ksbull

Issue one 2011

Message from the Principal

By the time this issue of KS Bull is in your hands, the excitement of the elections campaign and rally speeches would have blown over. The dice would have been cast for both the ruling party and the opposition parties. However, all who have presented their party manifestos, defended what they stood for and rebutted accusations from their opponents would have grown in terms of conviction as well as in their public speaking and argumentative skills.

If you have not read *Very Fine Commentary,* an online journal started and helmed by Rafflesian graduates, do log on to http://veryfinecommentary.tk. There are two articles on the elections which I particularly enjoyed: *"Party Responsibly: Renewal in the PAP"* and *"Tin Pei Ling: New Blood or Bad Blood?".*

Very Fine Commentary is where GP essays meet a real audience (albeit an online one) and therein lies the difference – when you write with a critical audience in mind, you will be forced to get your facts right and be accountable for all that you say through substantiation, evidence and research. You will write with clarity, make an effort to present a clear stance and ensure that no one catches you making generalisations and sweeping statements. One weakness of students writing GP essays stems from the thought of writing for an 'A' level examiner. If you think 'A' level examiner, your essay is likely to be just a paper exercise, with arguments that do not matter much to you yourself. Write with the intention of owning your ideas. This is the only way to give your essay a sense of purpose, clarity and verve.

Lim Lai Cheng (Mrs)
Principal

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General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 1 | **'Morality has no place in international politics.' Discuss.**

Jarret Huang | 11A01A

The great German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck once imperiously proclaimed that international politics should not be defined by lackadaisical morality but by might and power – the politics of "iron and blood". In this famous quote, the 'Iron Chancellor' argues that morality has no place in the interactions between states and that might, not right, should carry the day. This essay will examine the inherent clash Bismarck describes – whether morality has a place in international politics – by evaluating whether moral, and in fact altruistic acts, have any place in today's world of realpolitik and amoral balances of power.

Carl Von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist, argues that morality has no place in international politics as it often does not bring about benefit to the state that perpetuates it. He further posits that more often than that, it is immoral acts of self-interest that bring about benefits such as security and stability. In the present epoch, this Clausewitzian ideology is manifested in acts of espionage. From Israel's renowned Mossad intelligence agency to the recent sleeper agent scandal in the US, countries have been engaged in the immoral act of spying – the pre-mediated purloining of sensitive and classified information. Granted, this immoral act has entailed undeniable benefits for its perpetrators in giving them more information with which to deal with their neighbours. Eli Cohen, the famous Israeli spy, infiltrated the Syrian High Command and surreptitiously stole information on clandestine troop dispositions before the 1967 Six Day War, further elucidating how immoral acts create clear and tangible benefit – in this case a crushing Israeli victory. Had Israel insisted on a dogmatic code of morality, its chances of victory would have been rendered considerably less optimistic.

Furthermore, it has been argued by adherents of realpolitik that morality does not just fail to bring about benefit, but more importantly, obstructs the pursuit of essential foreign policy aims such as growth and security. Clausewitz called war "an inextricable corollary of politics… an extension of international politics into a different sphere." War, in particular pre-emptive, preventive war, is dubbed a "necessary evil" but would not be permissible under a strict moral system because of the deaths it would inevitably result in. However, war is often used as a means of ensuring stability, an essential foreign policy aim of any state. A prominent example would be America entering the Vietnam War because of its need to ensure its own security. Furthermore, the acquisition of resources by signing contracts with dodgy dictators could be construed as immoral, but these resources need to be obtained if a country were to prosper. This is best manifested in China's amoral foreign policy with regard to Sudan. Despite the ongoing genocide by the Janjaweed militia, China continues to back Omar al-Bashir because he controls a resource vital to the Chinese economy – oil. Thus, one could posit that morality has no place in international politics to the extent that it artificially constrains and restricts the range of foreign policy tools governments can employ in achieving essential aims for the state.

A final assault by those who reject the place of morality in international politics is that the intrinsically ambiguous nature of morality renders it impractical as a foreign policy consideration. As former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright acutely pointed out, "the innumerable permutations morality exists in are incompatible with the decisive actions that international politics demand." Granted, morality is fundamentally subjective and normative. To weigh out all the possible moral options is something that has no conclusive, objective answer. Foreign intervention in Myanmar to stop the egregious human rights abuses perpetrated by the incumbent junta seems a moral course of action from a moral paradigm that places life as its pre-eminent consideration, but would be rejected by a school of thought that emphasises the country's own domestic issues rather than those of Myanmar. In addition to this morass of confusion over which moral principles to adopt, extrapolating this problem to its logical conclusion necessitates consideration that other

countries may adopt different moral codes under which immoral acts in one country may be deemed standard operating procedure in another. Morality would have no place in international politics because the various states that seek to gain advantages over each other would subscribe to different moral systems to justify their acts of competition. In essence, as Khrushchev declared, "Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you". This once again highlights how the myriad of moral perceptions translates into states simply using their own moral codes as justification for their acts.

That being said, I fundamentally disagree with some of the views put forth by the realpolitik school of thought. While Clausewitz argues that morality does not bring about benefit to states, one could argue that it does. When ASEAN undertook aid missions to Myanmar in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, it was under no legal or political imperative to do so. Rather, it was an act of altruistic morality on the part of ASEAN and this created benefit not only for the people of Myanmar, but for ASEAN because it meant that the junta was more willing to attend discussions and acquiesce to ASEAN demands. The most prominent example of benefit ASEAN's act of morality has engendered is the regional stability that dealing with the generals has created. This undermines Clausewitz's assertion that moral acts do not bring benefit. While the benefits may not be entirely tangible, the goodwill and trust moral acts engender are more often than not a clear benefit that Clausewitz has overlooked. Thus, it could be argued that morality does have a place in international politics.

Moreover, the accusation that morality obstructs the pursuit of essential foreign policy aims such as growth and security is limited by its failure to consider the widening toolbox of measures governments have at their disposal to achieve such aims. With the inexorable advent of globalisation, political leaders are increasingly able to employ means to achieve their aims without resorting to immoral wars or dealings with dictators. For instance, security can be achieved without pre-emptive strikes and confrontations through intergovernmental alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Likewise, growth and resources can be attained by global trade since the range of countries a state is able to trade with has been immensely broadened by globalisation. In this world of increasing interconnectivity, trust and goodwill rather than sheer military might dictate who will treat and trade with you. Military hegemony is largely nullified by collective defence and as such, it is morality and responsibly diplomatic discussions that are more likely to effect change. As such, morality retains its place in international politics, especially the politics of our modern era.

In addition, while there are many schools of thought regarding morality, not all foreign policy decisions are as morally complex as Ms Albright would construe them to be. For instance, whether or not to intervene in the "ethnic cleansing" of Tutsis in the Rwandan genocide is not one that is as complicated as Albright suggests. The fact remains that very often, there are decisions that are morally desirable, such as the saving of lives. Vacillating over moral theories is often a case of countries legitimising their desire not to get involved. Granted, there are instances when more complex morality is involved, but in clear-cut cases of preserving human life, one has a moral imperative as a human being to act. The amoral foreign policy Albright represents can be held responsible for the Rwandan genocide and the needless massacre of thousands of innocents. Surely basic moral decency entails some kind of action on an international scale to end these abhorrent practices.

Ultimately, morality has its problems and constrains some of the decisions politicians must make. It is ambiguous at times and limits the benefits a country may gain over another. However, to reject it entirely does violence not only to international relations, but also to the fundamental responsibilities one man has to another. Morality may not be absolute, but it should remain a significant factor in the decision-making matrix of politicians so as to create a more desirable, humane world.

Marker's comments:

Jarret, this essay is in a league of its own! It has vigour and depth that are not often seen. There's also obvious evidence of extensive reading, although the accuracy of some of the quotes is questionable. On the whole, this is beyond brilliant.

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 2 | **'Morality has no place in international politics.' Discuss.**

Benjamin Mak | 11A01B

In Thomas Hobbes' formulation, life on Earth is "nasty, brutish and short". As we survey a globalised landscape powered by advanced technology, it is striking to note how seemingly amoral, or even immoral, international politics appears to have remained. From simmering violence in Somalia internally to continued tensions between North and South Korea over the North's alleged sinking of the Cheonan destroyer earlier this year, international politics appears to be a grubby, even abhorrent, business that has no basic sense of right and wrong and pays but lip service to ideas of justice and ethics. While this pessimistic scene appears to prevent morality from having a place in international politics, I will argue that the implications of taking this view are naïve at best and irresponsible at worst because of an emerging trend towards the inclusion of moral considerations in international politics. Even if this might be often unsuccessful, the fact that they contribute to international politics suggests to us sufficiently that morality's place is not to be denied in the dealings of the family of nations as well as that of non-state actors like al-Qaeda who now assert their extremist religious voice with violence global leaders cannot ignore.

Nevertheless, it is useful to first consider the views of those who uphold this statement. We begin with the oft-quoted axiom that "Nations have no permanent friends, ... only permanent interests". What follows from this is the idea that sovereign states act purely based on the calculations of realpolitik and do not consider the ethical justifications or impact of their actions, an interpretation with an intellectual heritage stretching arguably from Machiavelli to Kenneth Waltz in the 1970s. Such views reflect the realist school of thought in the academic study of international relations, and have been used to explain events varying from current issues like the 2003 American invasion of Iraq without United Nations (UN) Security Council approval, on the falsehood of Saddam possessing nuclear weapons, to what are regarded as more historical issues, seen, for instance, in America's refusal to stop the 1977 Cambodian genocide because it feared to antagonise the Chinese whom it had cultivated as a counterweight to the Soviet Union in the 1970s following "Ping Pong Diplomacy". These failures appear sufficient for proponents of this view to show that international politics is essentially immoral and morality has no place in it.

Another way that proponents use to show that morality has no place in international politics is the failure of international political institutions to provide justice to the beleaguered peoples of the world. From the blanket imposition of the Washington consensus free-market principles by the World Bank in developing nations like Bolivia, despite the fact that privatising water supplies would price the resource out of the means of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Bolivians, to the fact that the Permanent 5 members of the UN Security Council, namely Britain, France, China, Russia and the US, continue to hold veto powers that paralyse the world body and hamper its ability to deal with threats like Iran's suspected nuclear programme due to Russian and Chinese vetoes in the earlier years following the dawn of the 21st century, such situations add further credence to the views of those who argue that morality has no place in international politics.

Also, proponents of this view might suggest that even if moral considerations like peace may be at stake in international politics, the fact that such considerations are often trumped by the strategic considerations of sovereign states means that morality is sidelined and thus has no meaningful place in international politics. They point to the failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1970s due to the zero-sum calculations of the Americans and Russians, which led them to militarily supply the Israelis and Arabs respectively, building tension for an arms race that eventually culminated in Israel's spectacular victory in the 1967 Six Day War over the Arabs. Their argument is buttressed in this instance by the fact that Kissinger's "Shuttle Diplomacy" had laid the ground for the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel because Anwar Sadat, Egypt's president, decided that his predecessor Nasser's policies had weakened the country's economic standings

and prestige and found it strategically beneficial to hold the olive branch out to Israel. Moreover, the emergence of groups like al-Qaeda on the global stage, which engage in violent asymmetric warfare that came to its most horrific conclusion in the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks, and events like the 1998 World Anti-Zionist Congress, which condemned Israel's refusal of the Palestinian right of return, suggest that immorality in international politics by sovereign states actually spurs more immorality and violence.

Against this dour backdrop, there is still cause to believe that morality does have a place in international politics. Here, I introduce the idealist school of international relations, which suggests that politics today is not just a war of words buttressed by guns, but does adhere to common norms of justice that violators are condemned for and creates institutions that seek to promote peace and have done so successfully on several occasions. The first argument stems from the fact that with the strengthening of international law, national leaders who have committed grossly immoral acts can be called to account in international courts. We first witnessed this in the Nuremberg trials for Nazi political leaders convicted of involvement in the Holocaust that killed six million Jews, then subsequently with the Arusha tribunal by the UN in the mid-1990s following the Rwandan genocide, and most recently, the trial of the former Liberian leader Charles Taylor for his involvement in Liberia's civil war and the shady trade in blood diamonds. While the President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Hisashi Owada emphasised in this year's edition of the Singapore Academy of Law Annual Lecture that the difficulties in aligning international law with domestic law remain significant, the fact that growing numbers of states, including even bitter enemies such as the US and Nicaragua, have been willing to seek judgement by the ICJ on matters as prickly as territorial demarcations suggests a shift towards an increasing awareness and practice of morality in the dealings of international politics.

Beyond such cases, we must also consider the crucial argument that competing moral claims are often at the centre of some of the most enduring disputes of our time, one of which is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Israel had legitimate grounds to express its nationalist aspirations following the horrors of the Holocaust that tore the Jewish population asunder in Europe, the clash of this moral claim with the Palestinian claim to prior residency and hence a legitimate state in the same area has meant that their equally compelling moral claims have fomented violent political interactions witnessed in the 1987 and 2000 Intifadas. In this case clearly, rather than two wrongs not making a right, it is two rights making a wrong. Hence, far from being an outsider in international politics, morality has always been inextricably involved in this and other conflicts such as those between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

Furthermore, we must be willing to assess the positive impact of morality on international politics, paradoxical as this might first appear. In a world beset with the prospect of game-changing climate change that is likely to indelibly alter our lives, the decision of independent nations in the European Union (EU) to come together in 2005 to first establish an emissions trading system, which is tied to the fulfilment of enforceable emissions costs by 2012, suggests a growing sense of responsibility amongst developed nations for the destruction and suffering their industrial pollution now portends for the world and a willingness to take voluntary steps through political cooperation to mitigate the situation. It is such a sense of colonial guilt and a feeling of responsibility for the development of its former dependants that arguably led Britain to establish the Commonwealth, which today promotes the cultural, economic and even sporting development of a wide array of African and Southeast Asian nations. Indeed, the United Nations was founded upon the notion of desiring to rid the world of the "scourge of war" and though it has not always been successful in its implementation of numerous schemes under the UN Development Programme, which has incidentally helped Ghanaians get schooling, Nigerian farmers better yields and numerous other benefits, political cooperation in the image of the UN has earned itself a humane face of compassion and social justice.

While realist scholars might ignore such issues of morality by dismissing them as being possibly superceded by more insidious, cold-blooded and individualistic political calculations, the presence of moral considerations and their effect on international politics today suggests that they remain continually relevant and are making a gradualist ascent in terms of importance. Indeed, perhaps the only way one can say with absolute confidence that morality has no place in international politics is to question the existence of a unitary morality altogether due to what is termed as cultural relativism. However, such arguments firstly, stray from the task at hand, and secondly, are unfounded because in Declarations like that for Human Rights in 1948 and against Torture and other forms of Cruel, Degrading and Inhumane Punishments in the 1980s at the UN, numerous states agreed to commit to their principles for a just and better world. Though realists may choose to cite more cases of expedient deviations, including Iran's support for the violent tactics of Hezbollah and even America's use of waterboarding at Guantanamo Bay, the conclusion I have presented remains valid because morality does not disappear just because there are criminals in our society. There is a clear line between the threats to morality in international politics, and the absence of morality from international politics altogether. On the twin grounds of empirical truth and human hope, it is dangerous to claim, prima facie, that morality has no place in international politics.

Marker's comments:

Excellently written; mature, analytical, comprehensive and well-supported by a plethora of examples.

