integrate clean energy into their lifestyles, such as Denmark and Iceland. However, the majority of the world still requires fossil fuels to function at full efficiency and the problem of climate change remains unsolved as clean energy cannot be a perfect substitution for it.

Detractors also argue that a growing number of enlightened nations have recognised the economic and environmental benefits of clean energy, and are enacting tax breaks and other policy measures to partially offset the advantages enjoyed by fossil fuels. Growing political support and the right mix of policies for clean energy have created demand for these technologies which has led to dramatic growth, while advancing renewable technologies and driving down their costs. With oil and gas prices soaring amid deepening instability in the Middle East, renewable energy is emerging as a bright spot in the global energy economy—and is poised for a worldwide take off. Detractors would cite that these factors make clean energy a viable solution to climate change. According to a new study from the Worldwatch Institute, solar power generation has more than tripled globally in the past five years, and wind power generation has nearly quadrupled. Be that as it may, even with stronger political will to fight climate change through clean energy, the large extent of human ignorance about our planet's condition will render clean energy ineffective as the solution to climate



change. Truth be told, most people do not concern themselves with the well-being of the planet and will continue their destructive habits without pausing to think about the consequences of their actions. The value of convenience is ranked too highly in our daily lives and this can be illustrated by the increasing amount of personal vehicles in roads all over the world. Personal transportation, with the prime example being cars, is one of the main culprits for causing climate change, due to their sheer number and high fuel consumption. Governments and organisations have been pushing for people to use public transportation instead, such as the Green City initiatives in Singapore, but this has had only limited success. Despite the rapid development in the quality of public transport, as evident in the complex subway systems in Japan and Singapore, citizens still make the choice to purchase a car if they can afford to. Shifting away from consumers, producers too are at fault. In their never-ending pursuit of higher profits, few companies and organisations would be willing to change to clean energy if it means lower financial returns. Those who do are usually smaller companies and firms that want to increase their sales by appearing environmentally friendly. Clean energy is already recognised as a viable alternative to fossil fuels and has been for the past decade, but the unchanging mindsets of human beings in ignoring the problems of our planet has and will remain as the greatest obstacle towards solving climate change.

Moreover, clean energy is not the answer to climate change as it is not without its flaws and these too, cause environmental damage, although not directly in the form of climate change. Clean energy is most commonly obtained by harnessing the energy of nature such as wind energy, hydroelectric energy and geothermal energy. These are harvested through the construction of wind farms and hydroelectric dams. However, there needs to be a significant amount of clean energy before it can be used to substitute fossil fuels and thus these constructions usually occupy massive amounts of space. This is where the problem arises. For example, the building of hydroelectric dams is typically done by excavating a huge amount of land in front of a water body, like rivers and waterfalls. The dam is then built at the mouth of the water body to ensure that the moving body of water can produce kinetic energy. This process results in the destruction of wildlife habitats, which include a significant number of trees and the removal of any human settlements in the area. Popular cases include the Hoover Dam in the USA and the Three Gorges Dam in Hubei Province, China, where approximately 1.4 million inhabitants were forced to relocate due to the construction of the dam. The environmental damage done to surrounding wildlife and their habitats also indirectly leads to climate change, as forests are important sources in reducing the levels of carbon dioxide in the air. Thus clean energy, while being the answer to climate change in theory, also causes substantial environmental damage in its construction and may ironically contribute to the very problem it attempts to solve.

