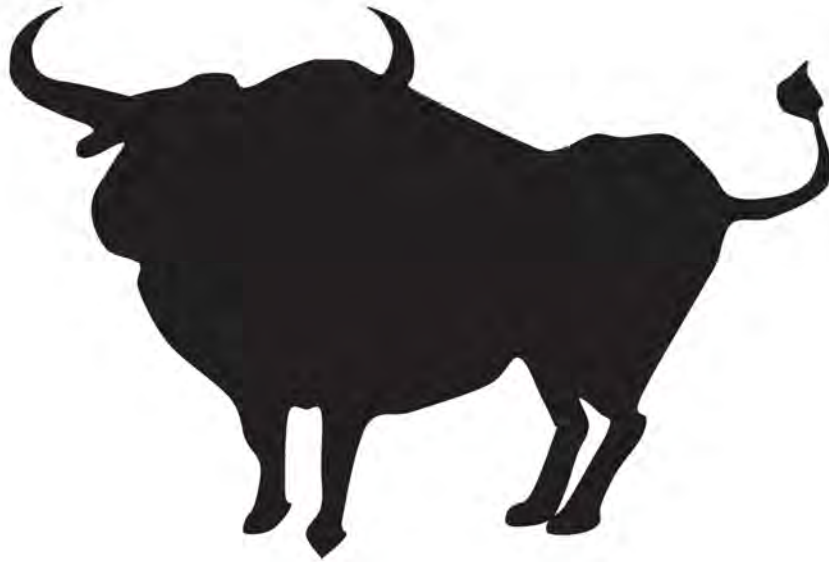


# KS Bull 2021

## Issue 2



# Raffles Institution

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**‘It is harder than ever to be a journalist today.’ Comment.**

“Freedom of the news is freedom of journalists to advance their own agenda.” A statement that was consistently asserted by Singapore’s founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, has ostensibly become the truth in the eyes of many. Many governments and authorities around the world have begun to subscribe to this belief, and thus view journalists and the potential power of their articles to create unfavourable outcomes for society as a ticking time bomb. Consequently, policymakers have put in place a slew of measures to regulate their reporting. With the rise in regulation of media, the ever-dangerous political landscape that journalists must navigate, and the increasing competition from non-traditional sources, I opine that it is harder than ever to be a journalist today.

Optimists may argue that with the rise of new media platforms, journalists can reach out to a large audience, and the articles they publish can be accessed easily by all, therefore making their job in relaying information to the masses easier than ever. Indeed, the Internet and the social media platforms it provides serve as an alternative conduit for dissemination of news to the masses, at an unprecedented speed and ease that could not have been imagined with physical newspapers or television broadcasts. Many reputable, traditional news outlets such as The New York Times or The Washington Post have established their online presence through websites or Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts, allowing people to obtain up-to-date news anytime, anywhere, without the need to deal with the physical distribution challenges of the antiquated newspaper. This is particularly convenient for journalists, since they can now reach out to their audience more rapidly, and publish truths that need to be broadcast urgently. For example, in 2017, journalist Elena Milashina alerted the world to a violent purge of men suspected to be gay in the Russian Republic of Chechnya. With the speed that online platforms provide and the ease at which people could access these platforms to read the news, she successfully warned many of the state-sanctioned detention, torture of gay men, effectively saving their lives by prompting them to go into hiding or flee from the area. Hence, the easy accessibility and speed of new media platforms empowers journalists to relay news faster than ever, to more people than was originally possible, thus enabling them to fulfil their jobs as truth-seekers better than ever. This not only applies to journalists from traditional news

outlets, but also to those individual ones that work from non-traditional platforms such as Substack. The newsletter-esque website enables journalists to publish articles, without the need to be employed by an established news outlet. Already, famous journalists such as Glenn Greenwald and Matthew Yglesias are among the most-subscribed-to journalists on the platform, and they enjoy greater freedom in what they publish, without regulation or censorship by news editors, allowing for more reporting and discourse regarding current affairs. Thus, the growth of new media platforms has indeed made it easier than ever to be a journalist today.

While the above point is irrefutable, I believe that the increase in regulatory laws, the progressively dangerous and polarised landscape, and growing competition from other platforms has made the journalist's job today far more difficult than ever before.

The rise of autocratic government or even democracies of a less liberal nature has led to greater regulation of the press, pressurising journalists to publish articles that are favourable to those in power. With the growing power of journalists to reach out to the masses and sway the opinions of the public, many politicians have become wary, and thus have clamped down on them with iron fists. This is especially so with repressive governments in places such as North Korea, Russia, China and, increasingly, Turkey. In 2016, as part of Turkish President Erdogan's personal war against independent media, he shut down 131 new outlets. In particular, he replaced the office of editors of popular newspaper, Zaman, with people of his own choosing, which led to the newspaper's complete reversal in stance from being very critical of the government to glossing over any news that could be perceived as dissident. As of today, 90% of traditional media outlets in Turkey are controlled by conglomerates with close ties to the government, giving the authorities unchecked power over the media landscape. Turkey is not an anomaly – similar situations are taking place all over the world. With the Chinese government's decision to shut down democratic newspaper Apple Daily in Hong Kong, to Russia's implementation of a new law that threatens journalists with hefty fines or jail time for publishing news that 'negatively affects the public', governments all over the world have, in different permutations, established strict checks and balances on journalists, severely restricting the ability of journalists to publish unbiased truths that may reflect badly on the government. Facing fear of being fired by draconian employers or charged with lawsuits, many journalists have no choice but to obey obediently and publish distorted truths or even mendacious propaganda. Thus, it is more difficult than ever for them to be unbiased and objective when reporting news due to heavy state regulation.

In addition, with the increasingly dangerous political landscape, journalists sometimes face threats to their lives for publishing controversial truths. The landscape today is

similar to a minefield—; journalists ought to be wary of the danger of angering powerful stakeholders, and must be keenly aware of lines that should not be crossed. An example that epitomises this would be the murder of Slovakian journalists Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in early 2018 by unknown assailants. The time of his death was especially chilling, since it coincided with the publication of a draft, in which he identified ties between highest echelons of Robert Fico's administration and an Italian mafia group. His death served as a warning to all journalists of truths that should not be told, lines that should not be crossed. His case is not an exception, for similar events have occurred in the past, but it can be argued that in recent years, the risk to journalists' lives has increased, with the entry of more dangerous stakeholders such as organised crime groups, terrorist organisations, or rogue states, and the cutting-edge technology they may possess that enables faster tracking down of individuals to inflict harm on them or their families. While the journalist's main role is to uncover truths and shed light on them for the sake of public welfare, as fellow human beings, we simply cannot disparage or denigrate them for omitting content or turning a blind eye to truths in order to protect their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. The role of journalists today has therefore become an increasingly dangerous one, making it harder than ever for them to report accurate truths without facing threats to their lives.

Lastly, and more insidiously, the growth of social media platforms has resulted in an increase in competition in the journalism industry, making it more difficult for journalists to survive financially. While social media has indeed expanded the reach of journalists today, the ease at which users can upload content to a large audience has enabled virtually anyone to be a 'reporter'. This does not bode well for traditional reporters since the deluge of content may overwhelm and inundate viewers, possibly causing some important reporting to be missed out or neglected. In addition, the architecture of social media platforms may even be disadvantageous to the traditional reporter – algorithms that prioritise engagement over everything else have a propensity for promoting misinformation or conspiracy theories. This not only takes away advertising revenue from established news sources, but also puts junk news, and misinformation on an equal footing with factual reporting by credible news outlets. With the cut-throat competition for eyeballs, clicks and advertisement revenue, journalists who publish sensible, factual articles may lose out compared to those who employ dramatic headlines or embellish their articles with sensationalised, inaccurate details. This is evident from how a 2016 Facebook post claiming that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump as president was shared a million times, five times more than an article on Trump's tax returns by reputable newspaper, The New York Times, in the same time frame. Despite the outright fallacious nature of the former, ignorant users were more enticed by its controversial nature and thus shared it more widely.

In the end, facing such competition, traditional journalists may also succumb to sensationalism to stay relevant in the industry and sustain themselves financially, which leads to an overall decline in quality of news. Hence, journalists today have to contend with increased competition who may steal their revenue and livelihoods, and have to fight against the temptation to compromise their journalistic integrity and have to persist in ensuring the veracity of their news.

In a nutshell, it is indeed harder than ever to be a journalist today. With growing pressure from various stakeholders and regulation by the state, we simply cannot expect journalists to be politically agnostic, nor can we expect them to give up their lives to uncover dangerous truths for us. Non-traditional outlets also threaten the position and role that traditional, established journalists play in our society, making it increasingly difficult for them to navigate the media landscape, both financially and socio-politically. Nevertheless, the core of journalism is a noble one as it aims to uncover truths that may be withheld from the public. While we should be critical of all news and not take whatever we read or consume at face value, it is vital that we recognise, affirm and commend journalists who remain true to their roots and who take great risks to deliver accurate, truthful reports of what is happening around the world to us.

**Marker's comments:**

*Tianna, this is a really enjoyable and thought-provoking read. There is a very good grasp of profound shifts occurring in today's world that exert severe impacts on how journalists can go about doing their work. There are still a number of AFLs to consider, ranging from better treatment of concessions and perhaps a more curatorial eye in selecting arguments. Still the depth, thoughtfulness and skilful use of illustration shown easily places this in Band 2. Very good range shown in expression. Instances of felicitous expression noted, and some personal voice is also discernible. Well done.*

**‘It is harder than ever to be a journalist today.’ Comment.**

“We exist to hold the state to account.” These were the words of Ali Velshi, a CNBC correspondent, after he was met with a flurry of rubber pellets from the police on live television as he was covering last year’s Black Lives Matter protests in America. Over the years, the role of the journalist has not changed drastically: a journalist is still expected to provide accurate, fair and objective news reporting in a timely manner, and indeed must “hold the state to account”. In today’s world, seeing the rise in digitalisation, many believe that such a role has become much easier to fulfil. However, in the light of the growing tensions between the state and the media, as well as the ever-changing socio-political landscape, it is apparent that a journalist’s role has only become more complex in our current world.

Still, detractors of this line of reasoning cite the growing adoption of technology as a key input that simplifies the entire news reporting process, enabling journalists to have an easier time on the job. Today, technology is embedded in every stage of the process. During the research phase, the vast repositories online, such as Wikipedia, greatly streamline the data collection process. Even interviews that are in-person are a thing of the past, as they can now be conducted over a quick and convenient Zoom call – something that the news agency Vox often does, as evinced by countless soundbites with experts that they sprinkle in their videos. During the writing stage, artificial intelligence in the form of fact and grammar checkers can often be utilised. Last but not least, the widespread use of social media has made such sites an optimal platform for dissemination of their findings, allowing journalists to garner engagement from individuals all over the world. In fact, particularly on Twitter, these journalists have become celebrities in their own right. A salient example is Fabrizio Romano, a sports journalist who covers rumours about football players’ potential transfers, developing a cult following on the platform because of his accurate Tweets that often are posted earlier than reports by other sports journalists. Clearly, there is no denying the host of benefits arising from technological advancements that have facilitated the entire news reporting process and made journalists’ lives much, much easier.

On the other hand, it would be myopic to solely focus on the myriad of ways social media has streamlined the process of reporting, for it has had other, more insidious

effects on the industry. Firstly, it is precisely the adoption of social media that has caused a permanent shift in the demands of what good journalism is, as news corporations try to seek out the most viral and eye-catching headlines to pander to the algorithm and, in so doing, enforce much higher demands on their journalists. It is no secret that media conglomerates, with their profit motive, are driven by their insatiable appetite for engagement. And on social media, only the most striking and visceral posts draw the most attention. The corollary of this is that it has become all the more critical for journalists to engage in on-the-ground reporting, in order to not only report the news first, but also to get a first-hand and optimally more emotional view of events. This means that the journalists are often put in the firing line (in Velshi's scenario, this literally was the case), where their well-being is second to the story. In fact, during the Black Lives Matter protests, a black CNN reporter was actually arrested on air, further highlighting how the welfare of reporters is often compromised for the sake of a viral-worthy story. A video of the incident was even posted on YouTube by CNN and has been seen by millions across the globe, and while it can be argued that this was done to raise awareness of systemic racism in America, there may also be the ulterior motive of leveraging the unfortunate scenario for views and engagement. Therefore, given the increasing need of sensational content that can result in journalists finding themselves in dangerous and unsafe circumstances just for a timely headline, it is safe to say that a journalist's life has become tougher in today's world.