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 3 | **'Pop culture is all about appearance.' Is this a fair comment?**

Miranda Yeo | 11A01C

With a quick flick of the remote control, a fast search on YouTube or a stroll through one's neighbourhood shopping mall, it is now easy to experience the effects new media and technology have on popular culture. Pop culture is now more popular than ever before, and it is greatly pervasive in almost every aspect of our lives. Pop culture, with its glitz and glamour, and its preference for the bold and the beautiful, may often be regarded as nothing but a material, superficial upkeep of appearances. Some disparage the idea of pop culture as having intrinsic qualities such as the celebration of genuine talent and freedom of expression, accusing it of mere superficiality, an insult to the creation of art. Yet, to claim that pop culture is nothing but appearance seems an overly hasty generalisation. I believe that pop culture has indeed much value surpassing the skin-deep upkeep of superficial appearance, as it offers us genuine talent, and its pervasiveness in our lives today may be employed for good.

As first glance, it does seem that pop culture places its sole emphasis on appearance. From the influx of beautiful actresses, singers and media personalities who dominate the pop culture scene to the top music videos of today with all their fancy graphics and special effects, it would be hard to ignore the visual kaleidoscope pop culture brings us. The implications of an emphasis on the bold and the beautiful manifest themselves in consumer choices and youth culture today. The cosmetics industry is flourishing and products front-lined by popular artistes have shown tremendous success in sales. Celebrities such as Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez and Celine Dion, amongst others, have jumped on the bandwagon of producing celebrity perfumes, a sales strategy that has indeed been successful. Perhaps a closer look at our top-ranking pop artistes of today would best illustrate this point. Lady Gaga, hailed by pop devotees as the queen of popular culture today, is the finest example of "appearance above all". Her outrageous costumes and red carpet outfits, coupled with her visually stunning music videos, have captured the attention of the general public, catapulting her to instant fame and stardom. Furthermore, a quick browse through any magazine covering a red carpet event would show us a "best-dressed" or "worst-dressed" list, promulgating the idea that celebrities are supposed to look beautiful all the time, and are constantly judged by appearance. Considering that pop culture does indeed place a great emphasis on appearance and that pop culture zealots compound this by expecting a near-perfect upkeep of appearances, it may seem that pop culture promotes little else but appearances.

Yet another criticism that pop culture suffers from is the accusation that beyond beautiful appearances, pop culture holds no worth, with its mediocre though multifarious talents. The artistic freedom that artistes today are given have allowed for pop songs with controversial or suggestive lyrics such as Katy Perry's "I Kissed A Girl". These catchy tunes with lyrics that hold little artistic value have made it far up on the Billboard charts, and critics attribute it to the physical attractiveness of the singers or the public's undiscerning ears. Furthermore, with new media platforms such as YouTube and MySpace, it is now increasingly easy to "create" celebrities, and many feel that this has resulted in a rapidly expanding "talent" pool, albeit one that is sorely lacking in real talent. Detractors claim that the meaningless lyrics of pop ditties and the predictable tunes of bubblegum pop are proof of this lack of talent. Seen in this light, it would be easy to understand why many feel that pop culture lacks talent and substance, beyond its glamorous appearance.

It would be overly hasty, however, to paint all of pop culture with the same tainted brush, accusing it of being nothing but superficial appearance. While it may be true that the exponential increase in artistes has brought its fair share of talentless beauties, we have undoubtedly also discovered a great treasure trove of artistes who are musically talented. Popular talent show "Britain's Got Talent" discovered Susan Boyle, now one of the top-grossing artistes in the United Kingdom. Boyle cannot be said to be a great beauty, yet she possesses a beautiful voice that won the hearts of

youths and adults alike. Her success is a testament to the untruth that pop culture is all about appearance. Besides, pop culture has also produced innumerable music legends such as the recently deceased Michael Jackson, hailed by many as the King of Pop. He was able to rise to his status as a legend because of his musicality, artistry and personality, not solely because of appearance. His fan base, in fact, was supportive even after he had to undergo reconstructive skin surgery, a clear indication that appearance alone was not a key determinant of his success. As such, it would be unfair to claim pop culture as nothing but appearance. History and current trends prove otherwise, as earlier elucidated.

While pop culture may seem to promote appearance, there is now a rising trend of celebrity activism, supporting the point that pop culture artistes, beyond superficial appearances, may help to propagate and make popular pioneering movements. An example would be eco-fashion that has gained momentum in recent years. Anya Hindmarch's "I'm Not A Plastic Bag" designer tote was a catalyst for environmental activism. It was hugely successful, even spawning imitations worldwide. While it may be questionable why these trends gained such popularity, it is undeniable that worthy movements gain much-needed publicity through pop culture. The recent Live Earth concert held in the name of environmental conservation also featured artistes singing and performing for a cause. The advent of this idea of "a celebrity for a cause" is proof that beyond appearance, pop culture does have intrinsic value in that it has the potential to spread positive influence when helmed by worthy artistes.

While the persistence of an emphasis on appearance in pop culture today may distract us from the intrinsic worth of art and the talents of deserving artists, to claim pop culture is nothing but appearance seems overly hasty and unfair. I believe that pop culture has real talent with celebrities who can capitalise on their popularity to do good. Hence, before we dismiss pop culture as being "all about appearance", we should ourselves look beyond appearances and artifice, discovering the worth of pop culture.

Marker's comments:

Miranda, overall, a commendable attempt, with some good examples and insights provided. Some of the examples, however, are rather commonplace, and I think more examples could have been provided as well. You may also like to consider other ideas, such as how pop culture may reflect the times, or express the zeitgeist of the age, or express values or mindsets etc.

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 4

To what extent is the commercialisation of sport a positive trend?

Lee Jiayu Sherri | 11A01C

The commercialisation of sport is evident in sport today, in the billion-dollar advertising and endorsements made by corporations, particularly in televised and highly publicised sports like soccer. Sport in the modern world is largely inseparable from commercialisation: every sporting event or competition has its sponsors, with athletes sporting the logos of the companies concerned on their team jerseys. Although some may argue that commercialisation negates the intrinsic value of sport and detracts from the values of athleticism, I believe that far more than being just a positive trend, to a large extent the commercialisation of sport is in fact necessary for its survival in the 21st century.

Commercialisation has proved to be a highly effective marketing tool, both for corporations and organisers alike, having raised awareness about sport in the modern world; it has served as a vehicle for practitioners of sport to showcase their craft, so as to generate public interest in sport and to transmit athletic values and ideas of sportsmanship to the everyman. With the recently concluded Youth Olympic Games in Singapore, the concept of sport was a hot topic here, with buzzwords like Olympism, and 'sporting values' permeating the sphere of social consciousness. Clearly, attempts to spread awareness amongst the general population have proved phenomenally successful; yet, this would not have been possible or even half as effective without the aid of commercialisation. Public awareness of and interest in the Youth Olympic Games stemmed largely from advertising campaigns, sponsored by a variety of international companies. One may recall Canon's televised and print commercials, featuring local athletes like swimmer Tao Li and air rifle shooter Jasmine Ser, with messages encouraging our sporting heroes in their quest for glory during the Youth Olympic Games; another significant series of advertisements was the campaign by Milo, featuring swimmer Rainer Ng and the tagline "Challenge Your Limits". On the surface, such campaigns appear to be purely in good spirit, promoting sporting ideals and the Games themselves; however, a vested interest lies at the heart of all such campaigns, that of companies seeking to promote their products, riding on the hype of the Youth Olympic Games. In fact, commercialisation through such advertising campaigns and media has been the primary means of transmitting sporting values to a larger, global population. Although purists may argue that commmercialisation, concerned with monetary profit, taints the spirit of Olympism and sport, sacrosanct ideals at the core of athletics, I would argue that commercialisation, on the contrary, fuels the flame of Olympism, encouraging people to adapt these values for themselves and to keep them alive in modern society, something that does more justice to the spirit of sport. As we can see, the commercialisation of sport is a highly positive trend to a large extent, proving a powerful force in raising public awareness and promoting the values of athleticism.

Building on the awareness generated through the commercialisation of sport, it is then a natural next step to generate interest, and by extension, capital. Sport benefits from commercialisation in that the revenue generated through sporting events ensures its fiscal sustainability, so that more people may continue to enjoy sport in the future, for generations to come. A prime example of this is football – one cannot watch an English Premier League (EPL) match without seeing the ubiquitous billboards along the sides of the spectator stands, which cover a literal 300 degrees; regardless of the camera angle, one is bound to see a Mastercard, American Express or Adidas advertisement on the pitch. Even players themselves wear jerseys adorned with the logos of their multi-million dollar sponsors, with Manchester United jerseys imprinted with the logo of Vodafone, for example. This is hardly limited to football; even on the Formula One race track, drivers wear suits with the logos of Petronas, Red Bull and the like. We hence see a common trend in the more popular sports today – they are all particularly lucrative (with corporations the world over clamouring for a billboard spot at the next EPL match) and highly commercialised beyond the shadow of a doubt. There is money to be made in sport, and it would be foolish of prudent investors

to ignore this. Detractors argue that this takes people away from the true focus of sport, namely that of enjoying the sport in its purest sense; these people often claim that commercialisation turns sport into nothing more than another capitalist money-making game, simply padding the pockets of the wealthy and eroding authentic enjoyment of such sporting activities. Although this is true to some extent, it is true also that the capital generated by this 'profit-making scheme' is necessary to keep sport alive. Alternative forms of entertainment and means of occupying one's time, like the Internet, have emerged as strong competitors for people's attention and time. Should sport be non-commercialised, it would be far more difficult for organisers to generate interest and awareness amongst the populace about their sport, greatly reducing their reach and also making it unlikely that such sports would be widely available to the masses. Over time, interest will diminish and sport may very well become a thing of the distant past, buried in the sands of time. Hence, the commercialisation of sport is necessary to ensure its survival, and is a positive trend to a large extent.

The ethics of commercialisation are often called into question, particularly where developing nations are concerned. The recent World Cup in South Africa raised concerns over whether the commercialisation of the sport was overshadowing the authentic needs of the African population, with corporations simply exploiting the locals and the local scene for profit. Some questioned the morality of holding such an extensively-funded international event in a place with severely lacking infrastructure, an extremely low literacy rate and overwhelming poverty. However, in my opinion, the World Cup in South Africa this year, far from being an opportunity for exploitation, has instead proved to be a great opportunity for charitable work and global aid. Over the course of the World Cup, organisations like UNICEF enlisted the help of soccer superstars like Cristiano Ronaldo to visit rural villages in Africa and interact with the children there; these visits were publicised via the Internet and other forms of media, particularly during half-time commercial breaks. This has since raised awareness of the socio-economic conditions in Africa, drawing attention from the global community to a region often neglected and overlooked by the rest of the world. This has shown that the commercialisation of sport can indeed effect positive social change in the world, and need not be a mere vehicle of selfish exploitation and profit-making. Sponsors have in fact stepped in to pledge aid to the African cause, donating money for the construction of schools and homeless shelters in the continent. In a broader context, the commercialisation of sport has brought about international collaboration between countries coming together to organise international events like the Olympics; although such collaborations may not win wars or bring about world peace, these exercises in co-operation foster harmonious bilateral relations, bringing different cultures together. Therefore, the commercialisation of sport has brought about positive social change and is a positive trend to a large extent.

The commercialisation of sport, for all intents and purposes, is ultimately a positive trend to a large extent. It need not be confined to the insular, parochial purpose of monetary profit, but rather should be championed for its potential to raise awareness of sporting values, generate financial support, as well as the power it lends to social, international and charitable causes. If used in an ethical and socially-conscious manner, the commercialisation of sport will ensure that sport will continue to thrive and grow for years to come.

Marker's comments:

Sherri, you provided an intelligent and glowing endorsement of the commericalisation of sport, with numerous pertinent examples. I think, however, the negative effects of sport should have been more thoroughly explored, rather than glossed over. Nonetheless, it was a pleasure reading your essay, and this is no doubt helped by the fact that you have an excellent command of the language.

essay 5

To what extent is the commercialisation of sport a positive trend?

Dominic Lo | 11S03E

From the gladiator contests in medieval times to modern sporting events such as the much publicised FIFA World Cups and Olympic Games, sport has been an integral part of our culture, heritage and identity. Sport is the pursuit of excellence, the willingness to scale new heights and the thirst to achieve unprecedented feats. It transcends boundaries, is a common language that the world speaks, and provides a platform for the interaction and cultural exchange between people of radically different backgrounds. In today's capitalist market, firms and consumers are driven predominantly by self-interest, and coupled with globalisation and the consequential erosion of international boundaries, sport has metamorphosed from being a mere leisurely pursuit to a highly profitable and viable commercial enterprise. Hence, sport is being increasingly commercialised in the world today. Is this a positive trend? Many proponents staunchly believe so, but while I acknowledge that the widespread commercialisation of sport undoubtedly has its benefits, I am more inclined to believe that the commercialisation of sport is not quite as desirable as its proponents would have us believe.

It is undeniable that the commercialisation of sport brings about benefits. This is manifested in the global sporting arena today. The commercialisation of sport has greatly increased consumer access to sporting apparel, infrastructure and education. Sports shops litter our malls, and a quick browse through any of them will allow us to recognise renowned athletes, modelling the same apparel and look that has become so fashionable today, which consumers spend billions on very year attempting to replicate. Sport and fashion are no longer two distinctly separate entities, but rather, have become closely linked and interdependent. With the proliferation and popularisation of the 'sporty' look, the scope of sport's influence has expanded beyond the pitch or ring to that of the clothing market. Moreover, as capital channelled towards sports development increases exponentially with each day, sporting facilities and quality training programmes have become readily available to the wider market. Governments all around the globe invest significant amounts of resources in the hope of discovering the next Roger Federer, Lionel Messi or Usain Bolt. Nations submit elaborate proposals and put forth passionate statements – backed by funds, of course – in order to clinch the privilege of organising global sporting events. Two recent sporting events that have displayed Singapore's support for sport and have well and truly placed Singapore on the world map would be the F1 Singapore Grand Prix and the inaugural Youth Olympics, of which the latter alone cost in excess of $200 million to host. Although the tangible returns may not be particularly apparent, the ties forged and positive image presented to the world more than make up for it.

In addition, the role of the media in sport has been greatly elevated. Media coverage of sporting events is no longer deemed a luxury, but rather, mandatory. The proliferation of the media through the mediums of television and the Internet has allowed sport to reach out to billions worldwide, and vice versa. The profitability of media coverage is immense, with media revenue figures ranging up to £40 million in television rights for screening the group stages of the UEFA Champions League, a tidy sum considering the (mere) £8 million that the winner of the entire competition receives. Media profitability has been the principal reason for the commercialisation of sport, and has presented a win-win situation for both consumers and producers: satiation of the thirst for action and excitement in the case of the former, and the huge nine-digit sums raked in annually by the media enterprises.

However, the glamorisation of the sporting arena has masked the numerous issues associated with the commercialisation of sport to a large extent. In the context of commercialised sport, there has been a drastic shift in focus from the traditional Olympic objective of "making friends through sport" and emphases on fair play and sportsmanship to that of results, success, and most notably, profit. The widespread commercialisation of sport over the past quarter-century has slowly but

surely eroded the sporting culture and ideals that have been inextricably linked to sport since it first came into existence. In today's context, sporting enterprises are, more often than not, run by entrepreneurs instead of athletes or sports enthusiasts, and thus, the motivation behind such endeavours has become inherently and intrinsically wrong. The common view today is that money – and money alone – is able to buy success. In the recent European football transfer window, Manchester City (and their inexhaustible funds gleefully contributed by Sheikh Mansour) splurged a staggering £200 million on the transfers of and wages for Kolarov, Boateng, Toure and Silva – with Toure allegedly earning £200,000 per week. Going back a few more months, Real Madrid's splurging on the 'galaticos' Kaka and Ronaldo amounted to €150 million. From these examples, we can see that money has truly made the world of sport go round, and that spending has become equated with sporting success.