Lastly, clean energy might be too late in reversing the effects of climate change and a more radical solution is required. Climate change has been ongoing for many decades but its effects has only been recognised in more recent times. During the mid-1900s, countries embarked on huge scales of oil-extensive industrialisation in an era known as the Golden Age of Capitalism. Oil consumption was at an all-time high and people did not think about the environmental repercussions as long as it meant advancement and progress. Till today, factories all over the world are spewing out enormous amounts of sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide and other harmful gases. The hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica has widened at a terrifying pace since its discovery, and 3 million tonnes of ice has been shed into the world's oceans. Sea levels have risen by up to 2 centimetres, causing flooding in low-lying parts of the world and the increase in global temperatures has sparked off a chain of natural disasters, one prominent example being the series of hurricanes that bombarded the USA in 2017. Even with such foreboding signs, countries are still in talks about moving towards clean energy, with recent ones centering over allowing a 1.5 degree Celsius increase in global temperatures in the next decade. This is to allow most countries to develop significantly enough to be independent of fossil fuels and instead, use clean energy as their main source of energy. The damage to the environment has already been done and clean energy, if not implemented swiftly across all countries, would not be able to reverse the effects of climate



change and would at best, only slow down its progression. Thus, it is not the answer to resolving the problem of climate change.

In conclusion, clean energy is only an effective solution if adopted immediately at every level of energy production and by almost all countries, in a bid to halt the damage caused by climate change. Seeing that this is not going to occur anytime in the near future, and the inability of humanity to overcome its own ignorance, clean energy will not be the solution to solve climate change. Rather, a conscious effort by governments and international organisations to change human mindsets to be more concerned about our environment would be more effective in answering the problem of climate change. Extensive scientific research in the development of a miracle 'cure' to reverse the effects of climate change would also be helpful in addressing this problem. Without significant effort to back it up, clean energy will remain effective only in postponing the inevitable.

Owen Tan (17A301)

Editor' comments: The essay is characterised by a clear, effective argumentative tone with evidence of personal voice. There is good depth and development of arguments. The well-developed and wide range of examples also display knowledge of the issues.

**'Military Strength is just as important as good diplomacy.' Do you agree? (MJCJ2MBT2018 Q4)**

Over the years, mankind has seen a change in approach towards foreign affairs. Throughout our primitive and early years of development, military strength was seen as the only way to defend one's own nation against others. However, in recent times, countries have increasingly seen the benefits that good diplomacy brings, and have mostly opted for this civilised approach, rather than the mobilisation of the military. Given this development, I am inclined to believe that good diplomacy is much more important than military strength.

Opposers of my view may argue that military strength is just as important as good diplomacy in the context of resolving a conflict. They argue that good diplomacy and military strength should be of equal importance when resolving conflicts within or between nations. This is because military strength offers the state the ability to attack and defend when needed, while good diplomacy with the opposing party will be able to aid in resolving the issue. Such cases have occurred where both good diplomacy and military strength were utilised, such as in the case of the Sri Lankan conflict between the majority Sinhalese government and the Tamil Tigers. During the conflict, the Sri Lankan state had to ensure good diplomacy with the Tamil leaders, with India as the middleman for both ethnic groups. Simultaneously, they had to use military strength to fend off attacks from the militant groups of the Tamil Tigers. Therefore, the case above shows how military strength is just as important as good diplomacy, as the two-pronged approach is sometimes necessary in times of conflict, where there is a need to protect civilians. However, I believe that good diplomacy is still more important than military strength because if diplomacy was implemented as a preventive measure, this conflict would have not have escalated. In relation to the example above, the Tamil Tigers may not have caused an uprising if the government did not oppress them through the use of military strength, and stir feelings of inequality and injustice. Hence, good diplomacy is still more important.

Another argument that opposers of my view would make is that military strength can be more important than good diplomacy, as it is able to give the nation credibility, unlike good diplomacy. Military strength can be seen as more important because tied with such strength are ideas of prestige and development of a nation. These opposers argue that because of the perceptions often associated with military strength, it should be of more importance than good diplomacy as it can bring nationalistic pride and grant the government international prestige. For example, in World War Two, the victorious nations were those that had military superiority. The USA was seen as a key player, and is to this day regarded as a superpower. Britain also boasted a strong naval fleet, and has also been a strong nation. Therefore, it is argued that because of the notion that military strength is directly related to national strength, it should be prioritised and is thus more important than good diplomacy. However, this view is anachronistic and is not suitable in today's context. The global context today, with increased globalisation, requires an evolved perspective of national prestige and strength. In a highly interconnected world where there is increased cooperation with many countries in many sectors, a country with military strength would likely lose out to a country that has stronger diplomatic ties. Thus, military strength is not necessarily more important than good diplomacy, and my view still stands.