Secondly, the increasing censorship in certain countries has complicated journalists' lives, as they struggle to balance fair and accurate reporting with the needs and wants of the states. Whether it is to erase events from the national psyche such as the Tiananmen incident, or simply maintain harmony in a conservative society amidst an increasingly liberal world in Singapore's case, the reasons for censorship are endless. However, when such guidelines are not followed, it can lead to disastrous consequences for journalists. In the most extreme cases, their lives can be upended overnight. China is notorious for this, and with the newly implemented social credit system, they are able to shape the lives of journalists who try to contradict the national narrative. In particular, as reported by Al Jazeera, there have been investigative journalists who have been blacklisted on the system – such that they cannot travel around the country or enjoy leisure activities – for trying to expose government corruption. Although this is definitely an extreme case as China has one of the most censored press globally, it ostensibly underscores the ability of the state to influence a 'deviant' individual's life, thus deterring journalists from being completely transparent and objective in their reporting, for it is not in their best personal interests to run afoul of the law. Therefore, the power dynamic between the state and the media has prevented the media from efficiently acting as the Fourth

Estate and interfered with the ability of a journalist to be unbiased and objective in fear of repercussions, thereby making their lives more complex in today's world.

Lastly, given the increasing education of the global population, readers have become more critical thinkers and do not accept news bites at face value, thus making journalists' lives all the harder as they must put in the due diligence to ensure accurate reporting. Today, the proliferation of fake news in recent years has undermined the credibility of media outlets worldwide, suggesting that journalists have to work doubly hard to fact-check their stories, lest they face severe consequences. Recently, ChannelNewsAsia came under fire for reporting on Harsh Dalal, a 19 year old Singaporean "CEO" who ran a company worth \$25 million. The piece undoubtedly was published due to its sensationalist nature, but the cadre of citizen journalists locally were able to dissect it and expose Dalal as a fraud, tarnishing CNA's reputation in the process. This negative example brings to light the cutthroat nature of the industry – with one wrong move, and one unchecked fact, the entire reputation of the establishment can be permanently damaged. The onus is thus on the journalist to be extra careful and stringent, and this heightened degree of meticulousness necessitated by the global critique of news outlets amidst the industry's very own fake news "pandemic" has made it harder to be a journalist than ever before .

In conclusion, while digitalisation has indeed made the menial process of reporting simpler and less time consuming, today's world has indubitably altered the nature of the role, and has inevitably placed our journalists in the line of fire, at the mercy of the state, and under even more intense public scrutiny – all of which have made their lives harder in our modern day and age. Sadly, the quest for fair and unbiased reporting may ultimately result in unfair consequences.

**Marker's comments:**

*An insightful response offering sustained analysis of contemporary developments which impact journalists such that their work of truth-seeking and fact-checking is overall made more challenging. A cogent and well-controlled essay!*

**Should environmental sustainability be given  
greater priority in your society?**

Charles Kettering once said, “Problems are the price of progress”. Not many aphorisms fit Singapore more aptly. We have developed from a third to first world country in less than half a century, but with this inexorable progress comes a slew of challenging issues. From inequality to discrimination, one global problem that has presented itself to Singapore is preserving the environment. Some feel that Singapore has given sufficient priority to environmental sustainability, given the large number of nature groups that advocate for the protection of the environment as well as government policies. Others feel that Singapore should do more, as we are a hub of consumerism that contributes to pollution, an island nation vulnerable to environmental issues and a “green city” with a reputation to uphold. With these in mind, I agree that environmental sustainability should be given greater priority in my society.

Those who feel Singapore has given sufficient priority to environmental sustainability often cite the many ground-up and top-down initiatives proposed to ensure the government, companies and consumers lead sustainable lifestyles that do not harm the environment. One could say that there has been a shift in societal mindsets, a shift away from apathy about the environment and towards genuine care for the world we live in. From songs like “Save My World” to mascots like Water Wally, Singaporeans are frequently exposed to the concept of saving the environment. In 2016, the government signed and ratified the Paris agreement, designating Singapore’s first goal as bringing greenhouse gas emissions down to 36% of emissions in the 2000s. Start-ups like Project Terra, which encourages sustainable fashion through upcycling, also plays a role in promoting environmental sustainability. Considering these initiatives, and many others, it is fair to say that Singapore has definitely placed significant priority on sustainability. Expanding further on this thought, some say that Singapore has thus placed sufficient priority on sustainability and should focus on other domestic issues like discrimination or inequality. Certainly, the impacts of climate change and the benefits of the solutions we have implemented cannot be observed within a short time frame, compared to issues like discrimination, where incidents of verbal and physical abuse often make headlines, many would be inclined to believe Singapore

should be giving more priority to these issues, not just environmental sustainability. Hence, taking into account our already extensive list of initiatives and other seemingly more pressing issues, some feel that Singapore should not place more priority on environmental sustainability.

On the flip side of this argument, many opine that Singapore, along with most of the developed world, have not done nearly enough to advocate for environmental sustainability. In around seven years, the world is expected to warm by 2.4 degrees, 0.9 degrees higher than the target of the Paris Agreement. Tuna populations in the Pacific have dropped to 2.6% of 20th century levels. Climate change is a global problem, but why should Singapore be worried enough to place more priority on environmental sustainability?

Firstly, from an individual's standpoint, we should place greater priority on environmental sustainability as Singaporeans are guilty of polluting the environment and sapping the Earth of its natural resources. With rising affluence and globalisation, the phenomenon of consumerism has reached our shores. From online shopping, to bubble tea stores, Singaporeans and their consumerist habits have been detrimental to our environment. Every year, 900 million kg of plastic waste is discarded. The plastic is non-biodegradable and is incinerated and stored at landfills like Pulau Semakau. The National Environment Agency also reported that we throw away a whopping 744 million kg of food waste a year, the equivalent of more than 2 bowls of rice per person each day. Without a doubt, Singaporeans could be more environmentally sustainable. We could, and should, recycle our trash. We could stop using our air conditioners so often, and we could even opt to use the public transport system instead of driving polluting cars. The huge inertia that we have to change our habits can be attributed to both the convenience of our modern lifestyles, and put simply our lack of concern for the environment. With all that said and done, how can we say that Singapore has given sufficient priority to environmental sustainability? More has to be done. Awareness has to be spread in schools and online, and more policies must be implemented to guide us toward a clean, sustainable lifestyle. Singapore may produce only 0.11% of global greenhouse gas emissions but we cannot afford to hide behind these numbers and be satisfied with what importance we have placed on environmental sustainability. Hence environmental sustainability should be given more priority in my society.

Secondly, Singapore must prioritise environmental sustainability as it is an island nation, surrounded by water and dependent on seas trading routes to carry our economy. First, considering that we are an island nation, rising sea levels mean not only that our land is shrinking with each passing second, but also that the living spaces of residents are at risk. More than 30% of the island is less than 5m above the

Singapore height datum. In other words, any rise in the sea level may jeopardise the utility of these areas. Singapore's sea levels have been rising at an increasing rate, from 1.2mm a year three decades ago, to 1.5mm a year in more recent times. We simply cannot afford to let this issue go unnoticed, and it is fair to say we must do all we can to stop sea levels from rising. Putting aside how small we are and thinking about our limited impact, it is only reasonable that we as a nation devote more resources to solving the issue that threatens livelihoods and living spaces. Additionally, knowing that Singapore is dependent on our water for trade and our economy, it would be of utmost importance for businesses and the government to ensure rising sea levels do not destroy our ports and potential as a trading hub surrounded by water. Therefore, Singapore should place more priority on environmental sustainability, as we will be severely affected by the repercussions of being unsustainable. Behaviour like wasting food and electricity all contribute to an unsustainable environment and a warmer climate, which Singapore must avoid. More attention should be given to areas like electricity usage, wastage of scarce resources and how polluting businesses are in the country.

Lastly, Singapore has to uphold its reputation as a green city and should thus prioritise environmental sustainability. Since our founding, the late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has emphasised the need for Singapore to be a city in nature, with trees and green as far as the eye can see. That desire of Lee Kuan Yew has persisted till this day. Amidst our sprawling urban landscape, what makes us stand out from other concrete jungles across the world is our lush nature, which has perfectly encapsulated the theme of a "Garden City". From the Botanic Gardens to Gardens by the Bay, eco-tourism has also crept its way into our daily lives. To keep these unique aspects of Singapore alive and give them a space to thrive in, it is essential that all Singaporeans promote environmental sustainability. On a global scale, the effects of climate change must be mitigated, lest intense heat waves and droughts cause our gardens to wither and die, and along with it part of our national identity. On an individual level, we must care for the environment, ceasing our littering and opting for sustainable lifestyles. The Singapore government certainly recognises this, but at the same time, current measures are ineffective. Our recycling rate for plastics is at an all-time low of less than 5%. Litter is seen all across parks and beaches. Recently, visitors to wetlands in Singapore, such as Sungei Buloh, made headlines on Mothership for catching animals and playing with them. Some even brought them home, instead of protecting them in their natural habitat. Though many of these actions are small, they all stack up and what results is clear gaps in our efforts to achieve environmental sustainability. Singapore has done its part in prioritising environmental sustainability and is certainly not apathetic to the problem. However, considering the gaps in solutions and the reputation we have as a green city, we cannot be satisfied with the current state of

affairs. Hence, environmental sustainability must be given greater priority in my society.

In conclusion, I feel that environmental sustainability should be given greater priority in my society. This is so as we are an island nation, and a “green city” on top of that. Our current way of living is far from sustainable for the environment and thus we should place more priority on environmental sustainability. Wendell Berry once said, “The Earth is what we all have in common”. This indisputable fact must be the cornerstone of Singapore’s campaign to be more environmentally sustainable. We must recognise we only have one planet, and that every action we take impacts our communities, country, and the world. Encouraging environmental sustainability is not just the role of the government, but also that of individuals and companies. Only through cooperation can we do our best and live a sustainable lifestyle.

**Marker’s comments:**

*Matthew, this is a good comprehensive answer that gives impressive and relevant details of why more is needed in Singapore for sustainability. You clearly show why, despite other needs, Singapore needs to look at sustainability, and you do so by referring to the global nature of this problem. Good effort!*

**Discuss the view that the world would be better off  
with more women in leadership.**

In 2020, the number of female heads-of-state in the world declined from 15 to 13, indicating a possible lack of support for – or supply of – women at the fore of leadership. Could this be due to a disillusionment of society with the capabilities of female leaders, and does such a view truly hold water? In my opinion, females are not only equally capable leaders as their male counterparts but also display greater competency in many areas. Hence, the world would be better off with more women in leadership, especially in the trying times of today.

Firstly, female leaders have been shown to possess a decisiveness and calmness in the face of a crisis that their male counterparts lack, enabling them to nip problems in the bud rather than letting them fester. Mounting anecdotal evidence suggests that female leaders are able to adeptly conduct crisis management by remaining calm and objective, quickly taking the course of action most beneficial to their people. A pertinent case in point: the performance of global leaders in the raging COVID-19 pandemic. While male leaders of countries such as India and America failed miserably to contain the virus – and possible worsening the situation in the process – exceptional female politicians such as Tsai Ing-wen and Jacinda Ardern swiftly implemented lockdowns and travel restrictions long before the world recognised the true severity of the pandemic. It is their flexibility and ability to make tough but necessary decisions that enabled them to suppress death tolls to six and four respectively, and ensure that schools stayed open. This efficiency and sense of normalcy retained in their nations is indeed a stark contrast to the havoc and surging death tolls in other male-led countries not unfamiliar to us on the news. Thus, as noticed by media outlets such as Forbes (which even ranked Jacinda Ardern as the top leader in the world today), female leaders have a better ability to keep their cool during emergency situations, taking the necessary courses of action and effectively mitigating the crisis. Clearly, the world today would benefit if more female leaders with such qualities were in power.