Furthermore, the commercialisation of sport has to a large degree been detrimental to the development of sporting talents. Driven by the "need" to obtain tangible achievements and spectacular results, the allocation of funds has been somewhat biased. A significantly greater proportion of funding for sports is channelled towards sports deemed to have a greater chance of winning. In Singapore's context, the table-tennis and soccer associations receive over S$1 million worth of funding each, while fringe sports such as chess and fencing receive paltry sums of less than one-tenth that of the aforementioned sum. While such an allocation of funds may be deemed "practical" or "pragmatic", a disproportionate allocation of funds will inevitably lead to a cycle of success and failure. With greater funding, athletes are provided with more opportunities, better facilities and superior assistance to achieve their goals. Naturally, with such additional benefits denied to poorly-funded sports, many well-funded sports are able to achieve desirable results and excel on the world stage (except perhaps in the case of soccer, where the goal of qualifying for the 2010 World Cup was discreetly abandoned), thereby leading to a repeat cycle not unlike that of the poverty cycle. Besides, in the quest for excellence, foreign athletes are often sourced as a means to boost the strength of local sporting teams. A quick glance at Singapore's table tennis team (and I mean no disrespect) will lead one to notice that it comprises almost exclusively Chinese "foreign talent". While their loyalty to and passion for Singapore's cause is not in question, it is undeniable that resources and opportunities bestowed on these athletes could otherwise have been utilised to develop local talent, which may match or even surpass their foreign compatriots. However, motivated by the country's myopic desire to achieve quick success, the development of local athletes has been jettisoned in favour of their more established foreign counterparts.

In conclusion, the issue of commercialisation of sport is not one of black or white; that is, that sport should either be completely non-commercialised or exclusively commercialised. A degree of commercialisation is indeed necessary for the continued development and expansion of the sporting arena. However, as proven by the situation today, an overly commercialised culture could be detrimental to the development of talented individuals, and could erode longstanding sporting virtues. Thus, presented with a fine line between sport being ideally commercialised and excessively commercialised, I am of the opinion that sport should only be commercialised to the extent to which it has a profitable yet sustainable existence, and not to the point where commercialisation of sport destroys the very nature of the latter. Hence, I agree to a small extent that the commercialisation of sport is a positive trend, and it is only when we stop making a sport out of sport that a desirable equilibrium may truly be attained.

Marker's comments:

Lovely! A persuasive and passionate response! There is depth in your arguments and a range of relevant examples have been put to good use! Keep up the good work Dominic!

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

The rise of science and technology in the past century has seen dramatic increases in the standard of living, and this phenomenon has had an impact on every aspect of life today. Accommodation, infrastructure, telecommunications, hygiene, food, transport and the economy have all been profoundly and irreversibly changed by modern technology. However, is modern technology addressing our fanciful desires for the unnecessary, or the down-to-earth needs that must be met in order for the proper workings of human society? Due to its profit-driven nature and its tendency to cater to the richer echelons of society, technology seems to be addressing our desires more than our needs.

Die-hard supporters of technology claim that, despite its profit-driven nature, technology still addresses the needs of our society. Technological advancement has helped to solve or alleviate poverty, hunger, and transport issues, and provided basic access to cheap and reliable medicine, clean drinking water and a roof over our heads. Technology today continues to solve these problems. The Green Revolution has doubled rice production in many Third World countries such as India, China and Pakistan, and is estimated to have saved one billion people from starvation worldwide. Today, Golden Rice holds the promise of a more nutritious diet for the poor, alleviating blindness and other conditions related to Vitamin A deficiency. Technological development has also helped cities build extensive and reliable drainage systems, drastically improving the level of hygiene. Surely hygiene, food, medicine and accommodation are basic needs, not desires. By catering to them, it seems that technology has addressed our needs more than our desires.

While it is true that technology caters to some of our basic needs, it also caters to our desires, sometimes to an even larger extent. Technological research and development is profit-driven, so it is accountable to those who are funding the research. Clearly, only the rich have enough money to fund technological research, so technology has a natural inclination towards the rich. Since the rich have all their basic needs already satisfied, they tend to fund technological research because of their desires. For example, research into luxurious high tech items, such as the iPhone, is funded by Apple, which is clearly a profit-driven company. In medicine, the 10-90 gap refers to how only 10% of funding spent on medical research is used to address health problems that affect 90% of the world's poorest. In genetically modified (GM) food, despite its ability to potentially solve world hunger, the distribution of GM seeds is plagued by patent issues. In this case, the desire for profit through patents has overshadowed the need to feed the world. By being profit-driven, technology has catered to the desires of the rich much more than to the needs of the poor.

Supporters of technology point to the fact that there are some instances where technology has placed needs over desires. In climate change, technology is developing many new methods of generating energy that can help to address our environmental problems. Wind energy, tidal energy, hydroelectricity, solar power and nuclear energy are all possible because of advancements in technology. These alternative forms of energy cost more than the conventional method of burning fossil fuel, so they go against the desires of large energy firms that simply want to strive for the lowest cost. In this case, the need to solve the global problem of climate change has been addressed by technology, over and above the desire for cheap energy.

However, while technology has prioritised needs over desires to a certain extent, it is still largely profit-driven. Although alternative forms of technology have been developed, they are not yet widely implemented. The burning of fossil fuels remains our main source of energy. Furthermore, research on renewable energies focuses on reducing cost to make the alternatives more economically viable. This is clearly appealing to the desire for the reduced cost on the part of these same energy firms. Despite the fact that technology sometimes prioritises our needs over our desires, this

prioritisation is rather limited. The bottomline is that technology is profit-driven, and the desire for profits must enter into consideration, even if technology is trying to address our needs.

Another reason why technology is catering more to our desires than needs is that technology has already done more or less enough to address our basic needs. Agriculture and GM foods have alleviated the problem of hunger, engineering has addressed the problem of providing infrastructure, and medical science has been largely successful at improving hygiene. If these needs are not met, it is more due to the fault of other factors, not technology. For example, agriculture has produced enough food to feed everyone in the world, but millions still go to bed hungry. This is not due to technology not being able to produce enough food. Rather, other factors such as economics and politics preclude the equal and fair distribution of food throughout the world. The fact that there is food rotting in the granaries of Europe, while many Africans still die of starvation is no fault of technology, but rather politics and economics. Similarly there are already medicines that treat malaria and tuberculosis – two extremely widespread diseases on Earth. Again, political and economic factors have prevented equal access to medicine for all. Technology has largely done its fair share to address our basic needs. The fact that these needs are still not met is not the fault of technology but rather politics and economics. Given that technology has already done its part to address our needs, it is perhaps reasonable to assert that modern technology today caters more to our desires.

In conclusion, technology does seem to cater to the desires of the rich due to its profit-driven nature. The fact that technology has already done its fair share to address our basic needs further increases technology's tendency to cater to desires rather than needs. Thus, modern technology has indeed addressed our human desires more than our needs.

Marker's comments:

Kewei, this is an excellent piece. I'm glad you focused on constructing arguments and counter-arguments rather than listing examples on one or two arguments. You may also want to consider how desires can become needs over time or when you move from developing to developed countries.

essay 7

Would you agree that modern technology addresses our human desires more than our needs?

Tay Zong Min | 11S03E

From the invention of the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) to the discovery of the immense possibilities of recombinant DNA technology, from the conception of In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) technology to the widespread use of optical fibres as the centrepiece of communications technology, it is indisputable that modern technology, in all its manifestations, has irrevocably changed human life in the 21st century. While many of these technological advancements have brought solutions to age-old problems and have directly addressed the fundamental needs of humans (such as dams to augment the existing water supplies in water-scarce countries – the Marina Barrage in Singapore being a good case in point), there have nevertheless been accusations made that modern technology does more of pandering to our desires, seeking to entertain our every whim and fancy with its bells and whistles, than actually addressing fundamental human issues like peace. I am, however, of the opinion that such an assessment of modern technology is highly unfair. For one, it fails to recognise several key areas where technology has responded most effectively to human needs, whether new or old. Furthermore, as I will seek to address later in this essay, the dichotomy between needs and desires is no longer as clear cut as it used to be. Hence, what could very much be construed as "desires" in the past may very much have become entrenched needs in our present times, making the claim of technology addressing desires more than needs an irrelevant one.

First, it would be worthwhile to examine the areas in which modern technology has very much addressed our needs. Take genetic modification (GM) for instance. With most of the media spotlight trained on rather controversial studies like the transfer of an antifreeze gene from trout to tomatoes to create a variety that could conceivably tolerate wintry conditions, what has been missed is that GM technology very often means to address basic human needs. The development of a variety of Golden Rice, which has significantly elevated levels of beta-carotene (a precursor to Vitamin A), for instance, is a direct response to a very human need for proper, wholesome nutrition, a need that has unfortunately not always been effectively met, leading to millions of children suffering from blindness yearly due to a Vitamin A deficiency in their diets. In this case, technology has clearly sought to address a dire need in the developing world. After all, the impetus behind the variety's creation was not for relatively unnecessary reasons such as to enrich the diets of First World citizens (who already have ready access to dietary sources of vitamin A), but rather, for Third World individuals who lack access to critical nutrition, yet need – and should be rightfully entitled to – that nutrition just as much as we do.

In addition, modern technology has very much stepped up to meet our emerging needs – needs that previously may not have surfaced in previous centuries of human civilisation but have nevertheless materialised in our present circumstances. The rise of green, sustainable technologies is a pertinent example. Detractors against such technology point to how humans have successfully survived in the past using fuel sources like biomass, coal and oil, and thus any forays into sustainable technology is largely unnecessary and merely a matter of human desire rather than need. What these people miss, however, is that today's world is a world vastly different from that of our forefathers: it is highly polluted, with carbon dioxide levels rising interminably and climate change hot on our heels. Clean technology, however expensive and inefficient though it may be, is no longer a luxury but rather an urgent, pressing need if we are to continue enjoying our present standard of living. True as it may be that we have had no need for such technology in the past, such an argument can no longer stand given our changed circumstances, where new needs have emerged and where conventional technology can no longer cater to these new needs.

Granted, there may be instances where the case for technology addressing our human needs may be rather dubious. Take, for instance, the rise of new media platforms like Twitter and FanFiction

where individuals can post every nitty-gritty detail of their lives for the world to see and comment on. Such technology arguably only serves the desire of an individual to gain his or her one minute of fame, and the self-serving nature in the way that such technology is used hardly justifies any claim that technology actually caters to concrete human needs. However, if we were to put aside our prejudices against such seemingly self-absorbed content, and hold our view that technology has just been a tool for our desires for global recognition to grow to the most epic proportions, we see that at the most basic level, such technology (and its consequent use for self–promotion) is but a manifestation of the human need to be heard, to be accepted, and to be recognised – self-actualisation from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, if you like. What technology has done is to enable such human needs to be addressed more readily, and effectively – needs that may previously have been unrecognised due to the sheer difficulty in getting these needs fulfilled. That these needs were unattainable in the past due to limiting circumstances should not confine them to being viewed as dispensable human desires. In this sense, modern technology has very much addressed our human needs, and addressed them so well that needs we previously thought of as almost impossible to attain have become realities for us in the present.

Furthermore, to say that technology merely addresses our desires and needs, and is very much a responsive tool as such, is to ignore the fact that technology very often goes beyond reacting to our needs and wants, to actually dictating them. Take, for instance, the instant connectivity that we enjoy today, thanks to extensive wireless Internet networks, the development of Push Email that sends email messages directly to our handheld devices, and the ubiquitous BlackBerries and iPhones that allow us to "carry" our working lives with us wherever we go. Before the arrival of this telecommunications age, such connectivity was largely unthinkable, and we very much functioned via conventional communication tools like landlines and the written letter. Instant communication was almost wishful thinking. Yet, with such revolutionary technology, the way we work has been thoroughly redefined such that new needs have been created in the process – the need for speed, the need to be always plugged in, and the need for instant connectivity. Sure, modern technology may have addressed our needs and wants, but it has also changed our behaviour so much that what used to be desires have been transformed into de facto needs, and hence to state that technology is merely a response to human behaviour is to ignore the fact that it has very often created for us, the users, new needs that were previously unthinkable.

Clearly, the dichotomy between 'desires' and 'needs' is not as clear-cut as the question insinuates. With our changing circumstances – the potential of technology to address previously unachievable human needs, and technology's ability to institute new needs in the human race – to say that modern technology addresses human desires more than our needs would be to ignore the highly fluid transition between desires and needs today, and would also be unfair given the plethora of technologies that have been invested to solve fundamental human problems. In that sense, I believe that modern technology always addresses more of our needs – be it new or old, natural or constructed.

Marker's comments:

Bravo! An insightful essay in which you did not just scratch the surface like so many others did! Very intellectually satisfying! I like the way you engaged with the subjectivity of the terms 'needs' and 'desires' head-on, from start to finish!

essay 8

"Art has little practical value in today's society." What is your view?

Lee Wesley | 11A01C

The modern pragmatist would have many of us believe that art is nothing but a painted canvas that is condemned to spend eternity in an ivory tower, or on the pristine walls of museums, the modern equivalent. Popular palaver surrounding art in all its forms – from the fundamental painting to the pioneering digital art piece – would suggest the contrary, that art is omnipresent in our day and age, and that it possesses a tangible and intrinsic value to society. This essay will argue that despite what many critics of art may claim about it being a fruitless endeavour, art has made a tangible contribution to society and it has left a mark in all communities, both artistic and non-artistic.

Art in its most quintessential form has practical value because it seeks to capture and immortalise a moment of beauty for the enjoyment of the artist as well as anyone who can appreciate it. This transcends self-expression because it aspires to bring comfort, happiness, reassurance, inspiration and a surge of other positive emotions to the audience. Famous playwright and essayist Oscar Wilde expounded this philosophy, claiming that mundane and insignificant reality should model after art because only in the artistic realm do we achieve perfection and beauty. That art is superior to reality gives us all a model to emulate, and by reinventing and replicating this absolute beauty in reality, it brings us much joy. Monet's impressionistic works encapsulate this ideal by capturing physical sensations of beauty while Da Vinci's famous works create a rich and colourful realm of their own, bringing millions of people much sought after inspiration over the course of history. Therefore, art has a practical contribution to modern society because it enriches our otherwise ordinary and transient existence.

Moreover, we see a gradual evolution in the role of art. Once, artists desired nothing more than to create beauty from a few simple tools and an extraordinary mind. Today, art can be an embodiment of both beauty and ugliness in order to effect concrete change. Sometimes it takes a piece of art that captures horror, to the same extent as beauty, in order to shock and convince people into taking action. A new wave of advocacy art has taken the world by storm and people are beginning to listen. This new role of art manifests itself when artists create pieces of art regarding issues they deem significant and would like to inspire others to take the same interest in it and stand up for their cause. Art has exhibited practical value to society by effecting very real actions to help redress and improve upon many of the world's pressing problems. Photography is a new form of art in the recent century and it has served this very role. War photography, detailing the gruesome atrocities committed during events such as the Vietnam War, managed to horrify the masses to such an extent that they began pressuring policymakers to put an end to these brutalities. Literature is also another prime example of art raising awareness of important issues. Novels dealing with the subject matter of the growing pervasiveness of science and technology, such as Huxley's *Brave New World,* have experienced great success in rallying support for the restriction of science's development. Evidently, art is of practical value because it can force a response for critical concerns.