I argue that good diplomacy is more important than military strength because it can build good relations among nations. If military strength was seen to be of equal importance, countries would still be seen as hostile as it implies the desire to use this military strength. Good will among countries can help a nation much more, in times where military strength falls short, such as natural disasters, and other issues that are unrelated to military conflict. For example, when Japan faced the worst earthquake seen in years, some of its nuclear plants had been destroyed with other forms of infrastructure damaged, and there were of course numerous casualties. The international body had extended a helping hand to Japan. This was also seen in Southeast Asia during the Aceh earthquake in 2004 where the countries sent needed relief to the area. Goodwill is forged through good diplomacy, and it also helps to bring peace and humanise political relations, as it is the basis of



mutual aid. Thus, forming good relations through good diplomacy with other nations, through for instance creating goodwill, should be prioritised over military strength.

Good diplomacy should also be seen as more important because maintaining military strength is costly and is not beneficial for all nations. Military strength cannot be achieved by all nations, as some nations are not endowed with such resources to build a strong military and thus should not view military strength as important as good diplomacy. More importantly, good diplomacy can also be seen as an approach to acquire military security. Unlike military strength that requires manpower and involves continuous upgrading due to advancements in military technology, good diplomacy allows for good relations, and hence forming of alliances between countries. This is seen in the many international organisations such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) that allows for nations to band together and ensure each other's security. This is especially beneficial for countries with limited resources and manpower. NATO is a regional organisation that combines the military contributions of many nations to ensure the national security of individual nations, on the basis of good diplomacy. Hence, not only are they able to reduce conflict in the region, but they are also stronger as a region against foreign threats. Therefore, good diplomacy is more important than military strength as it is able to achieve better intended results of security, at a far less costly price.

Good diplomacy should also be seen as more important than military strength as it is able to develop the country in multiple aspects - economically, socially, and politically - without any trade-offs in the process of developing one compared to the other. In terms of military strength, because it is state-funded, it may be able to achieve political stability but often times other important social and economic factors are neglected. For example, in the case of Myanmar, because of the military strength the government seeks to maintain, social stability was often imposed forcefully with the use of the military, and the economy was in shambles due to the bloated military budget. This shows how military strength is only able to achieve certain aspects of development. On the other hand, good diplomacy is able to develop a country in all aspects. For example, good diplomacy helps in economic development, which in turn bolsters the growth of both the social and political aspects of a country or region. An example would be the regional organisation of ASEAN which was founded on good diplomacy among the Southeast Asian countries. Each nation is able to provide another with aid in different aspects in which they lack. For example, Singapore provides educational programmes that allow students from ASEAN nations to utilise its advanced educational system. Moreover, these programmes are non-binding and thus, these students will be able to return to their country and contribute to develop them socially, economically, and politically with their acquired education. Therefore, because good diplomacy is able to develop a country much more holistically than military strength can, it should be prioritised and seen as more important than military strength.

In conclusion, I believe that because of the different contexts and situations of nations, they may take approaches that they may see fit. However, I strongly believe that in this day and age, good diplomacy should be seen on a level above military strength, because of the many benefits that military strength is unable to achieve. Moreover, what military strength can achieve, good diplomacy can achieve better.

Diana Ratih Permatasari (17A301)

Editor's comments: Clear organisation and signposts. The writer showcases her breadth of knowledge on international relations through a good range of examples which are quite well developed.