Secondly, females in positions of authority also have a tendency to be more humane and kind, unlike male leaders who may have a lower capacity for empathy. This could possibly be attributed to the nurturing role females take on throughout their lives as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. It is these traits that make female leaders so desirable in the cutthroat, dog-eat-dog nature of our society today – one characterised by selfishness, frivolity and apathy towards those in need. While other countries slammed their doors shut on refugees fleeing their war-torn and poverty-

stricken homes, even placing spikes and barbed wire at their borders to keep them out, German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed thousands of Syrian refugees into Germany, providing them with a safe haven and a new life. Despite this earning some voter backlash, Merkel stayed true to her values of kindness and charity. This enabled her to be a leader who saw past the votes and approval ratings, instead using her position to benefit the lives of many in need. Another excellent example of empathy uniquely displayed by a woman in leadership would be Norway's Prime Minister, Erna Solberg. During the COVID-19 pandemic, while other countries rushed to do the bare minimum of implementing restrictions and enforcing cold, hard regulations in a draconian manner, Solberg organised a 'kids-only' press conference to alleviate the fears children had regarding the pandemic. This novel but yet painfully obvious approach gained international approval due to Solberg's concern for all individuals in society, and her care served to ensure a sense of security for all during times of uncertainty. Evidently, it cannot be denied that compared to men in power, who are more inclined to take on a "strongman" role – as seen in Trump, Bolsonaro, Duterte, and the like – women are better able to attend to the needs of all, especially the vulnerable in society, making sure that they are well-protected and heard. Clearly, as our society becomes ever-more self-centred and competitive, it is only paramount that there are more of such female leaders to remind us of the importance of kindness and maintaining a balance between pursuing our own interests and caring for those around us.

Finally, female leaders in all spheres are catalysts for change and equality, acting as role models for all to emulate and inspiring others to improve as professionals or simply as humans. There is no doubt that fields such as politics, science, law and even business are traditionally male-dominated. However, while these areas may have once been said to be a "man's world", women rising in their respective fields are revolutionising them, catalysing immense breakthroughs and pushing society towards progress. Home-grown success stories include Professor Jackie Ying, a prominent and highly decorated research leader at A\*STAR, who has led breakthroughs in several areas such as dengue and cancer research. Justice Judith Prakash has also served as a cornerstone figure of Singapore's judicial system for years, acting as an inspiration to other aspiring girls who wish to join the legal profession. Even Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who won over the hearts of Americans due to her forward-looking policies and progressive stance on representation and equality, has used her position to reach out to youths and minorities. By connecting with teenagers through online platforms such as Twitch and social media sites, she was able to expand her reach and inspire the next generation of Americans and leaders. A final example of how females are best able to overturn outdated practices and inspire change would be the evolving image of the Victoria's Secret brand, which was previously noted as the "pinnacle of sexualisation" and appealing to male desires. However, a massive overhaul of the brand is transforming it into "VS Collective", where inspirational females such as Priyanka Chopra have been recruited as ambassadors to debunk these long-perpetuated stereotypes, empowering a new generation of girls to pursue their ambitions. Thus, it is only through female leaders that other future generations of girls

have a role model to look up to, promoting further progress and change in a world that is desperately in need of new ideas and mindsets to revolutionise growth.

On the other hand, while females may certainly seem to possess more of some traits than men which may lend them an advantage of being better leaders, it must be conceded that gender alone is too myopic a lens through which to view what makes a “good” leader for the world. The world would not necessarily be better off with just “women” in power, but instead women who use their unique characteristics to carry out their responsibilities. The same applies to men who may also possess these same traits or even others that confer on them better leadership skills. Sanna Marin has claimed that what is surprising about her position as Finnish Prime Minister is not her gender, but her age. This suggests that other criteria may be more important in determining whether a leader is beneficial or not, such as wisdom, rationality and communication skills. Take the cases of Park Geun-hye and Najib Razak. Female or male, both had scandals of venality and were thus ousted from their positions of power. This clearly indicates that gender itself should not be the key factor in determining the competency of leaders, as males can prove to be equally as competent, while females can prove to be just as incapable. It also cannot be denied that there have been exemplary leadership figures who are indeed male, such as Barack Obama, Lee Kuan Yew, and Nelson Mandela, all of whom were undoubtedly prominent figures who shaped the world today to be a better place for all. So, the view that female leaders would allow the world to be a better one, while true to some extent, should be taken with a pinch of salt lest it be overly simplistic.

In conclusion, I agree that the world indeed would benefit from having more females in power in all spheres, since the scales are still skewed in favour of men. Increasing the number of female leaders would not only allow society to benefit from more empathetic and humane policies typically enforced by women, but also increase the diversity of views across all fields and thus catalyse changes. Most importantly, female leaders can reach out to future aspiring leaders, nurturing the next generation to be equally exceptional leaders themselves. However, we must keep in mind that there are indeed other desirable qualities that may be characteristic of both male and female leaders, and thus be careful not to discount our male counterparts from positions of power or acknowledgement. With such a mindset and commitment to increasing diversity of leadership, I am confident that our world will only grow to be a more welcoming place for us to live, work and play in, and that our world is in good hands.

**Marker’s comments:**

*Megan, excellent range of knowledge of current female leaders. Concise and incisive arguments developed throughout each paragraph. Strong awareness of the issue especially in noting that traits found in women are not exclusive to them. Overall, comprehensive treatment. Fluent with a wide range of transitional devices, vocabulary, and felicitous expression.*

**'It's a woman's world today.' How far do you agree?**

The notable words of Jane Eyre, “I am no caged bird”, represent the freedom, success and autonomy that women can possess. Centuries have passed since then, with our current global context bringing numerous opportunities to women to showcase their potential and reach for their dreams through forging their own paths. Indubitably, progress has been made in multiple aspects of gender equality for women to lead enriching lives, yield more power and display their valuable voices. However, I am of the opinion that due to the discrimination against women and gender stereotypes entrenched too deeply in the roots of our societies, women continue to be oppressed in many areas, notably in political leadership and their socio-economic environments. Therefore, I do not agree that ‘it’s a woman’s world today’, as women still possess neither sufficient freedom to achieve their successes nor the relevant platforms to do so.

Proponents of the claim that it is a woman’s world today may purport that in the 21st century, numerous efforts have been made to grant women a voice, a pathway and a stage to shine in their well-deserved spotlight. In the arts and entertainment industry, women, more now than ever, are having their narratives told and are producing various forms of widely-acclaimed art, achieving success in a stereotypically male-driven industry. Notably, the movie *Hidden Figures* illustrates how three black female engineers greatly aided NASA’s first rocket launch, while *Wonder Woman* depicts strong independent women who utilise their talents for the betterment of society. Additionally, *Wonder Woman* was written and directed by females, and it was the first female-directed film to reach the list of top ten highest-grossing films. This conveys how women’s narratives are being brought to light in our current world, with the help of other females whose abilities have achieved notable success. In this sphere, progress in equality of the sexes has been accompanied by a change in perception of global audiences, who hold less prejudice against women and look beyond gender stereotypes. For example, the majority of those who enjoyed and analysed Jane Austen’s magnum opus *Pride and Prejudice* in the past centuries mainly focused on the caricatures of women falling in love, or the romantic relationships between Darcy and Elizabeth, as well as between Jane and Bingley. On the contrary, many literature enthusiasts in more recent decades have shifted their focus to how Elizabeth Bennet is a symbol of going against her patriarchal society’s expectations, as well as bridging the gap between both genders. In the non-fictional realm, notable female activists such as Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg have been able to advocate their causes without facing much oppression as a result of their gender. This is a significant marker

of progress to suggest that it is a woman's world today, as female suffragettes in the early 1900s who advocated for women's rights to vote were widely persecuted and largely ignored, which highlights how women today have been able to speak out in safer and larger platforms to champion their causes. These examples show how women are treated with more respect and reverence, as icons of strength and leadership whose characteristics we, as a global audience, have learnt to appreciate and value. Thus, it can be said that women today hold much more influence and possess opportunities for success.

However, it is too simplistic to claim that it is a woman's world today. Such a statement suggests that all women have unlimited liberties and platforms to engage their potential and be the writers of their own fates. Unfortunately, this statement harbours many underlying issues that illustrate how many women have yet been granted sufficient opportunities for their voices to be heard and for the enablement of their well-being.

Politically, there has certainly been an increase in female leadership, notably in New Zealand, Finland and Germany. Women have been given more opportunities in parliaments to be heard and to lead concrete change for their societies. Yet, such progress cannot be lauded too quickly when we view the cold, hard statistics: out of over 200 countries globally, there are only 10 heads of state and 14 national leaders who are female. Such a disproportionate gender ratio in both global leadership and national governments signifies a dangerous reality: women have yet to reach an era where they are in leadership positions that possess control and power that not only equal but surpass those of men. While it can be understood that for it to be a woman's world today, women do not need to surpass men but simply be able to possess platforms for their own successes, unfortunately, neither interpretation rings true today. A lack of female involvement in political leadership on a global scale can be attributed to numerous policies that decrease accessibility of ministerial positions for women, as well as societal expectations of them. In Germany, over 47% of males expressed their reservations against a female national leader, even despite Angela Merkel's long-standing chancellorship. This conveys an underlying distrust of females with political power or lack of confidence in their ability to lead nations. Such prejudice against females dismally represents the difficulties they still face at present, where a lack of opportunity is combined with societal rejection towards females achieving their potential. Thus, it cannot be said that women today are accorded the privilege of being able to write the narratives of their lives or achieve what they want without societal oppression and prejudice.

Furthermore, even in today's climate of greater progress for women's rights, women are continually restricted in a socio-economic manner, leading them to possess less autonomy and power over their own paths. In Singapore, the average female earns \$640,000 less than their male counterpart over a 40-year career, due to the gender

wage gap. This restricts many women to lower economic standing, financial ability and purchasing power, even relegating them to feel like “second-class citizens” in a working environment that neither values their hard work nor pays fairly for it. More now than ever, women are faced with dual duties of managing their household or family in addition to achieving growth and success in their careers. As any working woman would agree, this Herculean task has put women under closer scrutiny and even resulted in prejudice against them by their employers. Despite corporate policies such as paternal leave to encourage balance of parental duties between working couples, statistics continue to display women taking on larger roles with regard to childcare and household management. Certainly, societal expectations continue to dictate how women are restricted by gender stereotypes, which limits their ability to progress in their careers or spend more time at work. This illustrates how women are still held back by social norms and carry a heavier burden when desiring to chase their ambitions, as compared to men. Additionally, iconic female characters in movies such as *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Intern* spotlight the enhanced stress of working women, whose divorce and marriage troubles are scrutinised as a lack of ability to manage their duties. Notably, research studies on gender have shown that while male employees are commonly described as “confident”, “driven”, and “determined”, adjectives such as “assertive”, “forceful” and “overconfident” are more widely used for female employees in annual progress reports. This showcases how similar temperaments or characteristics between the genders can be interpreted in vastly different manners, which are indicative of gender stereotypes that much of society continues to hold today. This conveys that even when women try to pursue their goals, their approaches can also be judged more harshly due to gender expectations. Clearly, the continued burdens faced by women socially and economically refute the claim that, at present, women are able to chase their dreams in a fair, equitable and empowering manner.