In addition, the changing definition of art will allow us to give it more credit for the contributions it has made. While it is understandable that the pragmatist may not see any practical value arising from a sculpture or a musical composition, he or she certainly cannot deny the practical value of architecture, which in itself is accepted as a form of art. Indeed, we have become increasingly liberal with what exactly constitutes art such that many modern day inventions and creations, which were designed primarily for convenience and utility, have also been deemed art. Since art is not the product itself, but a technique of creating beauty, it encompasses the entire spectrum of means, whether it is through physical labour, primitive tools or even a computer. For instance, architecture in Chicago is unique and considered an art form. It is also practical given that the architects apply the concept of physics in building structures in a manner that allow them to sway, in order for them

not to be damaged by the blustery conditions there. Biodomes are also another fine work of art that have a practical contribution. They are aesthetically pleasing and serve to protect the Earth's biodiversity. As long as there is an intention to make the world a better and more beautiful place, we seem to term it art. With such a broad definition, few can contest the practical value of art.

However, there exist a few artists whose works truly seem to defy any explanation and have little practical value to society. Their art forms are so bizarre that it is difficult for even art critics to access, let alone the common man. We tend to categorise such art as fringe art – art that exists on the periphery of the conventional definition of art. It is widely regarded that such art is of little use to society and it is hard to argue against that. How does starving an innocent dog by tying it to a pillar and not feeding it bring about some value? The idea that such art produces negative externalities by harming others compels us not to accept it as art. There must be some form of reconciliation between the artist's desires and the product of his desires. If, in the process of creation, it detrimentally affects others, then the product does not align itself with the notion that art is a common human endeavour. Essentially, fringe art has little practical value to society and may sometimes exacerbate the stigma already attached to it. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish it from genuine art, which has a tangible value.

In conclusion, art has remained a potent and powerful force in our present day and age because it has real value – from simply enjoying the artwork to producing a response to it. Art can never be relegated to the footnotes of the development of human civilisation when it has played such a crucial role in shaping us and aiding us in transcending our mortality and insignificance. Art comforts and enrages, repels and attracts, inspires and responds; either way it does something and few can deny this. Art does not belong in a museum where it is isolated; it belongs in the hands of the people who have benefited tremendously from its existence, both in a tangible and intangible manner.

Marker's comments:

Wesley, you have very good insights on the issue and you have been able to weave in various art forms that are pretty diverse, from architecture to literature to photography to fringe art etc., into your discussion. However, I would have preferred to see more specific works of art cited in your arguments, which would have reinforced your ideas and assertions much more. Nonetheless, it was a thoughtful response with a good breadth and content.

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 9 | **"Art has little practical value in today's society." What is your view?**

Dexter Leow | 11S03R

One merely has to compare the number of artists such as professional musicians, painters, and dancers to the number of engineers, accountants, lawyers and doctors to see the stark difference in society's emphasis. In today's industrialised and globalised society, what people seem to value the most are the entities that can bring the most material wealth and that have the most economic and commercial value. As such, art, with all its abstraction, seems to have little practical value in today's society. However, it is far too hasty to generalise and to state that art is of little practical value because despite not having as much economic use, art has many uses and an inherent value that is of significance in today's society.

Art may seem to have little practical value in today's society, and this is largely due to conventional wisdom that tells us that there are better paying jobs in other fields. In today's society, people largely hanker after high-paying and prestigious jobs in the fields of law, engineering and medicine as these professions provide a much more robust and stable income to satisfy their desires for comfortable and affluent lifestyles. Contrast these professions to musicians, actors and painters. While there are many artistes like Lady GaGa and George Clooney, there is a far larger proportion who struggle to "make it big" and break into the scene. Furthermore, as with the case of musicians, many are what we dub "one-hit-wonders" – those who, after the success of one album or song, struggle to meet the previous standards and see a fall in sales of subsequent releases. This instability in income causes many to shy away from making a career in the arts, and thus, due to its lower economic value, any artistic skill seems to be of little use.

Furthermore, in many countries, there seems to be little future for the propagation of art due to a lack of receptiveness by citizens. The average Joe on the street often regards art as something for the "elite" of society, believing that it is beyond him. This misconception often leads to the unwillingness to learn more about art. For example, local born fashion designer Andrew Gn felt that he could not make a living in Singapore due to the lack of receptiveness towards fashion and as such, migrated overseas, where there is perceived to be a greater receptiveness and appreciation of art (in this case a more vibrant fashion industry). As can be seen, the misconception of art as being constrained to the elite of society seems to have devalued it in the eyes of the masses. After all, what practical value is there in pursuing art if people do not appreciate it?

However, one must realise that this is purely an economic viewpoint, which is not a holistic reflection of the value that art has in our society. Art also has many varying uses that are extremely relevant in today's society.

Firstly, art allows for the free expression of an individual's emotions, and can serve as an outlet for many. In today's globalised rat race, more and more people are feeling the stresses of the workplace and often turn to art as a form of escape from the real world. Many people choose to listen to classical music to de-stress and in the UK and Singapore, radio stations play smooth jazz in the evenings for the working populace to relax to while on the drive home from the office. In these cases, art serves as an avenue for de-stressing. Moreover, there has been an increasing use of art for the treatment of victims of abuse, a social problem that is steadily increasing year on year. For example, a form of therapy for child abuse victims involves encouraging these victims to express their pent-up emotions through drawings, and it is here that many patients find emotional release. It is evident then that art can serve as a cathartic outlet, and as such has immense potential value that cannot be ignored.

Art also retains the ability to unite and bridge distances between people, which is of great practical value in today's society. Back in the early 1960s, jazz music helped to bring both white and black

people together despite the ongoing racism and differences between the two ethnic groups. Black jazz legends such as Charlie Parker and John Coltrane were influences of future white jazz legends like Dave Brubeck and Pat Metheny. This bridging of socio-cultural gaps extends even till today, with pop music being easily appreciated and recognised all over the world, regardless of race or language. K-Pop acts such as the Wondergirls and Girls Generation are increasingly finding their feet in the American market – where the prevalence of the Korean language is minimal at best. This universal uniting of cultures is not only prevalent in the music industry, but in the theatre scene as well. This can be seen from the staging of various musicals such as *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera* all over the world. Art is a powerful uniting tool and in today's globalised and multicultural society, helps us connect with each other in addition to forging a sense of unity between people of different cultures. Thus, it can be seen that art has much practical value in our society.

Moreover, art is often the impetus that drives innovation and creativity through its ability to challenge societal norms. What is conventionally accepted today is always being challenged by the free and abstract nature of art. Vincent van Gogh's paintings were ridiculed in his time as being unsophisticated. Today however, they are revered as masterpieces that strained against conventional barriers back then. This challenging of the norm led to changes in the way people think, which has been instrumental to the progress of society. When *King Lear* was staged in Singapore, Sir Ian McKellen was told by the censorship board he could not appear naked onstage as they felt that "society was not ready to accept such non-conservative approaches." However, this sparked an outcry amongst many and led to the heated discussion and debate over censorship in Singapore. As a result, there have been a fair number of reformative changes made to censorship policies here. We can thus see how this continual challenging of societal norms helps us to broaden people's mindsets and changes the way society views things. Without art, it can be said that society would not have progressed as far, and as such, art cannot be said to have little practical value in society.

Art can also have political uses. From campaign posters to propaganda videos, political art has many manifestations, all of which serve to win over the hearts and minds of the citizens. When Mao Zedong was in power, there were many propaganda posters scattered all over China, exalting Mao as a leader. Adolf Hitler also used visual art as propaganda: the screening of films and use of posters to spread anti-Semitism and to glorify the Aryan race as being superior to the rest of the world. Political cartoon caricatures are also often published in newspapers or magazines to spread simple messages to the everyman, or as a form of political satire. All these different types of art are all aimed at winning the hearts, minds and votes of the citizens, and convey powerful messages that shape our thinking. Hence, it can be seen that art does have much political value.

When we think of practicality, the first thing that often comes to mind is usually economic benefits. However, we should learn to look past the superficial and examine the other inherent uses that may be present in art. While it may seem that, economically, art is of little practical use, it has many other uses that should not be overlooked entirely. Hence, it would be erroneous to suggest that art has little practical value in today's society.

Marker's comments:

Good job addressing the various forms of art – fashion, painting, drawing, theatre etc. with thorough counter-arguments. However, art does have economic value – it is a big business, you should not discount this! You could also think about art as an educational tool, a cultural repository and an embodiment of religion.

essay 10 | **Have we paid too high a price in our pursuit of economic growth in Singapore?**

Ong Zhi Song Vincent | 11A01C

Singapore has rebounded with an astonishing 13% GDP growth in the last quarter of the financial year, after emerging from the spectre of the sub-prime crisis and the 'worst recession in 80 years.' This is a testament to the solid fundamentals our economy is built on, which saw double-digit growth in Singapore's founding years, and has continued to garner sustained growth in the past two decades. In the pursuit of the material and the monetary, some might argue that the effects of such economic growth have been too detrimental. This essay will not deny that there has indeed been a negative impact in our pursuit of economic growth but will argue that the price paid is not too high, and to an extent, can even mitigate the undesirable outcomes it has brought to our society.

Some might argue that the pursuit of economic growth has led to the transformation of Singapore since its independence, catapulting Singapore from 'Third World to First' – to quote the title of Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's second volume of memoirs. Sound economic policies, like the decision to open up Singapore to Foreign Direct Investment through ventures with Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) in the 1960s, and the establishment of an investment vehicle, the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC), to grow Singapore's finances in 1981, have seen the rapid industrialisation and modernisation of Singapore, opening our shores to the world. With economic growth, Singapore has also seen the rapid urbanisation of her landscape, replacing the old dingy shophouses in Chinatown in the 1950s with a more cosmopolitan and vibrant metropolis. No doubt, economic growth has brought about the means for Singapore to expand and grow, fuelling more economic growth, bringing Singapore even further to the forefront of the world. In looking at how economic growth can bring about a virtuous circle for Singapore and its development, our pursuit of economic growth cannot be seen as coming at too high a price.

Moreover, some might argue that besides the transformation that has taken place over the years, economic growth has also resulted in high standards of living in Singapore today. Economic growth has enabled Singaporeans to be richer in terms of investments and asset appreciation. At the top end, Singapore has one of the largest numbers of dollar millionaires per capita, showing the monetary reward that economic growth has brought about. Similarly, at a more general level, Singapore has one of the highest GDP per capita in the world, showing that it is not just the rich who have benefited from this economic growth. Furthermore, this has spill-over effects on other aspects of the economy like unemployment. A constant demand for labour has seen unemployment rates kept to a minimum in Singapore at 2%-3% annually, ensuring that ordinary Singaporeans have a job and can live in relative comfort. Likewise, economic growth has seen a high Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in Singapore, buoyed by the strong Singapore dollar. This has enabled us to afford imports from around the world, contributing to the relative material comfort we live in. Hence, in seeing how economic growth has brought about a rise in our standard of living, and an increased ability to consume, the pursuit of economic growth was not a high price to pay, but has conversely led to more benefits.

On the other hand, economic growth has brought about detrimental effects in the political sphere, as evident in the stifling of civil society. Despite attempts by the government to "prune the banyan tree judiciously" – to borrow a metaphor used by then-Minister for Communication and the Arts George Yeo – Singapore has yet to find its political voice among its citizens. Apart from more well-established groups like the Law Society, Singapore has not seen many new civil society groups in recent years; even the Law Society has not seen much mass participation, with numbers in the hundreds only. This is due to the government's stance on the politicisation of Singapore, which it views unfavourably as a potential threat to Singapore's social stability. It is well-known that leaders have often shifted the focus away from potential political hot potatoes to what they

deem to be more pragmatic bread-and-butter issues. In a *Straits Times* column in 1994 by writer Catherine Lim, the trend of using economic growth to distract the populace from more political issues was observed, showing that it is by no means a new phenomenon and is deeply entrenched in our society. Ironically, the focus on economic growth has also seen fewer young people willing to work in the public sector and go into politics. Lured by higher wages offered by multinational corporations, brought about by Singapore's bid to spur economic growth and the low barriers to entry for companies here, more choose to work in the private sector, away from politics. Far from being just political rhetoric, the national political landscape has suffered because of a focus on economic growth, and that has had dire consequences for Singapore's direction in the future, indicating that there has indeed been a high price paid in our pursuit of economic growth.

Furthermore, the pursuit of economic growth has led to a yawning income gap in Singapore. By the very nature of 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer', Singapore has seen a proportion of its population falling through the cracks, being unable to keep up with the breakneck speed at which our economy is growing. For example, the Gini coefficient – a measure of income inequality – for Singapore is 0.461, with 0 being perfect equality and 1 being perfect inequality. This figure is closer to that of Sub-Saharan countries and other developing countries, while more industrialised countries like Japan and Norway have figures closer to 0.3. This illustrates the extent to which Singapore's rapid economic growth has brought about the steep gap between the rich and the poor. Unable to keep up with the skills that our knowledge-based economy requires, and unable to provide their children with additional support (like tuition) for their children's education that the rich can provide, the poor often find themselves trapped in the vortex of the poverty cycle. This has detrimental effects for Singapore's social stability in the future arising from "social disdain", as observed by political correspondent Zakir Hussain. The furore over recent events like the Wee Shu Min saga in 2006 over her alleged elitist remarks, and civil servant Tan Yong Soon splurging lavishly on a holiday in France where he learnt how to cook at Le Cordon Bleu highlight fault lines in our society between the rich and the poor, and threaten to tear our social fabric apart. Hence, our pursuit of economic growth can create rifts in society, leading to social instability, which in my opinion is a high price to pay.

On a more intangible level, economic growth has seen the pragmatism of Singaporeans emerge, in their pursuit of the 5Cs, including cash, condominium, car, country club membership and credit cards. This has been entrenched in our local consciousness, and even popular culture like the commercially successful *Money No Enough* in 1998. To this extent, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong has recently announced a new set of 5Cs that Singaporeans should aspire towards, including being compassionate and contributing to charity. In chasing material wealth, Singaporeans have spent less time on helping the less fortunate: less than 10% of Singaporeans did charity work in the past year. Generally speaking, this suggests that Singaporeans have less heart and are less willing to set aside time for less material aspects of life, something which the pursuit of economic growth has caused.

Nonetheless, it is precisely the pursuit of economic growth that has resulted in more affluence, and that Singaporeans now have more energy and time to devote their time to non-material areas. Young people in Singapore have been more politically active, and have shown a greater willingness to participate in politics, especially in cyberspace through *The Temasek Review* or *The Online Citizen.* Even the post-65 generation has envisioned moving away from just economic growth to other aspects of Singapore society, as new Reform Party candidate and former civil servant Hazel Poa has mentioned in one of her interviews. In the greater scheme of things, it can be said that the pursuit of economic growth in the past and present will lead to pursuits in other areas in the future.

In conclusion, while our pursuit of economic growth has brought about detriments to Singapore, its benefits cannot be denied as well. Similarly, given a greater time period, the price to pay for our pursuit of economic growth can be offset by economic growth itself, forming a self-mitigating cycle.