**How far is it possible for one country to forgive another for its past actions? (GCE 2015 Q2)**

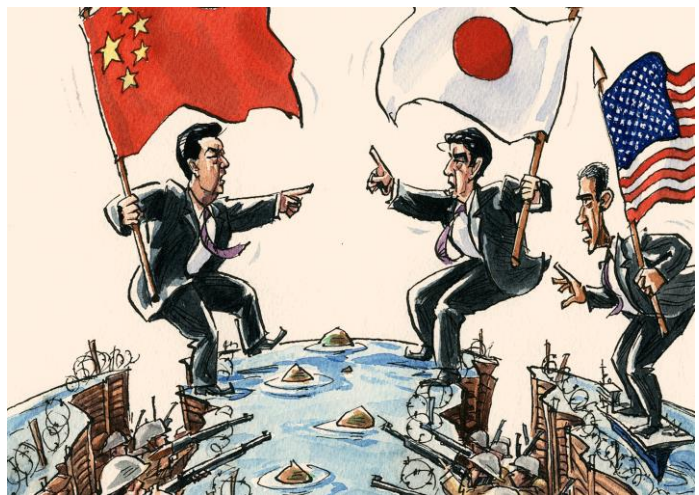
Throughout history, virtually every civilisation has had some degree of a 'dark past'. As human beings, we possess primal instincts that cause us to crave for things that others possess, while stubbornly protecting what we do have from others. This flawed, yet very 'human' aspect of mankind has often resulted in disagreement and conflict between countries throughout the ages. Sometimes, these conflicts can escalate to a point where countries commit horrifying atrocities, with brutal acts of mass rape, genocide, war, subjugation and the like, leaving much damage, both physical and mental in their wake. While we cannot change the past, we can certainly attempt to move on, and shape the future, albeit it may not be easy at times. For this reason, while I do acknowledge to some degree the viewpoints of cynics who believe that the damage caused by a country's past actions, the stubborn attitudes of their leaders, and ongoing conflicts between countries would at times be too great a barrier to enable reconciliation between two countries, it is my firm belief that with strong determination, the passage of time and the opening of new circumstances, it is indeed possible for a country to forgive another for their past actions.

Those who believe that it is nearly impossible for countries to forgive each other for their previous actions often argue that due to the magnitude and severity of the perpetrating country's past actions, the impacts and damage caused by said actions still linger on in present times. These pessimists point to the numerous horrors many countries have committed throughout history, with many of these atrocities executed being so shocking and traumatising that one unaccustomed to conflict would surely think of as inconceivable, both in severity and magnitude. Such acts often leave behind long-lasting impacts that may even continue to be felt to this day, making it all the more difficult for citizens in a country to simply turn away from the memory of another country's past actions. Some examples of these past actions that are so atrocious include Britain's history of colonialisation, subjugating and exploiting the numerous natives of countries. This was particularly observed in African nations like Ghana and Uganda through a mix of 'diplomacy' and brute force, forcing the chieftains of these 'lesser' countries into signing unfair trade agreements that gave the British the rights to own their land, and mercilessly killing and enslaving those who did not agree to their 'fair negotiations' through their more technologically advanced weaponry. The impacts of such widespread colonialisation are still felt by many of these affected countries today, with many of these African nations experiencing territorial disputes with each other due to poorly defined borders set prior to their independence by the British, and poorly developed economies due to these countries' citizens being denied rights to education and jobs during their time as a colony. Some of these countries still feel some resentment to the British for their colonialism, and in some extreme cases even committed acts of revenge against the British, as seen in the case of South Africa, where racial populism and anti-white sentiments are still prevalent. This was clearly demonstrated in 2017 when some officials in government positions began to directly target whites with threats in official speeches and set quotas that denied ownership of mines to non-blacks. In such cases, it may be near impossible for a country to forgive another for their past actions as the impacts of previous atrocities may still be felt and remembered very strongly by citizens of the country victim to said past actions.