In summary, it can be argued that women today have been granted greater opportunities to be in positions of influence and to achieve successes in a world that is more accepting and free. However, to languish in the illusion that “it’s a woman’s world today” is to harbour a narrow-minded outlook on the real oppressions and restrictions women continue to face, in areas of leadership, society and the economy, where gender stereotypes and entrenched prejudice continue to prevent women from reaching their potential, with respect, empowerment and well-deserved validation.

**Marker’s comments:**

*Strong interpretation of the arguments supporting your stand, with well-illustrated use of evidence from quite a wide range. You may however want to examine the situations of women in developing countries to assess their plight for an added dimension of how it is not a woman’s world in these countries for reasons such as honour killings, female genital mutilation, lack of basic human rights, etc.*

**'It's a woman's world today.' How far do you agree?**

When Monica Baey took to social media to express her frustration when her perpetrator, Nicholas Lim, escaped with relative impunity after filming her in the shower, it culminated in widespread discontent amongst the online community. The online uproar that ensued forced this oft-overlooked issue of sexual harassment and assault into the local mainstream political discourse, and led to universities imposing harsher regulations against male-on-female crimes, to ensure that offenders no longer escape with merely a slap on their wrists, but face punishments commensurate with their egregious acts. Internationally, the same cause that Monica Baey championed has ricocheted across the globe, in the forms of hashtag activism and protests. It is undeniable that the issue of gender inequality and women's rights have come to light more significantly in recent years. Some critics have even argued that contemporary society accords women more rights than men, calling today a "women's world". However, while it may be true that recent movements have managed to secure rights for women, perhaps more than men, in certain aspects, I believe, to a large extent, that women today still face gender discrimination due to the traditional norms and cultures that persist, as well as a lack of sufficient change at the legislative level. As such, I am of the opinion that it is too optimistic to claim that "it is a women's world" today.

Still, detractors argue that the playing field is now tipped towards women and accords more rights to them than males to make up for past atrocities, as the world gravitates towards a more egalitarian one, hence it is warranted to argue that the modern society is a "woman's world". This is evidenced by the formation of male advocacy groups, such as 'Men's Rights Activist', campaigning for more equal treatment for the males. They argue that in the legal sphere, this can be clearly illustrated in how female rape victims are taken far more seriously than their male rape victims, and mothers are overwhelmingly accorded custody of the child. Coupled with the recent rise of the international #MeToo hashtag movement, critics argue that the widespread attention garnered to advocate for female emancipation and to bring to account the countless men who have committed transgressions against women has led to male rape victims' plight being overlooked. Additionally, in the education sector, BBC has reported that schools have "failed" boys, as they now overemphasise "feminine traits" such as organisation and attentiveness. Moreover, more females than males continue to earn undergraduate degrees, with the disparity being as wide as 35% in the United Kingdom. This may be attributed to the rise in educational levels on a global scale, in which many people are increasingly welcoming of the Westernised ideals of equality and justice. The wider significance, however, is that in a country's attempt to "right" this wrong against women, they may have undermined men's rights in the process. As

such, on the surface, it seems reasonable to claim that women receive preferential treatments and more rights than their male counterparts, thus are enjoying a higher quality of life in a “woman’s world”.

While there may be some semblance of truth in the aforementioned argument, it fails to consider that this may only be the case in selected developed countries. Upon further scrutiny, one would realise that women today continue to be disenfranchised and discriminated against because of their gender, much less having achieved the pinnacle of equality they have been fighting for since the first wave of feminism. As such, one can dispel the myth that the 21st century is a “woman’s world”.

Many contend that deep-seated cultural conservatism and misogynistic mindsets continue to underpin gender discrimination, hence it is too absolute to posit that women have it better today. Ironically, it is precisely because of the increasingly progressive nature of our modern society that conservative forces exist – they seek to preserve the status quo and prefer stability over anarchy – and are the ones benefitting from the current system. A pertinent example would be Africa, where the practice of female genital mutilation has been made illegal. Despite the practice being criminalised, it continues to be carried out in secret to continue the tradition. To date, about one hundred and third million girls have been subject to this practice, with many suffering deaths due to this. Similarly, in Nepal, menstruation stigma against women continues to persist, with women being chased out of their houses into animal huts because they are considered “impure”. In light of such happenings that persist in our seemingly progressive world, it appears ludicrous to claim that women’s rights have been respected. In addition, this phenomenon of conservatism can be witnessed in Asian conservative nations such as Korea and Japan. They are the examples par excellence here. Despite their highly-acclaimed titles of being first-world countries, conservative and misogynistic mindsets continue to remain omnipresent in their societies. Regardless of the fact that women receive equal opportunities in education, they face immense obstacles in climbing up the corporate ladder, as upper echelons of society mostly comprised of men repeatedly deny their entrances. Arguably, one has to be cognisant of the fact that an increasingly progressive and democratic world is not tantamount to weakening conservative forces, but rather fuel such anti-women sentiments and cause them to further manifest in society in most cases. For this reason, it is a blanket assumption to content that it is a “woman’s world” today.

Lastly, supporters of the stand that it is not a “woman’s world” today postulate that the political landscape is still sorely lacking female representation to implement policies to ameliorate the plight of women. While recent news headlines are often inundated with the now well-known names of “Jacinda Ardern”, “Sanna Marin”, and “Kamala Harris”, we must be critical enough to be aware that such instances are still the exception rather than the norm. Furthermore, even if females are given the chance to enter the political sphere, it may be too naïve to believe this translates into a greater voice for women. Because the current political positions are still mainly held by men, they are often incentivised or see no qualms in promoting women who are for their cause, under the guise of gender equality. The prevalent ease of allowing

more women into politics to simply further their vested interests makes this phenomenon a common one. A salient example would be Japan's Liberal Democratic Party's lawmaker Mio Sugita, who openly accused women of lying about instances of sexual assault, during a 2021 budget Parliamentary meeting on advancing women's rights. She even called out Japan's #MeToo icon, journalist Shiori Ito, for committing clear "errors on her part as a woman" which led to her rape incident. A flower demonstration was held to protest against Mio Sugita for failing to capitalise on her role as a political leader to champion human rights, but rather to perpetuate the toxic culture of rape and victim-blaming. Another case in point would be Singapore, in which despite renewed calls for gender parity in the political sphere, only a mere three out of nineteen of our Cabinet Ministers – Mrs Josephine Teo, Ms Grace Fu, and Ms Indranee Rajah – are women. This is also the greatest number of women we have had in the Cabinet. Evidently, while recent developments may have allowed for slightly more women to enter the political realm this has yet to show widespread optimistic outcomes in legislative changes to alleviate women's plight. Moreover, societal mindsets have yet to shift enough to welcome an era of greater female representation. According to the Reykjavik index, only forty one percent of Germany citizens are very comfortable with a female leader, despite Angela Merkel's long-term chancellorship. It is worth casting doubts on whether or not the general populace is willing to vote for more female leaders, especially in our increasingly democratic society today. Thus, it is still justified to claim that the underrepresentation of women in politics remain a stumbling block towards attaining gender parity and significant advances for women's rights, hence achieving a modern "woman's world" is still a pipe dream.

Ultimately, it is true that women have made unprecedented moves to champion their causes, since the first waves of feminism to the present. Unfortunately, the fact that movements fighting for women's rights still constantly emerge is a clear testament of the fact that we do not live in a "woman's world". If we account for the countless instances where women's rights are obviously infringed upon and continue to exist, it is simply unjustified to argue that women have more rights than men, have it better today and live in a "woman's world". However, that does not mean that we should stop trying, but rather we have to continue taking steps in the right direction to be ever closer to our elusive ideal of gender equality.

**Marker's comments:**

*Very good response that is fully relevant, covers many pertinent points – and with detailed support and consistent effort at evaluation. The latter could be stronger at key points, but overall this is a convincing, balanced and mature response. Language is excellent, with apt and confident expression throughout. Ideas flow very well. Superb introduction and conclusion.*

**'It's a woman's world today.' How far do you agree?**

As feminism continues to make waves in the world today, women's empowerment has seen encouraging progress. There are more female politicians and high-ranking executives than in the past, and social movements like #MeToo have brought issues women face to the spotlight and amplified women's voices. The 2017 Women's march was attended by over a million people in the US, showing increasing support for gender equality. Some go as far as to claim that 'it's a woman's world today', a far cry from the blatantly male-dominated societies present in almost every part of the world just a few decades back. This may be due to the far-left feminist ideologies that have inadvertently demonised all men, yet faced little backlash due to the history of women's oppression. Is this statement, then, true? I largely disagree with this statement as it appears to only focus on the noise-making far-left feminists, without paying attention to the ongoing discrimination, whether institutional or in terms of individual attitudes, that women still face on a day-to-day basis that tells of a society where women have less autonomy and ability to fulfil their potential than men, as well as have more expectations placed on them.

Nonetheless, I concede that those who claim it is a woman's world today say so with some justification. As mentioned before, far-left feminists have demonised men, sometimes all men, which, if reversed, would scream sexism. Yet these people face almost no repercussions, suggesting that women can get away with things men cannot, and thus that this society is skewed in favour of women today. Indeed, there has been a rising strand of thought to 'hate all men'. Suzanne Moore wrote in the newspaper New York that 'it is logical to hate men', and 'every intelligent woman should hate men'. If this was a singular incidence, one could dismiss it as a fringe point of view, yet writings in Washington Post and Medium echo similar thoughts. To generalise such a large group of people – half of the world's population, young and old, poor and rich, straight and gay – simply because they have a Y-chromosome seems unquestioningly sexist, yet these women face little to no backlash. One mother of two young boys who wrote in to Medium to say she 'hates men' and wants to throw them into the sea was met with a response by the editor agreeing with her point of view and empathising with her. The hashtag #AllMen has also been gaining traction on social media, appearing to generalise all men as being sexist, discriminatory and enablers of a terrible patriarchal system, intentionally or not. People, especially men who see

themselves being ruthlessly demonised, may understandably feel that women can get away with anything simply because they are women, that the world today gives women a free pass to do and say whatever, therefore elevating women's status in society, making the world a 'woman's world'.

However, I contend that it is not a woman's world today as many countries in the world, especially developing ones, still discriminate against women institutionally, impeding their ability to fulfil their potential in society as much as men can and attain autonomy in their lives, thus making the world not one that truly enables them to pursue what they want in life. Around the world, women still face barriers towards living a life with autonomy and respect to as great an extent as that of men. For instance, females in countries in Africa are subject to genital mutilation as well as intrusive procedures to determine if they are virgins. In some Arab countries, marital rape is still seen as a domestic affair that does not require intervention. All in all, women face tangible discrimination imbued in the law, whether they are subject to violations of bodily rights with no protection, or are not able to seek help from sexual abuse (whose victims are mostly females). In developing countries especially, men continue to have the upper hand in society while women remain the oppressed group. These violations of human rights necessarily affect women beyond the one-time event. Victims of sexual abuse may suffer from emotional trauma and low self-esteem, impeding their ability to function in society as well as they could have had they enjoyed respect and autonomy. Particularly, women who suffer from marital rape would be the weaker party in a power imbalance between the couple, forcing them to concede to their husband's demands of them, therefore making them unable to pursue what they want in life. A world in which women are systematically oppressed and unable to fulfil their potential is a far cry from a woman's world, which suggests the world is catered for women to thrive.