Marker's comments:

Vincent, a thoughtful, perceptive essay with a lot of information and examples related to Singapore's situation that reinforce your arguments. Well done. Just ensure that you don't attribute only one cause or factor to what may be a more complex situation – arguments may become simplistic that way (see paragraph 4). Excellent linguistic ability overall.

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

The modern world is one driven by innovation. New discoveries and inventions are what keep the global economic engine ticking. Yet, as countries around the globe seek to improve their students' foundations in the sciences to allow them to compete in today's world, some have criticised the movement as placing too much emphasis on the sciences to the detriment of the other goals of education. I disagree that this is the case. There is still a healthy interest among many societies in areas that science does not encompass, and indeed there has even been an increasing interest in the liberal arts in some societies. Critics fear that an over-emphasis on science will lead to a decrease in creativity, but this is hardly the case. That said, there are also limits to what a scientific, pragmatic education can achieve, and there is still a need for balance.

Some have argued that in the race by countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom to introduce standardised testing and raise the competence of their science students, not enough emphasis has been accorded to the pursuit of the humanities such as geography and literature. While this may be true, one cannot entirely fault such countries for doing so. The issue with these countries is that, for the past few years, their students have languished in positions on international rankings that do not rightly correspond to the countries' economic status. This has undoubtedly caused these nations' leaders to worry about maintaining their countries' growth, which accounts for the shift back to a focus on the sciences. Even in developing countries, when world leaders talk about lifting standards, they usually refer to increasing literacy rates and proficiency in engineering and the sciences, because ultimately, these core skills are first needed for economic growth, whereas the returns from other subjects may be less critical or tangible.

Education in societies is also adapting to the needs of the modern world. In the modern world, companies are looking not just for people with specific skill sets, but for those with the ability to synthesise ideas from different fields. Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, emphasised the need to study the liberal arts because it would give one a helicopter view and the ability to connect the dots not just horizontally, but vertically as well. To this end, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, has also spoken on the importance of a liberal arts education and how he incorporated skills learnt from calligraphy classes into the design of the Mac as well as its fonts. Societies have not turned a deaf ear to their advice. Indeed, more than ever before, there seems to be an increasing focus on areas beyond the sciences. In Singapore, for instance, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen has advocated a shift away from the original cookie-cutter system, which was responsible for churning out students skilled in mathematics and the sciences who would then contribute to the country's breakneck growth in the 1970s. Singapore has launched new schools such as the School of the Arts to give students a taste of an education in the arts. Far from focusing too much on sciences, societies have moved to embrace areas outside the sciences.

However, it would not do to be too carried away and claim that an education focused on science saps young minds of their creativity, as detractors are fond of saying. Innovation still relies heavily on the sciences, and neglecting the education of minds when they are most receptive to new ideas would be a grave mistake. Education, especially that in tertiary institutions, is closely linked to research and application, which is a further driver of innovation. Research in the sciences has yielded inventions such as satellites, cell phones and the Internet, all of which are the embodiment of creativity and innovation. The process of teaching and learning science seeks to impart to young minds the values of being innovative, of analysing data and drawing conclusions. This, if taught correctly, will enhance their creativity, not dampen it. As Richard P. Feynman, an American physicist, once told his students, there is nothing quite as creative as science. Coming up with theories requires one to postulate something specific that is consistent with all observations and that is different from what has been postulated before.

In conclusion, education in modern society has not focused excessively on the sciences. It has accorded an increasing emphasis to the pursuit of the liberal arts and the arts. Even then, focusing on science education does not have as many flaws as its detractors claim.

Marker's comments:

Xiuzhen, this is a very competent piece with several insightful arguments. I am glad you see that science has the potential to nurture creativity too. Some arguments, however, could do with a clearer focus on the question and better substantiation.

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 12 | "Whoever controls the media controls the world." To what extent do you agree?

Ying Fang Ting | 11S03E

With the advent of globalisation, the media is also increasingly omnipresent in our everyday lives. Be it gazing at a billboard on the streets, reading a newspaper, or switching on the computer to connect to the Internet, we are all exposed to the media. Walk down the streets to any destination, and there is a virtual sensory overload of moving pictures, still-frame posters, and sound from radios. In fact, the media is so prevalent in our modern world that we scarcely consciously realise its presence anymore.

Therein lies the greatest power of the media – to influence our subconscious mindsets. This influence may be benign – perhaps seeing one too many advertisements propels one to purchase a product, or it may be lethal – such as causing genocide. The media is but a tool designed for the main purpose of disseminating information – and perhaps entertaining us along the way – but it is how this dangerous weapon is wielded that causes the greatest damage or brings the greatest benefit. Hence, whoever controls all of the media can indeed have the potential to control the world, though the premise is rather unlikely in our globalised society.

Knowledge is power, and power is a dangerous thing when unchecked. If all media avenues are controlled by a central authority, then that authority effectively holds all the knowledge and hence, absolute power. As the saying goes, absolute power corrupts absolutely. By using the media, the authority in question will be able to disseminate information to suit its own agenda and the people will blindly follow because they know no better. One stark case of this happened in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. In those days, Rwanda's media was completely controlled by the government, who then instigated the Hutus to attack the Tutsis by means of repeating inflammatory messages over the radio. Certainly, the government succeeded in their agenda, chiefly because all the knowledge the Hutu citizens had was "Tutsis killed our president and treated us like slaves. Therefore they must die." When one authority has absolute control over the media, this is the kind of end result it can achieve. By utilising the media to disseminate only the information the authority wants the masses to know, citizens will know no better, and will take whatever they learn as the truth. In this way, the authority is able to manipulate the masses into serving whatever agenda it has in mind, whether beneficial to the citizens or not.

This does not only apply to a government controlling the citizens in a country. The media is like a saloon door that swings both ways, transmitting information from the outside world into a country and releasing information about the country out into the world. When one authority possesses power over the media, it is not just what goes in, but also what comes out that can be twisted. During World War 2 in Nazi Germany, all media went through the government, which then polished the information for dissemination. The proof of its effectiveness can be seen in the fact that despite having spent years fighting almost at the borders of the country and indeed even after occupying Germany after its surrender, it was only the serendipitous stumblings of an Allied soldier that led to the discovery of the concentration camps. Did the German citizens know of this? Of course some of them did. However, the tight grip on the media avenues by the Nazi government forestalled any attempts of informing the outside world. By doing so, the government was able to control the world's perception of Hitler – inciting war made him overly-ambitious, but the Holocaust was the event that painted him a monster. By controlling the media, one authority has succeeded in enforcing one image on the rest of the world, an image that was only shattered when his power over the media collapsed.

Even media primarily meant for entertainment can be a tool to sway the people. It can be argued that one cause of the increase in violence and pre-marital sex is due to its proliferation in the media. Although this is hardly a sin when compared to genocide, it must be remembered that this type

of media is not yet governed by authorities in most developed countries. Censorship boards merely remove sensitive information, but on the whole do not twist the information presented in any irrevocable way because there are always alternate forms of media proclaiming a different viewpoint. For every teenage-oriented drama series glorifying pre-marital sex, there are programmes designed to combat this trend. Imagine if all of entertainment media was also under the careful scrutiny of one authority, with no chance of alternative viewpoints. All of society will be compelled to follow what is being promoted, because they know no better. The Cultural Revolution in China was successful partly because of stories passed down in the entertainment media that told of how great such a revolution would be. Without any opposing viewpoints – even from fiction – the government was able to do exactly what it had set out to do.

And it is not just the government. Anyone or any organisation with enough clout and power is able to control the media, and hence control the perceptions of the world. The multinational corporation, Monsanto, was able to threaten Fox – one of America's biggest media networks – into abandoning an investigative report into Monsanto's bovine growth hormones. This had the unfortunate effect of ensuring the continual usage of these problematic hormones until a United Kingdom report let the cat out of the bag. Monsanto was able to control the media by threatening a lawsuit and the world knew no better.

Besides legal organisations (even those with suspect behaviour), criminal syndicates have used the media to pull strings with great effect. After the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden released his famous ultimatum to the American people using new media – the Internet. Al-Qaeda effectively possesses absolute power over any media information about itself, and this in turn is able to either instill fear in the rest of the world or motivate the minority to commit jihad for "noble causes". Either way, the syndicate has the world dancing on its strings simply because it has the power to provide just one viewpoint, changing mindsets in the process, all in the name of achieving its own goals.

However, this is not cause for doom and gloom. For the world to fall under one authority's control, all avenues of the media pertaining to the relevant issues must first be controlled by that authority – no easy feat considering the multitude of media available in any globalised country and the ungovernable Internet. Although some may try – China, Iran and North Korea come to mind – it is evident that success has been limited. The disputed Iranian elections were debated over Twitter, a social networking site, and possibly one of the few media sources the government was unable to take over. As long as opposing viewpoints are present, this control is not absolute and the world will be able to break free.

In conclusion, from history, the one to whom the media answers to can indeed use the world as puppets, but only if his control is complete. Considering the increasing creep of globalisation in all modern societies, this is less and less likely to happen. However, we must recognise that the very prevalence of the media in our daily lives makes this event, if it ever happens, a real threat to individualism and can destroy everything we have stood for. Whoever controls the media can control the world, but he must control the media first.

Marker's comments:

Insightful, intelligent and impressive! Bravo!

essay 13 | **"Whoever controls the media controls the world." To what extent do you agree?**

Muhammad Ashraf Yusoff | 11S03C

The pertinence of the media to our current society is undeniable. With the advent of globalisation and the rise of new media, the pervasiveness and permeability of the media in our lives has increased rapidly, and has even become the norm for almost every individual all around the world, to the point that we are not even conscious of the influence the media has over us. As such, many organisations and individuals have sought to rein in the media, with hopes of influencing, or to a greater degree, controlling the actions of others. To 'control the media' in this context is defined as to directly regulate how the media is being used or implemented, and to 'control the world' refers to the ability to influence the actions and decisions of society at large to such a great extent that the organisation or individual doing the controlling is essentially deciding the actions or even altering the perception of the world at large. There is no doubt that by wielding the immense power of the media, organisations or individuals are able to influence the society at large. However, we, as sentient individuals, still have freedom of choice in what we do, and in fact, the people being controlled actually control the actions of the organisations or individuals controlling the media, as this essay aims to show.

The media is a colossal entity, and is not entirely monolithic. The media does encompass almost every aspect of our lives, but it is made up of different aspects, such as the political, economic and social aspects. In the political arena, one main function of the media is to inform the public of the happenings and current affairs in both domestic and international contexts. This role is usually carried out by press organisations, such as newspapers, magazines and journals. Though the main function of the press is to inform, the press and the media can inevitably influence public opinion on certain issues, depending on how they inform the public on those issues. Coupled with the ability of the media to spread information rapidly as well as its easy accessibility to the masses, it is no wonder why most authoritarian or repressive regimes have sought to control the press and the media. This not only inculcates a submissive and docile society, but the government is also able to influence and control public perceptions of the outside world. Take North Korea and Iran for example. Their authoritarian regimes have made extensive use of the media as propaganda to brainwash their masses, by distorting real facts and even promulgating outright lies. We, from the outside looking in, know that these hateful ideas, such as America being a capitalist enemy trying to control the whole world or Jews being parasites and the enemies of man, are a travesty of justice. However, these poor masses, like blind sheep, take these lies as facts, because they are not informed of the real truth. As such, governments who extensively control the media can essentially control the 'world' per se, by institutionalising false information and imposing their own perceptions of the world itself.

While this case shows how a suppressed and over-regulated media and press can control the 'world', or perceptions of it, a free and liberal media can also control the world by exerting pressure on the government to make certain decisions or implement certain policies in the domestic, and even the international arena. In most democratic countries, most press organisations, and subsequently the media, are relatively free from government intervention, as per the ideal in democratic and liberal societies. As such, they are able to act as a check and balance against the almost omnipotent government, and hence voice strong objections or opinions about certain government policies. By doing this, the press and the media are not only exposing the wrongs of the current government, but are also able to inspire mass public dissent against the government. This general discontent can further crystallise into mass strikes or rallies, further adding pressure on the government to stop these policies. Furthermore, the influence of the media can even extend to the international arena, influencing international bodies such as the United Nations (or more specifically the Security Council). Hence, the control over the media from a bottom-up approach can also control the world by controlling the actions of governments and bodies that can directly effect change in the world.

Indubitably, advertising also plays an immense role in the media. Popular culture, fuelled by the music, fashion and commercial industries, has become an all-pervasive phenomenon in our society, most notably amongst our youth. This overarching influence is further exacerbated by the monopoly most multi-national companies (MNCs) have over the media. Using the media as a tool, they have managed to garner more patrons and increase their earnings exponentially by influencing an impressionable public through advertising. In fact, we cannot hide from advertisements – everywhere we look, we see new ads promoting the latest beauty products or gadgets in magazines, on the television, and even on buses! Perhaps the effectiveness of such products can be attributed to the constant barrage of information that we receive till the advertisements are "hammered" into our minds, not unlike propaganda. Though advertisements may seem illogical at times, they still have an immense influence on society due to their appeal to popular culture, and more often than not, their appeal to false authority. Hence, we cannot deny that MNCs that control the media can subconsciously affect the products that we buy, due to the extensive use of advertisements. With globalisation shrinking the world down to a smaller, well-connected 'global village', the MNCs who control the media virtually control the world.

This being said, we cannot make sweeping generalisations and assert that the organisations who control the media are all-powerful. Prima facie, it may seem like the MNCs who control the media can and are controlling our decisions. However, in truth, it may actually be the consumers who control the MNCs and influence the decisions they make. These consumers, though exerting no direct control over the media itself, are ultimately what drive the MNCs and contribute to their growth. In today's context, many corporations, mostly those appealing to the young, go to great lengths to find out what the current trends are among society, and provide products that accordingly fit in with those trends. Companies like Abercrombie and Fitch and F&N frequently survey the youth and even conduct group discussions to find out the youth's likes and dislikes, and subsequently, provide them products according to their feedback. Hence, it cannot be said that companies who control the media control the world; rather it is the consumers who dictate what the companies should do in order for them to survive and remain relevant.

In addition, governments and organisations who control the media cannot be said to control the whole world, because individuals do still have the freedom of choice to do what they want and what they believe in. Though MNCs may subconsciously influence us to buy their products, this influence is only effective insofar as the consumer buys into their advertisements or is in alignment with whatever MNCs are promoting. Governments may try their best to suppress and mask the truth, but in the end, this control is not without cracks where outside information, or even popular public opinion, can seep through. This was exactly the case in the revolution in Burma, where Aung San Suu Kyi led Burmese monks and students against the military junta, who despite their best efforts to control the media, were unable to control this general dissent. In fact, the very existence of these exceptions and instances of freedom of choice disproves the assertion that whoever controls the media can and will control the world.

In conclusion, while whoever controls the media can exert a great deal of influence over society at large and ostensibly 'control the world', this degree of influence and control can only work if we buy into whatever the MNCs are promoting or whatever the government or the press promulgates. Though subliminal messaging through the media can indeed have a direct consequence on our actions, these examples are only a small exception to the general rule that individuals still have freedom of choice nonetheless. Constant advertising and propaganda only work if individuals wholly buy into these ideas, or have a lack of information on which they properly base their choice. Hence, in order to prevent these undesired outcomes from turning into reality, the global community should work together to ensure that all individuals around the world are supplied with objective and accurate information, so that they are able to make proper, informed decisions. All this can be done, of course, by the use of the potent and pervasive media.