Critics may also further argue that due to some countries still being involved in ongoing conflicts, there may be a significant amount of tension barring these countries from finding any possible way to forgive each other for their past actions, especially if current conflicts are built on past actions. As these countries are still engaged in disputes with each other, they would likely be far from willing to come to terms with their histories until their current conflict is resolved, as doing so could be viewed as 'surrendering' or allowing the other country to gain an advantage over them in their current conflict. In short, there is too much at stake and distrust present between said countries to concede to and forgive one another in any form. Looking at the case of Israel and Palestine, both countries have committed their fair share of atrocities, with numerous Palestinian Muslims having suffered discrimination and racism in majority Israeli-Jewish populated lands, and many Israeli

Jews suffering from persecution and acts of violence at the hands of Palestinian authorities. Despite both countries having a significant number of citizens, especially the younger generation, who wish to pursue peace and to move on from these past crimes and injustices committed by both sides, many of the older Israelis and Palestinians, along with the countries' leaders still refuse to accept any proposal of negotiations or parley between each other. This could largely be due to unresolved territorial disputes, the most significant one being which country has ownership of Jerusalem, a holy city sacred to both the Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims. These very unresolved disputes breed significant anger and distrust, coupled with underlying religious issues between the two groups who have equally strong convictions in their beliefs, make any possibility of a near resolution to the conflict, let alone forgiveness of all atrocities committed by both countries virtually null. This seems to indicate that countries will never be able to forgive each other for their previous disagreements and actions while they still have disagreements in the present.

Those who scoff at the notion that a country could ever forgive another for their past actions also cite the actions and comments of some countries' leaders, who stubbornly refuse or resist reconciliation, making any semblance of forgiveness non-existent. They argue that leaders of countries that have committed crimes, injustices or atrocities in the past have often, for various political reasons, refused to apologise for or sometimes, even acknowledge their country's dark past. This causes other countries who have suffered from said country's previous actions to feel anger and hatred, as they feel the leader of said country is neither respecting history nor accepting responsibility for the damage done by their predecessors. One leader guilty of such behaviour today would be Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. This leader of one of Asia's most developed and wealthiest countries is well known for his blatant refusal to acknowledge the numerous war atrocities committed by the Japanese in World War Two, especially by fellow Asian countries like China, who suffered loss of territories and mass rape at the city of Nanking at the hands of Japanese troops, and Korea whose older citizens constantly accuse Japan of not admitting to their usage of



Korean 'comfort' women for prostitution during their annexation under Japan. Despite there being significant evidence to substantiate these accusations against Japan, the current leader of the land of the rising sun still refuses to acknowledge them, even generating greater anger from the citizens of the above mentioned countries by frequently visiting war shrines of Japanese soldiers and refusing to pay war reparations to Korea unless Korea removed 'The Statue of Peace', a monument dedicated to the remembrance of the suffering and trauma experienced by Korean 'comfort' women during World War Two. These actions made by Prime Minister Abe have led to significant bilateral tensions between Japan and countries that have suffered from Japan's actions during World War Two, with many citizens denouncing Prime Minister Abe's refusal to accept responsibility for his countries' past despite significant factual evidence of these atrocities, as well as Japan's potential to help these affected countries given its current wealth, power and influence in the modern geopolitical world. This lack of justice, equity and inaction has made some believe that as long as a country's leader does not express any desire to address its nations' past injustices, countries can never truly forgive one another for their past.