In addition, despite some countries not institutionally discriminating against women, patriarchal attitudes remain rampant with its citizens still dictating how women should be like, thus clearly showing a world that tramples on women's freedom and does not allow them to be themselves. Countries like Singapore appear to have achieved some degree of gender equality – women and men are granted the same rights, and there are a decent number of female politicians and businesswomen. However, there are undeniably undercurrents in society that discriminate against women, albeit in a more sinister, unnoticeable manner. For instance, when rape cases are surfaced (of which the large majority are committed against women), a common question to ask the victim is 'What were you wearing?' This question, though simple, betrays the underlying assumption that it is in some way a woman's fault that she was raped. This form of victim-blaming disproportionately impacts women. It adds to their emotional

distress of recounting their rape incident and possibly discourages them from coming forward to seek the justice they deserve. From this, we can see that Singapore society indirectly tells women to dress conservatively, for if they do not, they may get raped and it is their fault. The act of drawing attention away from the perpetrator (normally male), who was the one committing this evil, and putting it on the female, makes one wonder whether women really enjoy full autonomy in this seemingly gender-equal country. Another instance is the United States of America's ex-president Donald Trump, who told a female reporter to 'dress like a woman', sparking many tweets on Twitter of women posting their non-feminine outfits with captions along the line of 'Yes, this is how I dress'. This anger and frustration shown by the US female population suggest their clothing, which is no one's business, has long been under scrutiny and at the receiving end of uncalled-for comments. People, mostly men, take it upon themselves to comment upon females' clothing, wrongly assuming they have the authority to do so. Yet another example is the attitudes people have when their colleagues speak their mind, differing based on the gender of their colleagues. Women who assert themselves are seen as 'bossy' and 'domineering', while men who do the same are viewed as 'capable' and 'possessing leadership qualities'. The disparity between these two views yet again exposes the underlying expectations many place on women – that they should be soft-spoken and demure. This differing attitude has been shown to cost women promotions and career advancements. In light of such evidence, will women still be willing to speak their mind, or will they bend under the pressure of these expectations and be content with being a supporting – never leader – figure? No matter what the choices of individual women are, it is undeniable that women face undue expectations from the world and are at times dictated by it. A world that tells one how to act, to dress, to speak – in essence, to live – shows this world is not yet one where women can be who they are, and therefore not a woman's world.

In conclusion, despite the progress women's rights have made over the years, the world is far from a gender-equal world, let alone a woman's world. Besides continuing to fight for women's legal rights, the invisible but all the same suffocating expectations put on women must also be addressed – not for a women's world, but for an equal world where everyone, regardless of gender, can have autonomy in their lives, fulfil their potential, and live how they want.

**Marker's comments:**

*Very good response that shows full awareness of question requirements and provides consistently sound and apt illustration coupled with some insightful evaluation. There are some critical points where the evaluation needs to be shaper, but overall this is a mature, balanced and convincing essay. Language is excellent, with controlled and confident expression. A strong personal voice comes through too. Organisation of paragraphs and flow of ideas is very strong.*

## Is marriage still an attractive option in today's world?

Match-making corners are prevalent in China and, surprisingly, these spaces located in public parks, neighbourhood centres and even local coffee shops have become a hotspot not for youths, but for their aged parents desperate to help their older unmarried children find a potential spouse. Success rates are low, and parents are often ashamed of resorting to such measures, but they continue visiting these corners regularly, hearts set on matching their children with a partner. This obsessive emphasis on marriage and the great lengths to which parents go to push their children to settle down and form their own families hides a greater, more disturbing phenomenon: —the willingness amongst youths to marry is silently dwindling. Some may firmly believe that marriage continues to be attractive today due to the very nature of humans to seek happiness and companionship with a partner. But I believe that this is an oversimplification of the modern world and its brewing challenges, as the attractiveness of marriage is now contingent on a larger slew of factors – from entrenched societal values to the increasing emphasis on economic growth – that make marriage an undesirable option in today's modern world.

Nevertheless, let us first venture to consider why some are persuaded to believe that marriage continues to be an attractive choice along the life continuum. Proponents of the stand would promptly point to the fundamental nature of humans as social animals, who involuntarily seek companionship to share the joys, sorrows, enjoyments, and experiences of life. Even according to the widely-accepted scientific reasoning behind Darwin's theory of the origins of humans, evolution would not have been possible if our greatest ancestors had not found mates and reproduced. In religion, the tale of Adam and Eve, as introduced by Christianity, also promotes the idea of two individuals coming together and seeking happiness in the comfort of each other's presence. In more modern times, marriage brings happiness to a couple as both individuals support each other amidst the rough winds, storms, and turbulence of modern life. When they face stress at work, when they encounter unhappiness arising from disagreement with loved ones, when they suffer from the demise of a close friend or relative – there is always someone at home to guide them through their difficulties and offer a listening ear or a hug to make them feel better. Friends can also provide companionship, but they may only prove to be temporary handrails in life as friends come and go according to circumstances. Marriage partners, on the other hand, are for “life, “till death does

[they] part”. Understandably, some may believe marriage is an attractive option in today’s world due to the long-term companionship and support it brings to the individual.

However, this line of argument has been met with growing opposition in recent years, and with valid reasons too. Modern marriage also comes with its own slew of challenges, and to base its desirability on merely the emotional comfort it brings is an oversimplification of the evolving needs and priorities of people, and in particular, the modern day city dweller. In an age that prizes productivity and economic efficiency above all, marriage may prove to be as demanding as it is unfeasible. In developed countries around the world, both men and women enjoy high levels of employment, and to the married couple, the pressures of work and the family may become too heavy a burden to bear. In Japan, for example, their intense work culture mandates at least 100 hours of work at the office per week, which points to working overtime and even reporting to the workplace on weekends. The stress faced by Japanese workers pushes them to the brink of mental and physical exhaustion, and to expect these working adults to also prioritise marriage and settle down with children on top of their already stress-laden work lives is indeed too much to ask. For women, in particular, marriage entails a career shift, or even resignation from their job because of pressure from other underlying social factors. In Asian countries like Japan, China, Korea, and even Thailand, society is still deeply-rooted in traditional values arising from Confucian patriarchy that promotes the idea that the main role of women is to marry and bear children to continue the family lineage. It is nearly impossible to balance work and also take care of the family without a significant amount of external familial support, and many women are compelled to sacrifice their careers for a future in marriage. To many independent women with liberal attitudes and modern aspirations, the option of marriage is hence undesirable as it dictates a loss of independence, free will, and decades of hard work in their career. Therefore, the demands of working life and social factors for both men and women make it undesirable to get married.

Lastly, what marriage entails may vary from country to country. For married women, in particular, what the future holds may spark even greater fear and repulsion than the very idea of marriage itself. Domestic violence is a growing problem that has received some attention in recent years. In 2020, a woman from China died after her ex-husband set her alight while she was live-streaming at home. In places like China, where one in four women suffer from domestic violence, there is no escape from this harsh reality when one commits to marriage. Other Middle-Eastern countries like Pakistan show similar horrifying trends of family violence and domestic abuse that have become so pervasive they are effectively normalised in society. If marriage is

forever, then so is the suffering inflicted on victims of domestic abuse. The promise of eternal companionship simply traps women in abusive relationships for longer periods of time. Coupled with the lack of societal support and patriarchal family values that promote women's obedience and compliance to men even in the face of abuse makes it a herculean task for them to seek help and speak out against physical, emotional, and sexual violence. For sure, marriage can prove to be a highly repulsive path that entails horrifying consequences, especially for women in less developed, patriarchal societies that still exist today.

Modern life and its brewing slew of challenges – from its obsession with economic efficiency and work productivity, to the stubborn, entrenched societal views that promote patriarchy and quash any dissent in support of women's rights and equality – continue to plague individuals' choices in regard to marriage in this modern age. Traditional values of happiness and emotional companionship associated with marriage still continue to play a role in decision-making, albeit a less important one as modern-day individuals may have alternative priorities and reservations.

**Marker's comments:**

*You drive a powerful argument, although you could be more nuanced when painting an idealised picture of marriage. Anyone who expects a marriage to solve their ills are in for a reality check, and you could have given it a more realistic spin on why societies and families maintain their identities in a construct (context?) of the marriage bond. It was a nice read, with a clear personal voice that integrated seamlessly with the reference to trends/phenomena across the world.*

### Passage

What happens in cancel culture is that those offended by the comments of another party become denounced online by those who object to the behaviour. It is a form of social and cultural boycott driven by 'groupthink' meaning the intolerance of others with a point of view that diverges from group norms. Taken to an extreme, it is like excommunicating someone from the community. But is it right to target a person with whom you disagree and use the Internet to express your outrage, get people fired, or pushed out of certain circles?

Some argue that it is good practice, since taking others to task is part of the democratic process and simply a manifestation of free speech. It also enables those who are of low social status to challenge provocateurs who are traditionally powerful beyond reach, like Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein, who were considered untouchable in Hollywood before the #MeToo movement. However, others argue that cancelling someone is an attempt to stifle another person's free speech rights, and the very thing you might be calling him out for (bullying someone else, for example) is the very thing you are doing. There seems to be no way to decide who is right.

In fact, cancel culture shows us that ethical discourse is problematic. On the one hand, it seems subjective. Should we cancel everyone with whom we disagree? Where do we draw the line? Is it even possible to do so? If you go down this path, and if you succeed, the only person left at the end of the path will be you, since there is nobody else who is exactly like you in outlook or worldview. If you were the sole arbiter of all moral and non-moral conflict, morality would be reduced to something totally relative to you. Yet, that is contradictory to the starting position you took when you started cancelling others, since you would have had to assume that you are fully right and others wrong. But, if everyone took the same position, everyone's position would be equally right, and nobody would be wrong.

On the other hand, ethical discourse seems to be empty. With cancel culture, moral debate is won by the side that shouts the loudest or is able to achieve the intended outcome (like the resignation of high profile individuals, for example). The only reason why we intuitively think that cancel culture is a legitimate response is that those who participate in it or argue for it are extremely vocal and get their way, but this in no way guarantees that the majority are in favour. In the end, ethical discourse simply resembles a shouting match between people who shout, in the words of AJ Ayer, "Boo ya!"

If either of these two analyses are right, then we will not be able to answer the question of what right and wrong really are. The best way forward, then, is to look

at consequences. Examining cancel culture more closely, the negative consequences outweigh the positive when we take into account long-term, not just short-term effects. Cancel culture has divided whole countries into factions, and social media has become the new virtual war zone. People have abandoned civility for hatred, for those who engage in cancel culture seek to criticise without listening or understanding why someone said or did something. As it is, many people have joined cancelling groups for fear of being cancelled themselves; at this rate, all-out civil war is imminent, and we surely do not want that.

*Adapted from “Ethics and the Cancel Culture” by Steve Mintz*

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

In this passage, the author concludes that, since we cannot conclude what is right or wrong in general, cancel culture is undesirable based on an analysis of its consequences. The author first begins by outlining various arguments for and against cancel culture to raise the necessity of arbitration between what is right and wrong – and the seeming impossibility of doing so. From there, the author argues that ethical discourse is problematic on two counts: firstly, that it is subjective, and then that it is empty. If ethical discourse is so problematic, then we cannot know what is right or wrong and so must look at the consequences of cancel culture, according to the author, which forces us to reject cancel culture on these premises. While I think the author raises some valid concerns about the nature of ethical discourse, I contend that his conclusions about ethical discourse – and then about cancel culture – are not sufficiently justified.

I want to begin by analysing the author's account of problems intrinsic to ethical discourse: the ideas that ethical discourse is subjective and that it is empty. In general, I think the author's arguments here raise what could be valid challenges to ethical discourse, but which are not yet sufficiently justified based on the premises provided.

Beginning with subjectivity, the author makes this point by highlighting the difficulties in drawing the line about who we ought to cancel and the impossibility in ultimately doing so. The author provides the following contrast: it seems that if we cancel everyone with which we disagree, we must be using ourselves as a benchmark for what is right and wrong (a relativist view), but, at the same time, if this is so, we cannot really cancel anyone because doing so must assume the presence of objective standards.

It is true that, to an extent, ethical discourse is subjective, insofar as we must subjectively decide what values to apply in negotiating an ethical dilemma. In deciding if, for example, one ought (morally or not) to abolish the death penalty – or any similar case – there must be a subjective choice of whether one is to prioritise the overall happiness of a people (pure utilitarianism) or a set of divine rules. There is hence little objectivity in this sense in ethical discourse.