Marker's comments:

Well done! Your introduction, thesis, and conclusion were clear and understandable. Each argument was carefully thought-out and had appropriate examples. The essay had a good structure allowing each paragraph to flow into the next. Good job!

General Paper Year 5 Promotional Examinations (2010)

essay 14 | **To what extent is raising the retirement age a necessary evil in today's society?**

Liu Emily Ronen | 11S03P

The recent uproar in France regarding the raising of the retirement age from 60 to 62 has catapulted this issue into the spotlight, sparking some debate internationally over the necessity and merits of such a decision in today's world. Personally, I believe that legislation to raise the retirement age in a nation is necessary in order to ensure sustainable growth in the future. Considering the potential benefits of such a law for many people, especially the elderly or those nearing retirement, it certainly does not warrant the title of "evil".

Critics who oppose raising the retirement age commonly claim that such a law disregards the will of the people, who may not wish to continue working, going even further to label such a policy as anti-populist and "evil". Indeed, it must be acknowledged that for some people, after slogging for so many years, retirement has always been the ultimate end point of perhaps a not-so-enjoyable, or at least toiling working life, the point which many have looked forward to. For these people, raising the retirement age would be almost equivalent to taking away their lifelong dreams, and signals several more years of labour, therefore it is deemed "evil".

However, one must note that the government of a nation has to consider the overall benefits of any potential legislation before deciding to implement it or not. In this case, although there may be some who oppose the raising of the retirement age, they do not represent the entire population, and the various benefits of such a policy certainly outweigh the costs, hence causing governments such as in France, to risk offending some of its citizens in order to implement such a law.

In terms of the economy, raising the retirement age would be an effective long term solution to ensuring sustainable economic growth in the future of a developed nation. Many developed countries today are increasingly facing the problem of an ageing population, coupled with a falling birth rate, signalling a potential contraction of the workforce in the near future. This poses a threat to the country's economic sustainability and survival, for without enough people, no matter how skilled or educated some people are, the economy would be difficult to sustain. Although some people may argue that countries could focus on attracting immigrants and encouraging child birth, these measures are either only sustainable in the short term or have met with debatable success. For example, in Singapore, with a total fertility rate as low as 1.25 in 2006 and an increasingly ageing population, the government began rapidly attracting foreign immigrants in recent years, and Singapore's non-residential population now makes up almost 25% of the entire population. However, as even the government acknowledges, such an increase is not sustainable and would not solve the problem of a diminishing workforce in the long run; what is more, immigration also leads to other challenging social problems like integration issues. Hence, in comparison, a straightforward legislation to raise the retirement age would seem a much more direct, manageable and sustainable approach, since it expands the workforce by encouraging older people to continue working or start work again.

Next, raising the retirement age would also help with the livelihood of some of the older members in society, or those who are nearing retirement in the next few years. With a rapidly ageing population, and the continually rising cost of living, especially in developed countries, many of the older population are facing more challenges to sustain their livelihood. For some, retirement, although desirable, is already out of the question as they are compelled to continue working due to the fact that their life savings are insufficient to sustain their whole retirement. With this new legislation, workers who were supposed to retire are given more legitimacy to continue working, and employers cannot simply dismiss them due to their age. The implication of this will certainly be far-reaching, especially when increasing numbers of older people are facing increasing competition at work from the younger and so-called better, colleagues or job candidates.

Of course, some people may argue that the problem mentioned above only applies to nations that do not have some form of welfare system, that welfare states then do not need such a policy. However, one must understand that the very foundation of a welfare state is government financial support for the underprivileged, unemployed or retired, which relies on state money for funding. Hence, there is a limit to how much money the government can give before it goes into deficit. With the recent global financial crisis, coupled with a rapidly ageing and growing population, more people need support, yet the government has less money. Many European countries like Greece are facing huge deficits and have resolved to cut government expenditure in order to ride out the tide and safeguard the future. For such welfare states, the option of not providing support is certainly impossible, hence the most feasible and reasonable way would be to raise the retirement age, hence reducing the number of people who would need support in the near future.

Beyond the financial and economic aspects, raising the retirement age would also bring positive social impact. By working to an older age, more of the elderly are kept occupied and busy, making positive contributions to society and the economy, while maintaining an active lifestyle. Furthermore, through work, they can derive a sense of satisfaction. Such a policy would also potentially contribute to the building of a more positive image of the older population, and reduce ageism that exists in some places. All these could certainly contribute to a happier life and perhaps an active lifestyle.

Therefore, although raising the retirement age might be labelled by some as "evil" for it makes people work even longer and delays retirement, it would bring many economic and financial benefits, as well as social benefits to a country. Furthermore, when looking at the possible costs of such a policy, one must bear in mind the possible political agenda of critics of this policy, who may wish to portray the incumbent governments in a negative light. Hence, overall, raising the retirement age would be a boon for the country.

Marker's comments:

Emily, this is such a breath of fresh air! Yours is one of the only a few essays on this question that demonstrate an accurate understanding of the demands of the question. Only the last argument on the social benefits of increasing retirement age could do with clearer connection to the question. Also, please check your work for basic language errors. Otherwise, a brilliant piece overall!

essay 15

How far is modern consumerism a threat to the environment?

Ethel Yeo Yixia | 10S03F

With the advent of globalisation, the rise of modern consumerism has been rapid. Once viewed as exclusive to the Western world, consumerist culture has spread to the rest of the world. This is evident in countries like India. Once a largely conservative society, Bangalore, India, has now transformed into a society where young people view the pursuit of material goods as a worthy goal and traditional values and religion have taken a backseat. Modern consumerism also encompasses a culture of excess, where people's desire for goods are seemingly insatiable, as wants are increasingly being viewed as needs. Modern consumers also have ever-changing preferences, resulting in a throw-away culture, where "old" goods are discarded to make way for new purchases. However, all these spell trouble for the environment. The production of such consumer goods involves vast amounts of the Earth's resources and industrial processes, which do much harm to the environment by emitting large amounts of polluting gases such as nitrogen dioxide. Hence, modern consumerism is by and large a huge threat to our fragile environment, having the potential to exacerbate the environmental problems we face. However, it must be noted that the rise of ethical consumerism, albeit a gradual one, holds the potential to alleviate the threat modern consumerism poses to the environment.

The throw-away culture is evident in modern consumerist behaviour. Such behaviour has been fuelled by advertisements, which often portray what may not be absolutely necessary to one's life – such as the latest handphone model – as a need. As such, it has encouraged a culture where consumers often purchase goods that they have no inherent need for and throw away goods that they view as outdated, even though they still serve their function well. This can be seen from the long queues that form each time Apple launches a new product. Many in the queue to purchase the iPhone 4 are owners of the iPhone 3 who desire the latest product even though their previous phones still function perfectly. The production of such goods requires much of the Earth's resources. In fact, every manufacturing process requires fuel that is derived from fossil fuels. The Earth's supply of fossil fuels is greatly dwindling and this problem is exacerbated by the fact that fossil fuels are non-renewable sources of energy. Once depleted, it will take many years to be replenished. Moreover, manufacturing processes are responsible for the emission of large amounts of polluting gases into the environment, worsening the problem of pollution and global warming, which have far-reaching impacts on the eco-system. Hence, with modern consumerism, where people's demand for goods are ever increasing due to changing tastes and preferences, the polluting activities of these manufacturing plants will indubitably rise. This will result in worsening environmental problems.

Moreover, the modern consumer's insatiable desire for goods has caused many profit-driven corporations to want to cash in on this large market. In order to capture a large share of the market, corporations are looking to lower the cost of their products in a bid to attract more customers. They understand that the modern consumer is fickle and hence want to attract them with their low prices. However, such cost-cutting measures may come at the expense of the environment. Large multinational corporations have been known to shift their production processes to less developed countries where environmental regulations are less stringent. China is a popular destination for such corporations, but the entry of such companies has greatly worsened the pollution problem in China. In fact, China is now home to more than 7 out of 10 of the world's most polluted cities. Such pollution problems are also known to harm wildlife, especially marine creatures. If consumers continue to demand more goods, profit-driven companies will continue to engage in such environmentally unfriendly practices, posing a huge threat to the environment.

The modern consumer's desire for goods can be attributed to the rising sentiments that success is measured by one's purchasing power. One is viewed to have succeeded if one has the wealth

to indulge oneself with the purchase of material goods. This has resulted in modern consumers putting their image before environmental concerns in their decision to purchase goods. The rich are known to indulge in delicacies, such as rare seafood, and some purchase leather goods and fur coats. Such exploitation of animals, specifically endangered ones, can heighten the threat of extinction many animals face today. In fact, one in four mammals in the world faces the threat of extinction. Hence, modern consumers' desire for goods to enhance their image has been a constant feature of modern consumerism and this is a threat to wildlife.

However, it must be noted that modern consumerism is slowly being redefined. This can be seen in the rise of ethical consumerism, where individuals factor in ethical concerns, such as environmental concerns, into their decision to purchase products. Recent surveys have shown that green consumerism is on the rise in many countries such as the US and Singapore. Companies, realising that consumers are increasingly factoring in environmentally friendly practices into their decision to purchase products, have begun to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Take, for instance, a Hush Puppies store in Marina Bay Sands in Singapore that has chosen to adopt environmentally friendly practices in response to the rising trend of green consumerism. Instead of the glass and chrome displays typical of retail shops, the display shelves in the shop are made from recyclable materials that include old shoeboxes and corrugated cardboard. In addition, the products are packaged in a paper bag, instead of a plastic bag. In a recent Straits Times poll, most consumers responded that if the cost difference was not too wide, they would choose to purchase the more environmentally friendly product. Companies, in a bid to attract such customers, are also increasingly taking part in environmental conservation efforts. HSBC, an international bank, is known to support environmental causes such as the preservation of nature reserves in Singapore as part of its corporate social responsibility programme.

Moreover, such green consumers have also been active in spreading the idea of green consumerism to others. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), in collaboration with environmentalists, has published a seafood guide to provide consumers with guidelines on how to make sustainable seafood choices, such as by refusing to consume seafood fished from areas with unsustainable fishing practices. Hence, it can be seen that with the rise of green consumerism in modern consumerism, individuals can alleviate the threat that modern consumerism is posing to the environment. This can include influencing corporations to adopt environmentally friendly practices by choosing more responsibly where to put their dollar.

The gradual rise of such green consumerism holds the potential to alleviate the threat that other aspects of consumerism, such as the throw-away mentality, pose to the environment. However, it must be noted that such environmentally friendly practices are still not widely practised and the culture of excess is still very prevalent. Unless we start cutting down on wastage as promulgated by modern consumerism, the harm done to the environment by our excessive demand for goods cannot be truly offset by the green consumerist behavior of a select few. Hence, modern consumerism is by and large still a great threat to the environment.

Marker's comments:

Sound approach that answers the question well, exploring the characteristics of modern consumerism and their origins, but also acknowledging the counter-movement of ethical consumerism.

General Paper Year 6 Preliminary Examinations (2010)

essay 16

Is world government a good idea?

Nagarajan Karthik | 10S06Q

In recent times, the world has experienced and continues to experience a multitude of problems such as global warming and terrorism. These problems are becoming increasingly ubiquitous in the contemporary world. The trans-boundary nature of these problems has led some to believe that there should be a world government, which would serve as a global institution that would have the capacity to deal with trans-boundary problems. However, there are various factors that would severely inhibit the effectiveness of such an organisation and hence, I strongly believe that it is unadvisable to have a world government.

Advocates of the world government idea believe that such a government would be impartial and would be able to undertake and implement more effective decisions that would be in the collective interest of mankind and leave everyone better off in the long run. For instance, a world government would be able to circumvent domestic political issues when delivering aid to an impoverished country. This would mean that people in countries with repressive regimes such as Myanmar and Zimbabwe might benefit more from foreign aid due to the fact that more aid is likely to reach them.

However, there are problems with this argument. Firstly, there is no guarantee that a world government would be able to make and implement decisions that would truly benefit everyone. This may be attributed to the fact that rich and industrialised countries will inevitably have a greater say in the decision-making process of a world government. If the current situation is anything to go by, rich countries, who would contribute more to the coffers of a world government, would then use the organisation as a means to achieve their own ends. For instance, the US is currently one of the largest contributors to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and therefore, it has veto power at the IMF. Indeed, this has often prevented the IMF from being able to effectively help developing countries to grow their fledgling industries, and this is especially true as far as agriculture is concerned. Some experts, such as the renowned economist, Joseph Stiglitz, even believe that the policies of the IMF may have actually prevented developing countries from achieving self-sufficiency in terms of their food supply as the US fears that such a development would decrease the amount of revenue it would earn from agricultural exports. This illustrates how rich and powerful countries will invariably have more legislative power in a world government, thus severely diminishing its ability to implement policies that would enhance world welfare in general.

Advocates of a world government also believe that establishing a world government would lead to quicker responses to emergencies anywhere in the world, especially those that are caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. They argue that a world government would be able to effectively marshal its resources and quickly channel them to areas where they are needed most. In today's world, international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) often have to appeal for donations from various countries after an emergency has occurred and even then, these donations would be slow in arriving. A case in point would be the recent floods in Pakistan, where aid has been slow to arrive and many have been left without access to basic amenities. Some people argue that such scenarios could be avoided, if there was a world government in place that had more power than what the UN currently has.

Again, there are flaws in this argument. Even with a world government in place, there would still have to be local administrations in each country to implement the policies of the world government. This might then give rise to bureaucratic hurdles, especially if domestic governments disagree with the world government as to the course of action that needs to be undertaken. This problem was observed at the national level in the US when Hurricane Katrina struck. The New Orleans state government could not reach an agreement with the federal government with regard to procedures such as evacuating residents. This definitely inhibited the effectiveness of the disaster response.

If such bureaucratic hurdles already exist at a national level, they would arguably be even more pronounced in a world government. This would lead to wastage of scarce resources and dampen the effectiveness of a world government.

There are also other serious problems with the idea of having a world government. One such problem is that a world government's hold on power would be extremely diffuse. This is due to the fact that a world government would constantly have to make decisions on controversial issues such as climate change and human rights. It is highly unlikely for there to be a universal consensus on such issues and this would inevitably mean that any decision made by a world government would end up alienating certain groups of people. If a decision made is not to the satisfaction of certain people in some countries, they may simply choose to ignore the decision made by the world government and undertake a different course of action that they feel would benefit them. Again, this is already being seen in today's world. A case in point would be the blockade that Israel has imposed on the Gaza Strip. Israel has prevented essential raw materials necessary for the construction of vital infrastructure from reaching the Gaza Strip as it believes this would hinder its war effort against Palestine. This is despite the fact that it came under widespread pressure from individual countries and the United Nations to change this policy. This example illustrates that a world government will often have difficulties enforcing its policies and rulings due to disagreements between various groups of people. This would inhibit the effectiveness of a world government.

The formation of a world government would also be associated with various practical problems. For instance, it may be difficult for countries to reach a consensus as to who should lead such an institution, assuming that the leaders of the world government would be democratically elected. If such a government were to be elected, elections would have to be conducted on a global scale. It may then be difficult to ensure that such elections are free, fair and transparent, given the fact that various countries such as Afghanistan are already having problems conducting free and fair elections at a national level. Moreover, problems such as red tape and corruption may become entrenched in a global government. Such institutional malaise would make it difficult to ensure good governance, and hence, having a world government is unadvisable.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that the world is currently facing many trans-boundary problems that require global cooperation in order to be dealt with effectively. While a multi-lateral framework may have proved to be successful in the form of regional organisations such as ASEAN and the European Union, having a world government is not a panacea to the problems that the world faces today. In fact, a world government may actually worsen these problems and thus, it is definitely not a good idea to have a world government.