However, while some political leaders are indeed stubborn in resisting reconciliation, I would like to argue that more often than not, these leaders are a small minority, and that in fact, numerous countries' leaders have apologised and are even actively working to help those countries that have suffered at the hands of their



predecessors. Germany is an exemplary role model with regards to this argument, whose leaders have been dedicated to righting the numerous wrongs committed by the Nazis against the Jews, Israelis and other European nations. For almost 60 years, Germany has made several war reparations to Israel, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union and in 2013 even agreed to provide 772 million euros to fund nursing care, social services, and medication for 56,000 Holocaust survivors around the world. The Germans have since been on friendly relations with the above-mentioned countries, with these countries having largely forgiven and sometimes even praised Germany's leaders for being unwavering in their commitment to righting the wrongs of their country's past actions. Indonesia is also another country whose leaders have been working to make it up to countries they have harmed in the past, most notably with East Timor whom they subjugated and annexed in 1975, having since made efforts to help East Timor refugees who were displaced from their homeland during East Timor's struggle for independence. In these cases, all the 'victim' countries have for the most part, forgiven the perpetrators, and are even on relatively good terms with them, showing that while difficult, countries that show genuine sincerity in helping those they have angered in the past can indeed lead to both nations looking past their former actions and forgiving one another.

Moreover, despite the previously mentioned difficulties in reconciliation, I genuinely believe countries can forgive each other for their past actions, especially with the passage of time. Many countries which have had previous conflicts with other nations, or were directly involved in the atrocities committed in the past, might initially harbour immense feelings of resentment and anger. However, over time, changing mind-sets and population demographics can result in citizens of a country that have experienced horrors at the hands of another state, wishing to forgive and move on from the past. This is especially prevalent in today's increasingly globalised world, where the descendants of citizens of countries that have been affected by conflict with other countries have enjoyed lives in an environment that is relatively free of the horrors of the past, and are even getting increasing opportunities to meet and work with descendants of the very countries guilty of committing the horrors their predecessors experienced. This enables them to form new friendships that could overcome any discontent they might have with the citizens of said country. This has been accompanied with the trend of many older citizens wishing to avoid talking about and harping on the horrors they faced in the past, in the hopes of letting their children live happy, free lives unburdened by the past actions of a foreign country. One such example would be the Protestants and Catholics of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland respectively. Despite the bloodshed during the Protestant movement in the 20th Century, many Catholic and Protestant children can now be seen living and playing happily together, relatively free of any anger, discrimination or animosity towards one another. This is a far cry indeed from the feelings of their predecessors who experienced discrimination and death nearly 30 years ago. This shows that while some countries' citizens might have immense hatred for another due to previous conflicts, over time, new generations who are innocent and mostly free from the impacts of the past, and growing desires from older generations to establish peace and happiness for their children could indeed cause such hatred to subside, making the possibility of a country forgiving another for its past actions very much possible.

Finally, a country can forgive another for its past actions if they find new reasons for collaboration to derive mutual benefits. After the end of World War Two, many countries that were once enemies have since set aside their previous war atrocities and worked together to improve their nations' economy, society's quality of life and for other various pragmatic reasons. In such cases, both countries' leaders recognise that the benefits of forgiveness and collaboration far outweigh continuation of harbouring grudges or anger against each other, and thus choose to forgive one another for their 'dark' past. This can be seen with the nations of Singapore and Malaysia, who, despite their numerous territorial disputes, have leaders who continuously attempt to keep relatively good relations with each other in order to improve both nations' economies. Japan and the United States of America also demonstrate this pragmatic stance, with both countries having a long history of economic and military cooperation to improve Japan's economy, way of life and military defence, despite the



two nations having been at war in the past with numerous casualties on both sides due to the nuking of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Americans, and the bombing of Pearl Harbour and other American trading ships at the hands of the Japanese during World War Two. This has resulted in Japan becoming one of the few Asian countries with an extremely high quality of life, and the United States of America having significant business trading with Japanese firms, proving that with the numerous benefits attainable by collaboration, countries can take a pragmatist approach, forgiving each other for past actions and working together for a prosperous future.