However, I am not sure if this is the sort of the subjectivity that the author has in mind. Instead, the author seems – in raising the ideas that morality is totally relative to people – to entertain a sort of subjectivity that is akin to an ethical subjectivism; roughly, the idea that morality itself is determined by people. It is if we assume such a moral ontology that people can solely arbitrate moral conflicts, in the author's sense. But this position does not seem adequately justified by the facts at hand. It may be true, and we can grant, that we do not know when to cancel people – but that need not arise from morality being relative to people, but merely from the idea that different people may subscribe to different (established, non-relative) moral codes.

If it is true that the author's implication of a subjectivist or relativist view is unjustified, then the conclusion – that everybody is equally right and nobody wrong – must also be unjustified. The author does not provide here enough reasoning to show that ethical discourse is ontologically relativist in the way he claims it is – because the cases he presents are adequately accounted for by an absolutist view, if we simply do not know what the nature of absolutism is. Ethics may be subjective, but I think we must doubt the author's account of subjectivity.

As for the idea that moral discourse is empty, the author supports this point by arguing that it seems that discourse related to cancel culture is merely directed by who shouts the loudest – by rhetoric, and not by content. If this is true, then ethical discourse bears no content and is just an expression of different opinions or attitudes.

This account of the semantics of ethical discourse is plausible, but I do not think that it is quite justified. Saying that moral discourse is empty is a strong claim that implies that a statement like "killing is wrong" is null in its truth-value. However, all the author raises here is a single example of one sort of ethical discourse where it seems that truth is irrelevant and only how vocal one is matters. This single example is not sufficient, I believe, to undermine the nature of what we intuitively think ethical statements are like – normative with truth-values. Indeed, the example itself cannot establish even the weaker claim that ethical discourse does not usually appeal to facts – that a debate is won by those who shout the loudest does not mean that the facts brought up by such individuals are empty or irrelevant.

Hence, I think that the author's account of ethical discourse requires much more evidence if we are to accept either of his strong claims. But the author proceeds from this account to further argue that, not knowing what right and wrong are, we ought to examine cancel culture from its consequences and thereby reject it on that basis.

Let us grant for now the idea that what is right and wrong is determinate and indeterminable. If we grant this, I am not sure if the argument, firstly that we must have recourse to an analysis of the consequences of cancel culture and then that this analysis compels a rejection of said culture, is fully coherent.

The author raises a number of negative consequences like the division of nations and the abandonment of civility for hatred, leading to the threat of civil war. He then concludes that since we would not want all these, and since the negative consequences outweigh the positive, we must reject cancel culture.

The problem is this: if this argument is to be made under the assumption that what is right and wrong is not knowable, then talk of negative and positive consequences must be in some sense problematised by this. It does not stand to reason that, right and wrong being unknown, negative and positive can be ascribed as easily, and in the same way that is done in regular discourse assuming some idea of what is right and what is wrong. This is not to say that there is no value without a distinction between right and wrong – we can still ascribe such value judgments based on, for example, prudential bases that refer purely to self-interest. But it does not seem that the author is using such prudential bases – rather, he uses value-laden terms like “hatred” and “fear” that seem still to make reference to what is right and wrong to make a normative judgment that, based on all this, we ought to reject cancel culture.

In other words, the author's argument related to the negative consequences, and our needing to reject cancel culture as a result, seems normatively and ethically laden, with reference to some assumed idea of what we should or should not do. For example, for the author, it seems we should not criticise without understanding, and we should avoid hatred and prefer civility. But taking the author's criticisms about the subjectivity and emptiness of ethical discourse at face value, all these ethical preferences that assume a normative role must either be fully relative or empty, and we do not seem to be able to ascribe positive or negative consequences in the way the author does. If all this is true, then the author's final conclusion that we ought to reject cancel culture seems undermined, if not made impossible, by some claims he wishes to make about ethical discourse.

Hence, I believe the author's conclusion is not fully justified insofar as his claims about the nature of ethical discourse require much more support and his same claims seem to display a final incoherence with his ultimate conclusion that we should reject cancel culture based on an appraisal of its consequences.

**Marker's comments:**

*Excellent piece! You clearly have a good grasp of the author's argument and have been able to evaluate the main positions the author raised in a comprehensive manner. However, you can be more charitable in your reading of the argument; the author only contradicts himself if you read him that way. Your analysis is not necessarily wrong; it just is a little harsh. Overall, there is sound understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge in ethics and very good awareness of the issues involved. Well done!*

**Critically assess the view that sense experience alone  
is sufficient in the construction of knowledge.**

Sense experience comprises raw sense data that we acquire through our senses – touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing. It is opposed to reason, which are thoughts in our mind. Intuitively, it may seem like our senses are all we need to obtain knowledge of the world around us in our daily lives – that is, sense experience is sufficient in the construction of knowledge. However, in many cases, sense experience alone is insufficient as it must be complemented by reason. Nonetheless, in cases where we only demand certain types of knowledge, sense experience alone may be sufficient.

Sense experience seems like an intuitive way to construct knowledge about the world around us. For example, if one were to ask Jimmy how he knows he is alive, he would likely point to his hands that can be felt and seen, or he might jump around to show he is not an inanimate object. Similarly, if asked what colour a particular table is or what species a certain animal is, Jimmy would likely employ his sense of sight to tell us that the table is blue, and he would point to the furriness of the animal, the sound of its bark, and the shape of its head and ears to tell us it is a dog. In this sense, sense experience (SE) is certainly a common part of knowledge construction – in attempting to understand the world, we often employ the senses through which we perceive it.

However, using the senses alone opens us up to the risk of sense deception. If the senses cannot be trusted to give us accurate information about the world, then surely they cannot be sufficient in constructing all knowledge about it. For example, I might take a straight straw, place it in water, and observe the straw suddenly seem to bend as it enters the water. My sense of sight alone would tell me that the straw is now bent. In reality, the straw is still straight; using my knowledge of physics, I know the straw appears to bend because of the refraction of light: water is denser than air, leading light rays to bend upon striking water, such that my view of objects placed in water is distorted. Here, my senses are telling me one thing but reason is telling me another, and reason seems to be correct – upon taking the straw out of water, I once again observe that it remains straight. This example illustrates how SE alone sometimes gives us false knowledge, so it cannot be sufficient in knowledge construction.

Furthermore, in some cases, SE is not only insufficient but unnecessary in constructing knowledge. While SE gives us knowledge of the ever-changing world around us, certain ideas are innate and unchanging, and these can be discovered through reason alone. Such ideas are termed ‘a priori propositions’ – ideas that can be known prior to experience. For example, many ideas in math and geometry are known a priori. One does not need to find a triangle in real life and observe it to know a triangle has three sides. Rather, one need only contemplate the definition of a triangle – three lines connected to enclose a space – to know that a triangle does indeed have exactly three sides. Furthermore, given the axiom-theorem structure of mathematics, one can derive a wealth of further knowledge about triangles given a basic understanding of what a triangle is – we know that the angles in a triangle add up to 180 degrees, that two triangles adjoined by a side form a tetrahedron, and so on. None of this knowledge requires the aid of SE, nor can SE alone conclusively construct such mathematical truths – even if I were to measure the angles in a hundred triangles or place pairs of triangles together, I could only assert that I observe a hundred triangles that have internal angles summing to 180 degrees, or that those particular triangles form tetrahedrons when adjoined. Thus, in discovering a priori truths, SE is insufficient in giving us the certain and innate knowledge that reason helps us obtain.

Similarly, SE is insufficient in helping us obtain knowledge in fields such as ethics and aesthetics, which deal with intangible concepts that are not easily observed through the senses. One can hardly touch or taste the notions of justice, honesty, and dignity or ascribe the entire definition of beauty to the sight of one piece of art. Defenders of SE might argue that in arriving at a definition for justice or beauty, we would surely bring to mind examples of just acts or beautiful things we observed through our senses. Nonetheless, this only shows that SE may be helpful in the process of constructing knowledge about such intangible concepts; just because I can imagine one, ten, or even a thousand just acts does not mean I am able to articulate a universal notion of justice. To do so, I would need to employ reason to contemplate whether justice is, say, about restoring an equitable balance of power, or perhaps about enforcing a societally agreed set of laws. Thus, SE is insufficient in giving us knowledge of intangible concepts.

Perhaps the strongest grounds for the sufficiency of SE in constructing knowledge is that of knowledge about the physical world. However, even here, reason is necessary for us to obtain factual or propositional knowledge, as opposed to knowledge by acquaintance. Factual knowledge is knowledge that can be articulated in language such that it can be shared, debated, and acted upon by others. Knowledge by acquaintance is knowledge that we obtain through the simple act of experiencing and in a sense recognising a particular thing, place, person, or even sense experience – for example,

we would say “I know Chris” or “I know that taste”. In our daily lives, when we observe “that table is blue”, it appears that we are using SE to obtain the proposition “The table is blue”. However, our senses can only give us the raw data of the rays of light hitting our eyes or the touch of the table on our fingers. In order to obtain the factual proposition “the table is blue”, we must use reason to interpret the data given to us by our senses – we must have the concept of a table in our minds and an understanding of what the colour blue looks like. This is a process of concept-formation that happens in our minds, not through our senses; hence, we obtain the proposition “the table is blue” not through SE alone, but by combining our senses with reason in order to articulate that what we see is a “table”, and that it is “blue”. Therefore, SE is not sufficient even in constructing ordinary statements of knowledge in our daily lives about the physical world.

Where we must concede to the sufficiency of SE is in its ability to give us knowledge by acquaintance. In the above example, one might argue that we only employ reason in the leap from raw sense data to the formulation of a factual proposition. Thus, by staying at the stage of raw sense data, we can eliminate the need for reason in knowledge construction – instead of saying “the table is blue”, we can simply know that we are experiencing a certain sight, smell, or touch without attempting to categorise such senses under concepts. Another example might be the smell of coffee. While we require reason to give us the concept of “coffee” and that it smells of, say, earthiness, smokiness, and nuttiness, we only require the senses to know we are experiencing a certain wonderful aroma, even though we are unable to know that it is the smell of “coffee”. We know this aroma by acquaintance – we may be unable to articulate it, but we certainly ‘know’ what the smell is like. This is a compelling way of knowledge construction as we often do not demand someone to articulate or explain a specific sensation that is unique and knowable primarily by experiencing it yourself. For instance, no matter how detailed a description of the smell of coffee someone recites, we would be reluctant to say they know what coffee smells like unless they have smelt it themselves. Thus, sense experience is sufficient in obtaining knowledge by acquaintance about the particular sense itself.

Nonetheless, it is important to understand that SE alone cannot give us factual knowledge even about our internal mental state. It is tempting to argue that reason is unnecessary in obtaining knowledge about, say, a headache I am experiencing. Surely it cannot be doubted that my senses tell me I am actually experiencing a pain that I perceive to be a headache. Yet, even here, reason is instrumental in formulating the concept of a headache. It is true that SE alone gives me knowledge about the pain I am experiencing, but this is only knowledge by acquaintance of the pain itself, not

factual knowledge that the pain is a headache. Hence, SE alone cannot give us any factual knowledge, whether it is about the physical world or our internal mental state.

Ultimately, in considering whether sense experience alone is sufficient in the construction of knowledge, we must first decide what we admit as knowledge. In the case of knowledge of intangible concepts such as in ethics or knowledge of a priori truths such as in mathematics, it is clear that the senses alone are insufficient and may even be unnecessary. Even in the intuitive case of everyday knowledge about the physical world, we cannot admit knowledge given to us by the senses as certain knowledge due to the possibility of sense deception – reason is needed to ensure the senses are giving us accurate information, such as by recognising when we are using our senses in poor or misleading conditions. In fact, even if we drop the demand for certainty, we find that sense experience cannot give us any factual information at all without the aid of reason in concept formation, both in obtaining knowledge about the physical world and our mental state.