Marker's comments:

On the whole, well-analysed and well-substantiated. It would have helped if you had established from the outset what world government is (or in theory) but overall grasp is excellent.

essay 17 | **Is world government a good idea?**

Tan Yin Yun | 10S06T

After World War Two, numerous countries emerged drained and tired. It was a pyrrhic victory against the Germans and the Japanese, which ended only with the launch of the atomic bomb. To prevent countries with such dangerous ideologies from influencing and harming other countries, the Bretton Woods Agreement was reached, and the United Nations was born. Since then, people have wondered whether a world government would be a better idea, a step towards greater progress, where the world would not be governed by the current inter-governmental organisations, but a whole new world order. This is the essential gist of world governance, where all countries would be united under one system of governance. Would it be a good idea? I believe that ideally, this is a very noble aspiration to achieve, but in reality, practical circumstances prevent the world from doing so.

People entertain the thought of world governance as a panacea to the world's global problems. With all countries united under one banner, decisions can be made efficiently and problems can be solved much more quickly, perhaps even nipped in the bud. Global threats such as pandemics, terrorism, global warming, and poverty affect almost every nation; hence, with global cooperation fostered by world governance, every nation can pool their best resources to counter these threats and ensure long term security and peace of mind. A good example would be the SARS crisis in 2003, where countries were unsure of the new virus and were confused as to what to do. A common set of guidelines and codes of conduct by the World Health Organisation (WHO), comprising a series of red, orange, and green alerts, ensured that appropriate measures were implemented to successfully contain the threat as it is now. With much success, one can imagine how poverty can possibly be alleviated when the world government allocates extra agricultural produce from the richer developed countries to poorer nations such as Pakistan, now in dire need of food aid due to the floods. It is said that 20% of the world's rich consume 80% of the Earth's resources. Hence, the prospect of world governance is bright given the numerous problems that can be solved.

Also, given the growing interconnectedness of the world, almost all nations are interdependent, and the actions of each nation have serious repercussions on the others. North Korea is not excluded due to its isolation, as even its threats of possessing nuclear weapons can send chills to neighbouring countries. World governance would then ensure a certain world order by considering the numerous interests of nations and arriving at the best decision for the citizens of the world. Rogue states could possibly be contained with laws, and conflicts resolved in a diplomatic way with the world government as a possible third party. Consider the financial crisis experienced in 2008 when Lehman Brothers collapsed and also the US subprime mortgage crisis. These were caused by consumers spending more than they ought to have. A world government could then regulate global practices to minimise risk to other countries.

However, in reality, such noble ideals cannot possibly be reached in a human lifetime, mainly due to the nature of human beings. A few points need to be considered when imposing a government of such a large scale.

A world government might not know what is best for a specific country's interest, and might end up causing more disorder and chaos than order. Each country has unique circumstances, is blessed with different geographical resources (or none at all like Singapore) and has people of different cultures. These socio-political contexts might render world governance ineffective because some members of the world government might not know what is best for the country. They might implement policies that appear feasible, but fail due to differing contexts, which could hurt a country and fuel resentment and conflict. For example, we are already having trouble with inter-

governmental organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF's structural adjustment policies (SAP) were designed with the intention to help less developed nations by imposing strict conditions that they had to adhere to in order to get aid. However, these conditions requiring recipient nations, notably African nations, to open up economies have backfired. Zimbabwe ended up with hyperinflation and imported textiles instead of exporting them, hurting its nascent economy unable to handle the influx of privatisation. Bolivia's water supply too is under privatisation, and Bolivians spend 25% of their daily income on water, straining their income instead. Hence, practically, a world government might not be a good idea because to govern well, it needs to address all the subtle socio-political contexts of each and every country to satisfy them. This is a rather impossible reality. The local style of government is more attuned to the daily affairs of its citizens and would better serve their needs compared to a world government.

Although others might say that local governance might not meet the needs of citizens due to corruption, who is to say that there would be no corruption in a system of world governance? Granted, there might be other representatives from other countries who can act as a check and balance, but even then, the allure of power is greater than that in a local government. Human nature is inherently selfish, and the desire to acquire and control great riches of all the nations under world governance is very enticing. As the saying goes, who guards the guardians? The power might be abused by those in control, who may siphon off countries' wealth under the guise of world progress. This is the reason why communism failed. With promises of greater equality and benefit for everyone under a single government that would distribute the wealth equally amongst rich and poor, the system, as ideal as it sounds, failed so many states that pursued it – China, Russia, and Cuba – because such great responsibility corrupted their leaders. World governance is a dangerous prospect, given the greed and immorality inherent in man, that can be used to foster dictatorships. I would say both current and proposed systems of governance may fail in this aspect, and the consequences of a failed world government would be more severe.

Moreover, even if the world government leaders possess stellar qualities, and successfully avoid imposing a dictatorship, such a system of governance would not be effective in the long run, due to the numerous agendas of different countries. The world government would be so swamped by a whole variety of requests that it cannot make a decision that is agreed by most countries, rendering its governance futile. Its position would also be highly politicised and sensitive, akin to treading on thin ice, because any stand taken by the world government on world issues may often be misconstrued as an act of favouritism to a certain group of countries, and erupt into conflict. For example, the current gripe of less developed countries is that they are excluded in the current "Western World Order" by more developed countries, and this has resulted in numerous stagnant talks such as the Doha Round and the recently failed Copenhagen Talks. Neither party wants to give in for the sake of its national interests. India and China feel that they have no obligation to reduce carbon emissions and hinder their astronomical rise. Hence, given such circumstances as seen today, the world government would probably end up being a toothless tiger, immobile and useless in resolving conflicts, due to the fear of engendering more conflicts in the midst of navigating national agendas.

 Another point to note is that along with differing agendas, every nation inevitably has different cultural and religious points of view, complicating the situation further. Cultural and religious views are relative, and no third party can possibly deduce who is right and who is wrong without causing worldwide uproar. This factor may make it hard to reach a consensus in world government as to which course of action to take. Such possible clashes of religious and cultural views can be seen today in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the increasing resistance in Islamic nations against American "corrupting" values. Such vast ideological wars that may result in the "Clash of Civilisations" (Samuel Huntington) may cause the world government itself to be polarised into two opposing camps, for the beliefs of each individual involve a person's precious identity and he or she may not yield to and empathise with other beliefs easily. Internal strife may occur in world governments, rendering them inefficient. For example, Osama bin Laden made a huge list of crazy demands in his letter to the American people, demanding that all convert to Islam. Such a rift in ideology is impossible to resolve.

In conclusion, in the light of history, which teaches us about past experiences of governance, and considering the differing socio-political contexts of various countries today, which often give rise to fixed beliefs tied to identity, it is imperative to see how the idea of world government is bad, and even disastrous in these aspects, for it entails upsetting the status quo and making hard choices in a sea of dissenting voices. However, I believe that it is nevertheless, an optimistic step to improving human nature, because it cultivates care and compassion for others in this growing interdependent world. For now, the idea is not feasible, but someday when conditions are ripe, it may be a good idea to discuss world governance.

Marker's comments:

A good and interesting read for me – thank you! Fairly comprehensive and well thought-out. Fluent, with good and clear argumentation and substantiation. Well done!

General Paper Year 6 Common Test 2 (2010)

essay 18 | "The media does not require more freedom; rather it needs to exercise more responsibility." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Huang Jiahui | 10S06O

In an age where the concept of the media increasingly conjures images of paparazzi ruthlessly chasing public figures for the latest scoop or scandal, press freedom appears to be falling out of favour. Indeed, issues concerning privacy have come to the fore as governments and pundits increasingly call for tighter control over the media, and for the media to act more responsibly. Ultimately, however, when it comes to those issues that really matter, responsibility and fair reporting are vacuous claims without the guarantee of press freedom. As this long-cherished freedom comes under attack by those who would see the media tied to a leash, it is all the more important that we must defend it. When press freedom and responsibility clash, I would rather that society give up the latter to uphold the former.

First of all, it is necessary to dissect the intricacies inherent in the question of freedom and responsibilities as applied to the media. Some countries already give the media much free reign, notably the United States, member states of the European Union, and much of the rest of the developed world. In this case, these freedoms should continue to be granted, and in fact, extended when they are found to be lacking. In other countries, however, the media, and especially the printed press, labour under the harsh scrutiny of the government, and are not free, semi-free, or are at best under the guise of superficial freedoms. For these cases, including most of the developing world and emerging economies, it is imperative that arbitrary and superficial concerns about responsibility be set aside in order for the media to gain the true freedom that they deserve. A world where all outlets of the press are free from censorship and oppression should be the aim of all free peoples today.

The most compelling reasons for granting freedom to the media rather than burdening them with responsibilities arise from the crucial roles that the media play in all societies today. The most basic of these is the provision of information. Informed choice is the lifeblood of democracy, and even in non-democracies, an informed populace that does not revolt is the only proof of legitimacy of a government. In either case, citizens, and voters in particular, need to know – and arguably, they have a right to. If the people of a country do not obtain information presented by a free media unburdened by political obligations, they cannot satisfy the innate human potential of achieving agency, through the possession of knowledge, and are nothing but senseless receptacles for the propaganda of the bureaucratic apparatus of an illegitimate state. Max Weber said that the State is the authority possessing a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence and if people are not informed, be they citizens of a democratic or non-democratic state, they cannot legitimise their government. In Russia, where the press is ostensibly free but in reality ruthlessly subverted, the important role of the press as a provider of information is clear: Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent dissident and journalist, was murdered by agents suspected to be connected to the KGB, the Russian secret service, just as she was on the verge of a major discovery concerning human rights abuses in Chechnya. By subverting the freedom of the press, crucial information is kept from citizens by oppressive regimes the world over.

There are some who would argue, then, that the state should regulate these sources of information and keep them accountable and responsible, if they are so crucial. Singapore, China and Venezuela are among many countries that profess this view. But here it must be recognised, that the government of a country is in power with the ultimate aim of remaining in power. That, by no means is any guarantee that the government regulation of the media should produce an outcome in the interests of society, as compared to having a free media. In fact, it is more often than not those governments that commit the most opprobrious human rights abuses in the first place that argue the loudest for the regulation of media freedom: observe the extrajudicial killings of journalists in Sudan, Equatorial Guinea and Libya, countries that are vocal opponents of press freedom.

In fact, if there is any reason to favour the freedom of the media over requesting them to be more responsible, it is because freedom, once defined, is clear and absolute, whereas responsibility, no matter how well-explained, remains dangerously vague and arbitrary. Often, responsibility is a byword for subversion and censorship. After all, 'to control is to distort', and when it is up to a government to rein in irresponsible behaviour, there is no consideration of the subjectivity of this responsibility. In Taiwan, on the grounds of privacy and the rights of the office of the President, the government might well have stopped the 'irresponsible' interference and investigation of the media into the affairs of then-President Chen Shui Bian; it did not, and eventually, the media helped unearth a concerted effort to cheat the Taiwanese taxpayer of billions. This was also the case of former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose suspicious activities would never have been called into question if 'responsibility' were used as an excuse to muzzle the media. Despite the lack of concrete proof against Thaksin even today, it is undeniable that the activities of the media in this case were both warranted and important, as far as the society's mandate to the government is concerned.

Rather, despite the ongoing debate as to the degree of freedom that should be granted to the media in many countries, freedom, once a statute is agreed upon and signed into law, is well-defined and objective. It is invariably harder for society and the apparatus of justice to call into question the contravention of the right of freedom, as opposed to proving whether the media has failed to act responsibly and should therefore be curtailed.

It must be granted, nevertheless, that the media may have distorted incentives that pervert their role as the sources of information for society. Tabloids arguably have exploited the freedom of the press for entertainment and financial gain by reporting on scandals or using tactics of shock and humour to attract readers' attention. Most in society agree that this is both rampant and unethical – as seen in the case of Princess Diana, whose unfavourable and highly exploitative coverage in the British news media led to a backlash by many, and countless other incidences of paparazzi haranguing film stars or scandal-prone celebrities. Here, it is of paramount importance that we distinguish between normative judgment of ethics, and the concept of rights, and I offer two arguments in defense of media freedom over responsibility.

Firstly, no government can justifiably discriminate between sensationalist coverage that is useful to society, and that which is not: the British tabloids that uncovered the British MP's expenses scandal, catalysing parliamentary reforms and weeding out corruption used essentially the same tactics and marketing strategies as their Italian counterparts who unearthed the profligate and promiscuous lifestyle of Italian president Silvio Berlusconi, which only hindered the political process. Therefore, to grant freedoms to one type of media activity is to grant the same freedoms to all of them, except in cases where special rights come into play, as will be seen later. In this case, if offering fundamental freedoms to the press means offering the same freedoms to those who would expect it for financial gain, then I say that the trade-off is both inevitable and well worth the price paid. When it comes to weighing the benefit of having an informed electorate served by a free press that is able to expose the most egregious abuses of power and contraventions of human rights, and the costs of the same free press selling more copies of the news by reporting on the latest developments in a sordid celebrity love affair, the benefits of press freedom overwhelmingly surpass its costs.

Secondly, it is not even the prerogative of the media to act in these responsible ways. All media outlets represent some quarter of society, and no media outlet has the obligation to censor itself, even if we wished they would. Rather, the confines of free speech should be defined by the government and judiciary, through laws and the constitution. These rights granted by the law, such as the right to privacy for private individuals, and the right not to have private property arbitrarily seized and trespassed upon, already exist, and where they are not sufficiently cogent, should be refined. This is a far better solution than relying on the caprices of a barrage of ideologically disparate outlets, or the heavy hand of the censor, to decide what is "responsible".

In an examination of the context in full, and the arguments presented above, it is clear that the media never has a free reign. Instead, the rejection of the call to heighten media responsibility is about three things – firstly, affirming the unfettered right to free speech and the lack of obligation of the media to self-censor, tempered only by the opposing rights of individuals to privacy under the law; second, obviating the danger of arbitrary control and manipulation of the press by a government's conceptions of 'responsible' behaviour; and thirdly, and most importantly, upholding the key role of the media as an unimpeded, uncensored source of information crucial to the functioning and legitimacy of any state or society. For all these reasons, the media should be granted more freedom, and not burdened with the chains of an artificial idea of responsibility.

Marker's comments:

Your stand on the issue is eloquently argued, and supported with well-chosen examples. Excellent attempt at discussing the topic, employing resources such as sharp analyses, philosophical ideas, and clear arguments.

essay 19

"Powerful branding now dictates consumer choice." Do you agree?

Kristabella Low | 10S06L

Aggressive advertising has become increasingly ubiquitous and overwhelming in today's society. A famous Japanese actor was reported to have sent his 7-year-old daughter to school with a Louis Vuitton school bag, a luxury impossible to be justified as a necessity. The modern world is a favourable breeding ground for branding, being characterised by the advent of mass media and burgeoning middle- and upper-classes. Yet, to over-simplify consumer choice today to being dictated mainly – let only solely – by branding would be a parochial view to have. The modern consumer, despite being ceaselessly bombarded by the media and having greater wealth, is placed under countless other subtle influences such as that of education and ethics.