In conclusion, it is indeed difficult to assess the true extent of damage and horror caused by the numerous conflicts between countries throughout history. Some of these atrocities might be extremely severe and may still have lingering effects in the aftermath of these conflicts, making the possibility of mediation and forgiveness relatively difficult, and even seemingly impossible at times. However, it is my view that while it may be tough, it is definitely not impossible for a country to forgive another for their past actions. T'Challa, the protagonist of the Marvel Film Black Panther, famously said, 'Now, more than ever, the illusions of division threaten our very existence. We all know the truth: more connects us than separates us. But in times of crisis, the wise build bridges, while the foolish build barriers. We must find a way to look after one another as if we were one single tribe'. Similarly, the wish for countries to forgive each other should not be dismissed as wishful thinking, for no matter how far-fetched the possibility of it occurring might seem, our nations are becoming increasingly interconnected in this modern world, and the potential benefits and possibilities that can be unlocked through collaboration are far too great to pass up over holding grudges. Countries and their citizens should strive to forgive, rather than hate each other for the past, and work together in harmony for the sake of not just themselves, but for their children, and the future generations to come.

Dylan Lee Pak Han (17S414)

Editor's comments: An intelligent and persuasive response. The essay has a clear and differentiated topic sentence in every paragraph, and is rich in examples to support the arguments.

'Harsh punishments create more problems than benefits.' Do you agree? [MJCJ2MYE2018 Q12]

'I did it. And I'll do it again.' These are the words of the infamous Ted Bundy, one of America's most notorious serial rapists and murderers in the 20th Century. Bundy was eventually hanged, but his death sparked off a debate as to whether the punishment was too severe for someone psychotic like Bundy. I would argue that although harsh punishments do give rise to certain problems, the benefits that they yield ultimately outweigh the problems they cause.

Prima facie, it may seem cruel to deny criminals their opportunity to have a second chance. Thus, detractors of my argument will claim that harsh punishments give rise to the problem of the lack of rehabilitation for the criminals. The English social activist, Elizabeth Fry, once said, 'Punishment is not for revenge, but to lessen crime and reform the criminal'. This points to the view that the justice system should aim to coddle and re-educate criminals, to change a hard core murderer or drug trafficker into a contributing member of society. I would concede that rehabilitation efforts for criminals around the world, such as Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project and America's Anti-recidivism Coalition, are of a noble cause and have achieved some success in helping to reduce criminal activity and offering criminals a chance to pick themselves up from their shattered lives and move on. However, there is only so much the rehabilitation efforts can do. The age-old saying that 'A leopard never changes its spots' may sound like a cliché, but it actually applies to many criminals. The



American criminal justice system does not espouse overly-severe forms of punishment, yet the recidivism rates in the USA are among the highest in the world. This is despite the government's efforts to rehabilitate criminals and the country is already struggling to fit all of the criminals in their already over-crowded jails. Therefore, harsher punishments may deny the criminals' rights to a second chance, but they have already forfeited it when they decided to commit a crime, and the justice system should not have to bear the additional burden of having to reform them. Thus, harsh punishments are much more beneficial than harmful.

Others may argue that harsh punishments may be misused as governments may use them as a tool to further their own agenda and oppress human rights. For example, criticising the Communist regime in North Korea could land one's entire family in labour camps for three generations, effectively stifling any opposition to the government. In Saudi Arabia, the need to affirm the Kingdom as the scared hub for Conservative Islam means that the government adopts Sharia Law, under which stealing is considered to be a crime punishable by having one's hands amputated and apostasy is punishable by death. However, it is simply unfair to completely write off the benefits of having harsh punishments based on such examples. Such abhorrently harsh and seemingly medieval punishments only exist in a handful of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes around the world, and even these countries have been facing international pressure to reform their system of punishment. As such, such misuse of harsh punishments is mostly limited to a few isolated examples. With the rising sentiment of democracy globally, even those few examples may soon be a thing of the past. Hence, such misuse of harsh punishments is a minor problem in comparison to the benefits they bring.