Thus, we are left with the question of whether knowledge by acquaintance should be considered knowledge. On the one hand, it does not seem useful to have knowledge if we are unable to articulate it in language, enabling discourse on the knowledge. For instance, we would not say a baby knows very much before it is able to talk and demonstrate its knowledge. Yet, at the same time, we would say that a baby knows who its mother is or what milk tastes like even if it cannot describe the taste or reason that the woman caring for him is likely his mother – rather, we point to how the baby intuitively clings onto his mother, knowing her touch and scent, or smiles when he smells and tastes milk. Hence, knowledge by acquaintance is indeed one form of knowledge, and this can be given through sense experience alone.

**Marker's comments:**

*A good attempt. Generally correct content. Good attempt in elaborating and writing for the tabula rasa reader in general – except for the part on concept formation. A flaw, though, is the non-discussion of incorrigibility which links to sense deception and the categorisation issue.*

**‘When it comes to what we ordinarily call knowledge, belief is the only undeniable condition.’ Critically assess the view.**

We ordinarily call knowledge justified true belief. That means that to know that p, (i) one has to believe that p, (ii) p must be true and (iii) one has to have justification for his belief. However, some argue that belief is the only undeniable condition because due to the infinite regress of justification, we can never have sufficient justification to prove a belief's truth. Also, they argue that justification is not an undeniable condition because the theories of truth are very similar to theories of justification. However, I disagree that belief is the only undeniable condition for knowledge because all three conditions of justification, belief and truth are undeniably needed.

First, let us examine the traditional definition of knowledge, which is justified true belief. To know that p, one must have belief (B), justification (J) and truth (T). For example, to know that proposition p (“there is a cat on the mat”), (i) I must believe there is a cat on the mat, (ii) there must actually be a cat on the mat and (iii) I must have good reasons for my belief, such as I see a cat on the mat and I can trust my senses.

I agree with the statement that belief is an undeniable condition for knowledge. This is because to claim that I know p, but I do not believe that p is simply incoherent. For instance, saying that “I know that it is raining but I do not believe that it is raining” seems absurd. Thus, belief is a necessary condition for knowledge.

However, some may argue that belief is not an undeniable condition as belief is incompatible with knowledge because belief is fallible while knowledge is infallible. This argument seems fairly persuasive because in everyday life, we use “believe” to express some sort of hesitancy and ambivalence while we use “know” to express certainty. For example, a confident tennis player would say “I do not believe I will win, I know that I will win”.

However, this is in fact a misunderstanding of language. What the confident tennis player would have meant to say is “I do not just believe I will win, I know that I will win”. Therefore, while I concede that belief is fallible, it is evident that belief plays an integral role in knowledge. Hence, belief is an undeniably necessary condition.

Some may argue that belief is the only undeniable condition, hence justification and truth which we include in what we ordinarily call knowledge are not required in the definition of knowledge. Some argue that truth is not a necessary condition for knowledge because truth is an unachievable condition as it is simply impossible to prove the truth of a knowledge claim. This is due to the infinite regress of justification. The infinite regress of justification states that a belief requires prior justification, which itself requires prior justification, hence resulting in what seems like all our beliefs having a lack of justification for their truth to be proven. For example, John claims to know that “All Amazon crocodiles cannot stick out their tongues”. The sceptic will then question how he knows this. John will then explain that he learnt about this piece of information through a documentary called Nature Watch. The sceptic will then question how John knows Nature Watch is a reliable source of information as it could be the case that the producers of Nature Watch wish to spread disinformation. John will then reply that Nature Watch won “Best Documentary” at award shows. The sceptic will continue to question how John knows that these award shows prove that Nature Watch is a reliable documentary as the producers of Nature Watch could have bribed the award show producers in order to receive the award. Hence, this process of requesting for further justification and producing evidence to prove the truth of a belief is never-ending and results in an infinite regress of justification. This results in what seems like all our beliefs lacking sufficient justification to be proven true. Therefore, the truth of a belief simply cannot be achieved if the infinite regress of justification cannot be stopped and hence truth cannot be a necessary condition for knowledge because that would result in us possessing no knowledge.

However, rationalisation, which is a strain of foundationalism, has in fact beat the sceptic and stopped the infinite regress of justification through providing self-justifying truths. Self-justifying truths do not require further justification because their truth can be recognised by merely examining the meanings of the terms involved. An example of a self-justifying truth is “triangles have three sides”. By understanding the meanings of the terms involved, one will already be able to recognise the truth of the statement since “triangle” itself means a “three-sided shape”. Hence no further justification is needed for the truth of self-justifying beliefs to be recognised. Therefore, truth is an achievable condition and thus can be a criterion for knowledge.

Truth not only can be a criterion for knowledge but must be a criterion for knowledge because to claim that one knows p, while p is false is simply absurd. Consider a cave woman living in prehistoric times. She claims to know that the Earth is flat. Her justification for her knowledge claim is that the Earth appears flat in all directions. Even when she climbs on top of a tree, she still cannot see any curvature in the ground.

Thus she has some justification for her belief and she believes that the Earth is flat. If truth was not a necessary criterion for knowledge, we would have to concede that she has knowledge that the Earth is flat. However, that is simply untrue because the Earth is in fact round. It would hence be unintuitive for us to concede that she possesses knowledge. Accepting her knowledge claim would require us to alter our entire understanding of knowledge as we would now need to accept contradicting pieces of knowledge. For example, due to scientific findings, we now know that Earth is round. However, conceding that the cave woman knows the Earth is flat at the same time that we know it is round is impossible because the Earth cannot be simultaneously round and flat, just as we cannot have contradicting pieces of knowledge. The truth criterion fulfils the external criterion to ensure that our knowledge claims about the physical world cohere with the physical world. Hence, truth is undeniably a necessary criterion. Therefore, belief is not the only undeniable condition.

Going back to how some may argue that belief is not the only undeniable condition, while they may now concede that truth is an undeniable condition, they may still argue that justification is not a necessary condition because three of the Theories of Truth are very similar to three of the Theories of Justification. Hence, it might be the case that having both justification and truth is redundant. The three Theories of Truth are the correspondence theory of truth, the coherence theory of truth and the pragmatic theory of truth. The Three Theories of Justification are foundationalism, coherentism and reliabilism. Firstly, the correspondence theory of truth states that the truth of a belief depends on how it corresponds to the external world. The correspondence theory of truth is very similar to empiricism, which is a strain of Foundationalism, which states that a belief is justified based on what one's senses tells him. For example, I see a cat on the mat and therefore I know that there is a cat on the mat according to the correspondence theory of truth and empiricism, which respectively prove that the belief is true and justified. Secondly, the coherence theory of truth is very similar to coherentism which states that a belief is true based on how it fits in with a host of beliefs. For instance, John claims to know that the Earth is round because it coheres to his other beliefs, such as "My science textbook states that the Earth is round" and "My science textbook is a reliable source of information". According to the coherence theory of truth and coherentism, I can concede that John does possess knowledge as the belief is both true and justified. Lastly, the pragmatic theory of truth states that p is true if p "works". It is very similar to reliabilism which states that p is justified if p was obtained via a reliable method. A reliable method is defined as a process that is likely to produce true beliefs. For instance, I use Google Maps to reach my intended destination and the fact that I do reach my intended destination proves that my belief ("I know how to reach my intended destination") is true. The fact that I do reach my

intended destination also proves that Google Maps is a reliable method and that in itself can provide justification for my belief. Therefore, it is evident that because each of the 3 Theories of Truth stated are so similar to one of the 3 Theories of Justification stated, the same piece of evidence can prove the truth of a belief and provide justification for that same belief. Since it has been established that truth is a necessary condition for knowledge, it can be concluded that justification should be the criterion we can remove from our typical definition of knowledge. Thus, justification is not an undeniable condition.

However, I disagree because justification, just like belief and truth, is an undeniable, necessary criterion for knowledge. Justification provides a “tether” for our belief so that we will not be easily dissuaded from our beliefs. Moreover, our beliefs will not be true by chance because it is intuitive for us to require good reasons to believe in our knowledge claims. For example, a gambler claims to know that the roulette wheel will give a 9 on its next spin. One will most likely not be persuaded to concede that the gambler has knowledge because he does not have justification for this claim. However, if another gambler who somehow rigged the roulette wheel to always give a 9 makes the same knowledge claim, one will be more persuaded to concede that he has knowledge because this gambler has justification for his claim. Therefore, justification is undeniably needed as a condition for knowledge so that our beliefs will not be true by chance and we will not be easily dissuaded from our beliefs. Hence, belief is not the only undeniable condition.

In conclusion, when it comes to what we ordinarily call knowledge, I disagree that belief is the only undeniable condition because all three conditions, namely justification, belief and truth are undeniable conceptions that are necessary for knowledge. Hence, I disagree with the statement.

**Marker's comments:**

*A good attempt. General concept correct (but a couple of instances of misunderstanding/incomplete understanding). The part that truth is unattainable was not given enough credit as your later points assume that truth for empirical statements have been shown to be attainable when it has not.*

**‘When it comes to what we ordinarily call knowledge, belief is the only undeniable condition.’ Critically assess the view.**

Ordinarily, knowledge is defined by the tripartite theory of knowledge to be “justified true belief”. This means that the three conditions – belief, truth and justification – are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for us to claim a proposition as knowledge. There have been attempts to show that either justification or truth is not necessary for knowledge, leading some to assert that belief is the only undeniable condition. Nonetheless, I believe that the objections to the justification and truth conditions have failed to prove that they are not necessary for knowledge. Hence, belief is not the only undeniable condition as the justification and truth conditions are equally indispensable.

First of all, let us establish why the belief condition is considered to be undeniable and why it is necessary for knowledge. Intuitively, we would think that having knowledge of a statement would require us to have a propensity to agree with the statement. Any suggestion to the opposite effect would simply seem to be incoherent. For example, it would seem incomprehensible for someone to say “I know that it is raining, but I do not believe it”. Hence, it is clear that belief seems undeniable as a condition for knowledge.

Even so, there have been detractors of the belief condition who would argue that belief is incompatible with knowledge and, therefore, that the belief condition is deniable. Notably, Plato holds such an incompatibilist view. He argued that since knowledge is infallible while belief is fallible, they must be fundamentally different ways of apprehending the world. Similarly, other philosophers who agree with this view posit that to believe is to be ambivalent about a proposition and this may involve mixed feelings, while knowledge involves no such hesitation. Therefore, knowledge does not entail belief, but goes beyond mere belief. For example, a tennis player may say “I don't believe I will win, I know I will.” This seems to imply that to know something is to cease to believe it. Thus, knowledge and belief are separate, and belief is not an undeniable condition for knowledge.

However, upon closer inspection, we would realise that in the above example, it was simply a more emphatic way of saying “I don't just believe I will win, I know I will.”

Hence, it becomes clear that knowledge may indeed go a step further than belief, but belief is still a necessary building block for us to acquire knowledge. Thus, the fact that the belief condition is undeniable still holds true.

Another dispute over the necessity of the belief condition would be the argument that knowledge is more about how one acts than what beliefs one might entertain. For example, I might have learnt that the Japanese occupied Singapore on 15 February 1942, but forgot this particular fact. Nonetheless, when I am quizzed on it, I am able to give the correct answer, even though I believe my answer to be a mere guess. At this point, some would argue that since I am guessing, I seem not to have belief, but the fact that I got the correct answer seems to suggest that I do have knowledge. Thus, belief and knowledge seem to be distinct and it seems that belief cannot be said to be an undeniable condition for knowledge.

However, for one to guess a proposition  $p$  would mean that one assents to the possibility that  $p$  is true. Guessing an answer displays a tendency to agree with that statement. This assent is sufficient to constitute belief, at least in a minimal sense. In this way, then, we would arrive at the conclusion that belief is, indeed, an undeniable condition for us to obtain knowledge.

Having established that belief is indeed necessary for knowledge, some would then argue that the truth condition is not necessary for knowledge. This is because truth is rarely attainable. They may argue that it is not always possible for us to verify the truth of our knowledge claims, especially those of the external world. There may always be new advances or discoveries that would disprove current knowledge claims that may appear to be true at a certain point in time. This is because we are unable to transcend our minds to obtain a God's-eye view of the physical world and thus discover truths of the world; rather, it is only possible for us to derive an explanation to the best effect for our available evidence and consider this as knowledge of the world. The fact that we are unable to verify the truth of our claims has been evidence in numerous shifts in scientific paradigms, such as from the theory of Geocentrism, where the Earth is the centre of the solar system, to that of Heliocentrism, the belief that the Sun is the centre of the solar system. This shows that our knowledge of the world is ever-changing and we cannot ever be certain if we have arrived at truth. In this sense, then, it would make no difference if truth were removed from the requirements for knowledge and thus, the truth condition is deniable.

However, I believe that truth is necessary and an undeniable condition for knowledge as claiming to know something that turns out to be false cannot be considered as having knowledge. Even if we do not know the truth of our knowledge, it does not then mean that the truth condition is dispensable. This is because belief and

justification are merely internal criteria, which means that they are within our minds and can be fulfilled by introspection alone. However, for us to consider a proposition as knowledge, it has to fulfil the external criterion of truth, meaning that it has to correspond with external reality, or cohere with our current justified, true beliefs. Crucially, we do not need to know if our knowledge claims at any point in time are true. If they are true, then they can be considered knowledge. For instance, assuming that it is true that the Earth is round, we would not say that a caveman who believes that the Earth is flat has knowledge. He may have excellent justification for his belief, such as “the Earth looks flat” and “if it were round, then objects would roll towards the edges and fall off”. However, this can only be considered a well-justified true belief and we would be reluctant to consider this to have the same epistemic status as knowledge. Therefore, the truth condition is also an undeniable condition for knowledge.

Another way to approach the question of the necessity of the truth condition would be to consider the consequences of discarding the truth condition. Without the truth condition, we would have to accept an infinite number of contradicting statements as knowledge. As in the above example, the “flat Earth” and “round Earth” theories would both have to be admitted as knowledge if the truth condition were to be disregarded as they both possess reasonable justification. This would lead to an unintuitive and confusing result of there being contradictory pieces of knowledge, with no way for us to decide which to adopt. Therefore, this illustrates the necessity of the truth condition and the fact that it, too, is undeniable.

The last condition to be discussed in the tripartite theory of knowledge is justification, which I would argue is equally indispensable and undeniable as the belief and truth conditions. This is because we would be reluctant to grant someone knowledge if he had obtained a true belief simply by luck or bias, with insufficient evidence for his belief. To illustrate this with an example, consider a racist juror who has come to the conclusion that the defendant is guilty on the sole basis of the colour of his skin. Even if it is, in fact, true that the defendant is guilty, the juror cannot be said to have knowledge as his belief was based on irrational prejudice, rather than the objective evidence presented in court. Thus, it is clear that reasons or evidence for a belief is required for us to consider it knowledge. I would therefore argue that justification is an undeniable condition for knowledge, besides belief and truth.

However, detractors may argue that true belief is as good a guide to action as justified true belief, or what we would traditionally consider knowledge and so justification is deniable as a condition for knowledge. Consider the example of two tour guides – one with mere true beliefs and the other with actual knowledge. The former would have correct beliefs on the route to take to reach a destination and would thus be

able to guide us just as well as the latter, who has actual knowledge of the correct route. Thus, it seems that true belief is as useful to us and to others as justified true belief and the justification condition thus seems dispensable.

While this may be true, it is important to note that the flightiness of belief as compared to the stability of knowledge is what leads us to value knowledge more than belief. Using the above example, we would think that the tour guide with mere true beliefs would be easily persuaded to go down another incorrect route, precisely because he has no good reason for following the correct path. On the other hand, the tour guide with actual knowledge would likely be more persistent in his beliefs as he has justification for them. In this sense, then, justification acts as the epistemic glue for our beliefs, tethering them to our minds such that we would not be easily dissuaded from them. Hence, it is clear that justification is also an essential and undeniable condition for knowledge and so belief is not the only undeniable condition.

In conclusion, belief is not the only undeniable condition for knowledge as the other two conditions in the tripartite theory of knowledge, justification and truth, are equally crucial and indispensable in our definition of knowledge. While there has been arguably more controversy over the justification and truth conditions, they have ultimately failed to prove that these conditions are unnecessary for knowledge. Hence, the view that belief is the only undeniable condition for knowledge cannot be accepted.

**Marker's comments:**

*Very good attempt! Quite comprehensive. Generally consistent in providing elaboration and example, though sometimes this was not the case (some narration). Consistently argued for (with a few exceptions). Could have considered justification vs truth.*

**‘When it comes to what we ordinarily call knowledge, belief is the only undeniable condition.’ Critically assess the view.**

Our ordinary definition of knowledge is that knowledge is justified true belief. This means that to know a proposition, one must fulfil three conditions. One must believe the proposition, have good reason to believe it, and the proposition must be true. I disagree with the view that belief is the only undeniable condition out of the three because the justification and truth conditions are undeniable as well.

Firstly, belief is a necessary condition for knowledge because it would seem incoherent otherwise. Consider the sentence, “I know that it is raining but I do not believe it.” This sentence seems intuitively absurd because we do seem to think that if we know something we believe it. Asserting that you know something but you do not believe it thus gives you an incoherent sentence. Therefore, to know something you must believe that it is the case, so belief is a condition for knowledge.

However, some may deny that belief is a necessary condition for knowledge by claiming that to believe is to be ambivalent but to know is to be certain, and thus that belief and knowledge are incompatible. For example, consider an athlete claiming that “I do not believe that I will win, I know that I will win”. Here, the athlete is claiming that he is certain about winning and not ambivalent about it. This shows that believing and knowing are not compatible. If you know, then you do not believe because you are certain rather than ambivalent. If you believe, then you do not know because you are ambivalent rather than certain.

While this seems plausible at first, the objection does not work because even if to believe is to be ambivalent and to know is to be certain, knowledge still entails belief. Consider the earlier example of an athlete claiming that “I do not believe I will win, I know I will win.” This can be seen as merely a more emphatic way of saying “I do not just believe I will win, I know I will win.” Even if believing is ambivalent and knowing is certain, it could be the case that knowing still entails belief and some other features of knowledge make it certain rather than ambivalent.

Some may also deny that belief is necessary by saying that belief is more about one’s state of mind but knowledge is more about how one acts, and thus one can have knowledge without belief by acting in a way that suggests they have knowledge

without having belief. For example, consider a quiz where you have forgotten all the answers to the questions. You guess all the answers and later find out that you have guessed correctly. The fact that you guessed correctly seems to suggest you have knowledge, since someone who knows the answers would answer the questions correctly. However, the fact that you guessed the answers seems to suggest that you did not believe the answers to be true. Thus, you can have knowledge without belief by acting in such a way that someone with knowledge would act without having belief.

However, this fails to deny that belief is necessary because acting in such a way that someone with knowledge would act entails assenting to a proposition, and this assent counts as belief in a minimal sense. Consider the previous example. By answering the questions correctly, even if it was by guessing, you had to assent to the correct answers. Guessing is thus still a form of belief in a minimal sense, so belief is still necessary for knowledge because to know something one must assent to it.

With this, it can be said that belief is an undeniable condition for knowledge, since attempts to deny it have failed. However, the other conditions, truth and justification also seem to be undeniable, so belief is not the only undeniable condition.

Let us examine the truth condition. Truth is necessary for knowledge because we intuitively do not allow that someone who has a false belief has knowledge, even if they have good reason to believe it. For example, consider a cave person living thousands of years ago who believes that the Earth is flat. They have good reason to think so given the available information, since the Earth looks flat and things do not fall off the side of the Earth like they do with other round things. An egg placed on top of another egg would roll off it and fall to the ground, but eggs do not roll off the edge of the Earth. Despite the reasons for the caveperson to believe that the Earth is flat, it still seems counterintuitive to grant that they know that the Earth is flat because the Earth is in fact round. It is more intuitive to claim that the caveperson did not have knowledge that the Earth is flat because they lacked the relevant information to know that the Earth was round.

Moving on, justification is necessary because we tend to think that we must have reasons for believing that something is the case to know that it is the case, and it is unintuitive to grant that we have knowledge if we come to a true conclusion by sheer luck or coincidence. For example, consider a racist juror who comes to the conclusion that a defendant is guilty simply because of the defendant's skin colour. The defendant is in fact guilty of the crime, but nonetheless, it seems odd to grant that the racist juror knew that the defendant committed the crime since the racist juror come to their conclusion via unjustified prejudices rather than actual evidence presented in court. Therefore, justification is necessary for knowledge since a true belief without

justification is not knowledge, rather it is an unsubstantiated assertion which happens to be true by luck or coincidence.

However, some may deny that truth and justification have to both be there to have knowledge by claiming that truth and justification serve the same functional role, and thus we only need one or the other. This is since we determine whether a statement is true or justified by similar methods. This is shown by the similarities between the theories of justification and the theories of truth. Empiricism, which claims that all knowledge is justified by a bedrock of incorrigible sense data, suggests that we justify our knowledge using our senses. Similarly, the correspondence theory of truth states that a proposition is true if it corresponds with a fact, situation, or state-of-affairs. This also suggests that a proposition is true if we can verify that it corresponds to a fact via our senses. For example, I see a cat on the mat and thus believe that there is a cat on the mat. Using sight to see the cat on the mat means that the proposition is both true and justified under empiricism and the correspondence theory of truth. Next, coherentism suggests that our beliefs are justified if they cohere with other beliefs, and the coherence theory of truth suggests that a proposition is true if it coheres with other beliefs. This means that coherence with other beliefs establishes both truth and justification. For example, it is both true and justified that the Earth is round since this coheres with other beliefs like that my science textbook and science teacher tell me that the Earth is round. Lastly, reliabilism states that beliefs are justified if they are produced by a reliable method and the pragmatic theory of truth states that a proposition is true if it works and we can successfully put it into practice. This suggests that my ability to achieve any practical goals establishes both the truth and justification for the proposition I use to achieve the goal. For example, I believe that there is a restaurant six bus stops away. I managed to get food by riding the bus, and I used a reliable method in Google Maps to get to the restaurant and get food. Thus, the fact that I got food from the restaurant seems to suggest that it is both true and justified. Given these similarities between the theories of justification and theories of truth, some conclude that it is deniable that truth and justification are necessary for knowledge since we only need one or the other.

However, this does not successfully deny that truth and justification are not necessary because it is nonetheless possible to have justified false beliefs even with the similarities between truth and justification, and it is nonetheless unintuitive to grant that we have knowledge in these cases. Looking at the correspondence theory of truth and empiricism, we could easily have a justified false belief if we view the world in bad conditions. For example, I could think I am seeing a cat on the mat, but it could just be a cardboard model of a cat made really well. This would mean that although we use the same method to establish truth and justification a lot of the time, these methods still could produce justified false beliefs. Coherentism and reliabilism and the

coherence and pragmatist theories of truth face the same problem. We could be wrong in saying that the Earth is round even if this coheres with the science textbook and teacher, since the science textbook and teacher could be wrong and the Earth could be doughnut shaped with an imperceptibly small hole going through the middle. Just because I got my food does not mean that there is a restaurant six bus stops away. It could be the case that the restaurant I found was on a constantly moving truck that just happened to be six bus stops away, so there was no restaurant at all. Therefore, we need both truth and justification to have knowledge even if we establish truth and justification in the same way because we need a way to reject these instances of justified false beliefs and say that they are not knowledge.

In conclusion, the attempts to deny that belief, truth or justification are necessary for knowledge have been unsuccessful and thus belief, truth and justification are all undeniable conditions for knowledge, as far as I know. I thus disagree with the view that when it comes to what we ordinarily call knowledge, belief is the only undeniable condition.

**Marker's comments:**

*A good attempt. Generally correct content. Good attempt to bring in the whole justification vs truth issue. But better if you had considered truth being unattainable for matters of fact statements.*

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