There are also those who argue that harsh punishment, in the form of long prison sentence, provides a breeding ground for even more aggressive and violent behaviour amongst inmates, thereby contributing to higher recidivism rates, which society must still address. Studies on the American prison system for instance, indicate that of those prisoners who were rearrested, more than half were arrested by the end of the first year of release. As problematic as this may sound, I believe that, ultimately, harsh punishments do help to actively get criminals off the streets for as long as possible, helping to make our society a safer place to live in. It functions as a check-and-balance system, ensuring that criminals pay dearly for their crimes and are off the streets, thereby helping to rid society of any major threats. For example, Singapore's Internal Security Act gives



the government the authority to jail criminals, like terrorists, for an indefinite period of time, which directly benefits the country in the form of increased safety. In America, a district court sentenced notorious paedophile, David A. Holley, to 275 years in jail for molesting dozens of children, with no chance of parole. While this may seem excessively harsh given that Holley will invariably die in prison with no chance to be rehabilitated, it ultimately kept a serial child predator off the streets, indirectly saving hundreds of children that could have become his potential victims. As such, harsh punishments like these are extremely beneficial to the safety of the large community.

Harsh punishments also serve as a formidable deterrence to other criminals and potential criminals to think twice about committing crimes. If punishments for crimes were as light as a fine or a few weeks in jail, criminals would not be deterred to commit crimes as they will simply get the equivalent of a light tap of the wrist if they were to be caught. Therefore, harsh punishments need to be in place to deter criminals as they send the signal that the crimes are simply not worth committing. For example, in 1921, the American Federal Court sentenced Chicago White Sox player Joe Jackson and seven others to a lifetime ban from the sport of baseball for fixing matches. This served as an excellent deterrent as the cases of match-fixing fell drastically as players did not want to risk losing their lucrative careers. Currently, in Australia, the Victoria County Court is seeking to jail Cardinal George Pell, the Catholic Archbishop-Emeritus of Sydney and The Vatican's de facto Finance Minister for allegedly sexually abusing children and covering up the sexual abuse of children by members of the Australian clergy under his charge. Although this may seem excessively harsh for a frail elderly man in his late seventies, it sends a strong message to deter any other member of the clergy from covering up sexual abuse cases in the future. Hence, harsh punishments not only help to keep criminals from re-offending, but also prevent crimes from happening in the first place.

Another criticism of harsh punishments is that it may destroy the offender's self-esteem and affect one's employability. All this could make re-offending more likely, thereby undermining societal welfare. Yet, one must not forget a major benefit of having harsh punishments: the fulfilment of retributive justice, especially for the victims. Harsh punishments, like life imprisonment and capital punishment, may appear blunt and unforgiving, but they are necessary to bring justice and solace for the victims. The religious commandment 'to forgive those who trespass against us' is much easier said than done in reality. For many, the only way to obtain peace and closure is to see the perpetrators of the crime brought to justice and punished as heavily as possible. The family members of the victims and the prison guards cried and cheered when Ted Bundy was finally hanged on 24 January 1989, a testament to the relief and closure that one gets when one sees that the perpetrator of a crime that affected them is punished in the harshest way possible. Although it is impossible to quantify the amount of emotional and mental trauma and damage inflicted on the victims and their families, punishing the criminals as harshly as possible is the best that the criminal justice system can give them.

In conclusion, it is not always easy to justify meting out harsh punishments due to the diverse circumstances under which crimes are committed, and the courts must not neglect the circumstances under which the crime is being committed when deciding the severity of the punishments to mete out. Extraordinary circumstances, like mental defects and accidental deaths, must be taken into account. That being said, the judicial system must still punish the perpetrators and ensure that justice is served. Although justice is to be tempered with mercy, it must never lose its sense of retribution, for it will no longer be justice. This is exactly why we need harsh punishments, for they create more benefits than problems on the whole for society.

Zou Haiwen (17A201)

Editor's comments: This essay shows breadth of knowledge on the subject matter, with some apt examples cited. It also shows effective comparison for most paragraphs.