It must, however, be conceded that the increasing exposure to the mass media has left consumer choice highly susceptible to powerful branding. In magazines such as TIME, which are targetted at professionals, advertisements for fashion labels and luxury cars occur with such frequency that it becomes something nearly ingrained in the psyche of readers. On the streets of cosmopolitan cities, large advertisements line the streets and the repeated viewing of television commercials plant an association of these high-end brands with notions of affluence and status. Powerful branding taps on the new media to increase the appeal of their goods. Compared to in the past when commercials could only be screened on black and white television or printed on black and white newspapers, powerful branding now comes in the form of very tangible and real images that call out more strongly to the individual.

Moreover, the consumer today is more likely to be swayed by powerful branding due to the burgeoning upper- and middle-classes. In the past, firms were similarly engaged in powerful branding. Celebrities were likewise employed to endorse brands, such as Marilyn Monroe and how she wore Chanel No. 5 to sleep. It is logical to believe that consumers in the past were also strongly drawn to branded items, but what has changed over the years is the ability to possess these items. When children asked for such goods in the past, parents may have turned down their requests due to the lack of financial capability to support a lavish lifestyle like what their children envisioned. There is also the element of thrift, especially in traditional Asian societies. Today, with greater affluence and a paradigm shift, consumers are more likely to succumb to the temptations and manipulation of powerful branding.

However, it is also undeniable that people today are far more educated than in the past and the assumed better judgment that accompanies education is likely to diminish the influence of powerful branding on consumer choice. Due to the high costs involved in powerful branding, these brands often charge a much higher premium for their goods. Certainly, these goods may be of a better quality, such as renowned hotels having the best facilities, decor and services. However, in other arenas, there is likely to be a merely perceived difference, such that the high price paid by the customer goes to the brand name. An educated populace would be more discerning and would expect a higher quality or better service that stands out amongst other brands. Otherwise, they would seek value-for-money and quality would take precedence over pure, sheer branding efforts. Branding, after all, must be substantiated by genuine advantages.

Also, powerful branding in today's world has seemed to diminish in its foothold with more and more consumers jumping on the bandwagon of ethical consumerism. We exist in a generation fraught with issues and global problems that are familiar to most in the developed world. Take for instance, the issues of animal rights, fair trade and exploitation of labour in the Third World. With a deep level of awareness about these issues, many consumers today reject cosmetic products that involve animal testing and the unfair treatment of other human beings. Slowly but surely, companies like Marks and Spencer and Starbucks that promote fair trade, are gaining a steady reputation of being

socially responsible. Whilst detractors may claim that this is but a new form of branding, I am more inclined to perceive this phenomenon as the increasing place of ethical concerns and moral principles in modern consumer choice.

We cannot forget that despite the rapid economic progress we have made as an entire human race, there are still hundreds of millions of people struggling for survival and to make ends meet. These people scarcely have any significant "consumer choice" to begin with. For these people, branded products are a luxury that they cannot afford. Even those who can afford it to a slight degree may choose not to pursue these brands as it is not a sustainable way of life. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one's basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing have to be fulfilled before one is able to pursue higher ideals like that offered by branding, social status and power. Moreover, living and growing up in the developed world skews our sense of perspective, and often causes us to forget that not every society is like ours. There are bound to be states and regions in the world such as North Korea, Tibet and Africa that are still largely untainted by branding and commerce. Unlike people in developed countries who live with almost the sole purpose of advancing their individual will and fighting for a higher quality of life, people brought up in different environments may have vastly different worldviews, such as the Tibetans whose lives generally revolve around their local region. Brands are something unheard of, and their purchases are made on more pragmatic grounds such as price and quality.

To agree with the assertion that powerful branding now dictates consumer choice seems to concede that branding is a more powerful force today than in the past. However, that is not necessarily true. What is branding, really? In the superficial and most obvious sense it seems to be a dramatic playing up of image, where advertisers use all ways and means to enhance that image in the opinion of society, such that people who use that brand would attain a sort of social status above their counterparts. Yet branding, at its very core, is an exploitation of human weakness – the desire for status, recognition and social acceptance through the use of branded products. Branding is not any more powerful today than in the past in dictating consumer choice because the fact is that the innate characteristics of our human nature have changed very little. The forms of branding today may have become more apparent, but the influences of branding are timeless and transcend all boundaries. Be it yesterday, today or tomorrow, it will be our lust for social acceptance and status that governs consumer choice as the overarching reason; branding is merely the convenient scapegoat to disguise our own human weaknesses.

Powerful branding, as has been established over the course of this essay, has nevertheless become an inescapable fate for many modern consumers. Whilst some consumers have become easy targets for renowned brands, many others are now better equipped to make informed choices regarding what they consume. Though it seems that consumers are subscribing more to branded goods, the truth may instead be that these powerful brands, which embrace ethical consumerism and environmental friendliness, are in fact the manifestations and not dictates of consumer choice today.

Marker's comments:

A thoroughly persuasive essay that explores the essay question from different perspectives. Your writing shows resourcefulness and reflects strong reasoning ability. An impressive take on the issue. Nice work, Bella!

Long Passage

Return to History

Following the September 11 attacks, some have begun to take more seriously Samuel Huntington's spectre of a 'clash of civilisations'. Such commentators are right to observe that a new era has arrived but the expression "clash of civilisations" simply does not capture the fact that a great deal of contest is taking place within civilisations (including Islam and the West); and the idea of 'civilisation' tends to disguise the degree to which people and cultures change, and the extent to which members of a community can reformulate their own civilisation.

Rather than a 'clash of civilisations', it seems one might more sensibly speak of a 'return of history' to describe this new era. The phrase specifically counters the 1990s observation by Francis Fukuyama that we have come to the 'end of history', and to stress 'history', or 'histories', is a way of acknowledging that the globalising sweep of liberal economic and value change has by no means swept away the whole range of local perspectives and narratives in this region. National, religious, ethnic, and other perspectives, including those of Southeast Asian regionalism itself, have proved more stubborn than the convergence thinkers anticipated. Furthermore, in using the term "history" rather than "civilisation", or "culture", I think it is fair to say that we are underlining the fact that these perspectives are themselves dynamic and subject to extensive reinvention. Separatist movement in Indonesia, even Fundamentalist Islam, are themselves not static but in motion – shaped by the encounters and struggles of the twenty-first century, as well as by their own pasts. In speaking of the return of history, there is no need to go from one extreme to another and neglect the role of globalising forces. The point to stress is that globalisation can foster multiple and competing viewpoints.

Today, then, the view of this region is likely to be historical rather than convergent. And in this era of the return of history, there is good reason to be patient with the talk of the region. Few today would insist that the task of achieving consensus – of establishing shared norms and understanding – has been accomplished. The regional conversation is fortunately ongoing – and it should be listened to, and contributed to, by historians.

Approaching the issue of talk from another angle – that of Security Studies – can help illustrate what I think historians can do. As I understand it, what was the dominant mode of analysis in security studies until recent times fitted comfortably into the convergence thinking I have been discussing: the Realist School in security studies has tended to analyse security relations in terms of relations – predictable rivalry relations – between sovereign states. According to it, states are always the units engaging in security relations, and they are always self-interested, self-advantaging – and always in potential military conflict with one another. Making such convergent claims – insisting on a homogenising view of a world of inevitably competing nation states, all driven by the same motivations – the Realist analysts of security relations were bound to be intolerant of the painstaking processes of consensus making and regional norm construction encountered so often in ASEAN regionalism.

A focus on talk has in fact been an increasingly prominent concern in the field of security studies over the last few years. This turn in security studies – associated by some with the word 'constructivism' – does not take for granted a world of nation states driven by the same self-serving, universally-held motivations. It is concerned with the capacity of actors to be able to construct conditions of peace. It stresses the constructedness of concepts relating to security, and the way actual security decisions can be made and understood in terms of such constructed concepts. This turn in security analysis understands that different international actors will operate according to

different logics – and that a problem can occur in negotiation and deliberation in security relations when actors working from different logics have to deal with one another. Success in international relations, as some would conceptualise it, is facilitated when the different sides share the same 'lifeworld' – that is, possess a 'shared culture', a 'common system of norms and rules perceived as legitimate', the same 'social identity of actors being capable of communicating and acting'.

(Adapted from a lecture by Anthony Milner)

The writer makes claims about how we can study and influence ASEAN regionalism. Discuss and evaluate the author's claims, using your own understanding of the nature of knowledge in history and/or social science as well as the ideas raised by the author.

essay 20 | The writer makes claims about how we can study and influence ASEAN regionalism. Discuss and evaluate the author's claims, using your own understanding of the nature of knowledge in history and/or social science as well as the ideas raised by the author.

Jonathan Lian | 10A01A

The author's main conclusion is that ASEAN regionalism should be examined through a 'return of history' and that the process of 'achieving consensus – of establishing shared norms and understanding' should be 'listened to and contributed to, by historians'. He begins by first identifying the fact that 'the idea of civilisation' tends to disguise the degree to which people and cultures change, and the extent to which members of a community can reformulate their own civilisation. Hence, by replacing 'civilisation' with 'history', he attempts to refocus the examination of regionalism specifically to 'the whole range of local perspectives and narratives in this region', which he believes are 'more stubborn than the convergence thinkers anticipated'. He then proceeds to highlight that the 'dominant mode of analysis in security studies' has wrongly made 'convergent claims – insisting on a homogenising view of a world of inevitably competing nation states, all driven by the same motivations' and that the last few years have wisely made a shift towards 'constructivism', which 'understands that different international actors will operate according to different logics', thereby justifying his claim that history has a place in contributing to the 'success in international relations'.

The author is right to identify that the term 'clash of civilisations' simply does not capture the fact that a great deal of contest is taking place within civilisations. The use of 'civilisation' encompasses too many distinct and varied national identities: clearly not all Islamic states are in conflict with the West. In fact, within an Islamic state, there are extremists and non-extremists. As such, the author is correct to point out that if we are to make any progress in international relations, we have to acknowledge that there are many major distinctions among nations, even within one 'civilisation'. That being said, we cannot entirely dismiss Huntington's use of the word 'civilisation' because, from a positivist standpoint, he has identified the broadest possible trend pinning down the 'social forces' at work following the 'September 11 attacks' – the incompatibility of Islamic and Western notions of freedom and justice.

Nonetheless, it is commendable that the author tries to preserve 'the whole range of local perspectives and narratives in this region'. While globalisation has made a huge impact on the way we perceive international relations in how the lines have blurred with the increased integration of nations, it is undeniable that there are 'national, religious, ethnic' perspectives that are still unique to different nations. It certainly cannot be said that Southeast Asia is a homogenous region, for 'these perspectives are themselves dynamic and subject to extensive reinvention'. That being said, it is necessary to point out that Weber, who was the foremost proponent of Interpretative Social Sciences, admitted that his acknowledgement and preoccupation with 'multiple and competing viewpoints' could hinder one in the process of identifying social changes, describing the historical narrative as useless if it leads us to believe that we cannot come to a conclusion because there is no common basis for comparison across cultures, that is, things happen because that is just the way they happen. Nonetheless, we see that that is not the point the author is making; he is merely ensuring that we do not disregard differences, for he says in his disclaimer that 'there is no need to go from one extreme to another and neglect the role of globalising forces'.

He is hence justified to say that 'the view of this region is likely to be historical rather than convergent', declaring that history's acknowledgment of differences can in fact lead to consensus in 'establishing shared norms and understanding'. He then proceeds to underscore the failings of the 'Realist School' in security studies: in 'insisting on a homogenising view of a world of inevitably competing nation states, all driven by the same motivations', they are 'intolerant of the painstaking processes of consensus making and regional norm construction…in ASEAN regionalism'. This Realist School stance essentially highlights the view proposed in the Rational Man theory, which is to say that people respond to incentives and base their decisions on how best it benefits

themselves. The author cannot accept this because he finds it contrary to the fact that ASEAN nations have come together of late and made so many concessions for each other with the purpose of promoting peace. However, the arrival of a consensus is not mutually exclusive with fulfilling one's self-interest: for example, I agree to be at peace with you because a war with you will incur far greater losses than if I were at peace with you. Nonetheless, by the Principle of Charity, we can see that the author is trying to forward the notion that to harp on 'predictable rival relations' is self-defeating in our pursuit for greater understanding and peace within the region.

He finally concludes by offering the alternative – 'constructivism', which 'is concerned with the capability of actors to be able to construct conditions of peace'. He proposes that the key to 'success in international relations' is hence 'facilitated when the different sides share the same "lifeworld"'. With a 'common system of norms and rules perceived as legitimate', progress can take place, and that is what security studies should aspire to create. Only by '[returning] to history', that is, understanding the distinct perspectives across the different nations can such a possibility be entertained.

Marker's comments:

Brilliant!

Knowledge and Inquiry Year 6 Preliminary Examinations (2010)

essay 21 | The writer makes claims about how we can study and influence ASEAN regionalism. Discuss and evaluate the author's claims, using your own understanding of the nature of knowledge in history and/or social science as well as the ideas raised by the author.

Yeap Choon How | 10A01A

The author's main argument is that in order for different agents in the region (ASEAN) to work with each other in building up security relations, they have to construct a system of knowledge that is laid upon an intricate lattice of understanding and acceptance of differences in each state's historical background. He further argues that such a system of knowledge, which he calls the "lifeworld", ought to be separate from the extant "logics" of different states involved. Although this is his main argument, its primary function being to advocate the construction of the "lifeworld", it is also used by the author to justify his earlier preamble about the nature of knowledge in the anthropological context of the world.

First, I shall look at his broad claims about the nature of anthropological knowledge, as these form the basis upon which his more specific argument for security studies in ASEAN lie. He primarily draws the distinction between what has been termed 'the clash of civilisations' – the contest between conflicting modes of thinking and living represented by unique and distinct groups or collectives of people in the world – and 'history'. The author does not provide a clear definition of the 'history' that he uses, but it can be contextually surmised that he is referring to the general study of individualised understanding and narrative in different cultural contexts. Hence, his view of history is not one that is merely an assemblage of disparate shards of information and acts, but a continuous flow of events and interactions that produce a network of identity, which is acutely distinct from those of other nations in the world.

His argument stems from the observation that much discussion of international affairs is based on what he considers a misunderstanding of the way the world behaves; to him, the misunderstanding is that civilisations are static, well-defined entities that can be judged positively, with an empirical examination of its nature, and perhaps its qualities. He argues that instead of treating countries as unchanging, single-minded bodies, they should in fact be treated as amorphous sociological constructs, subject to change based on personal factors and "extensive reinvention". His use of fundamentalist Islam suggests that he does not even consider this argument in the inter-state context, but in terms of global modes of thinking, supporting his interpretive position of anthropology and history. This argument is meritorious, to the extent that his fulcrum of analysis and justification is globalisation as a contextual phenomenon. He states that "globalisation can foster multiple and competing viewpoints" as a fundamental premise in his argument for the embrace of interpretive, rather that positive, analysis. Assuming this premise is sound, this provides the argument with its validity, as it adheres to his concept of history, as one that is shaped by changing individual narratives. This is because he argues for understanding between states and ideologies, not the perception of civilisations as "clashing". The conclusion he derives from this is that the primary task is one of achieving consensus – shared norms and understanding – which is in effect a synthesis of his notion of history and the recognition of the potential for destabilising relations due to globalising forces.

At this point, he turns to the more specific issue of security studies in explaining how history is relevant not just as a way of viewing the nature of political relations, but also as a means of constructing consensus, the essential compromise between history and the advancing forces of globalisation. Once again, he reiterates his rejection of the positive view by using the Realist School as an example: it analyses security relations in terms of "predictable rivalry relations" between "sovereign states", which are "always self-interested, self advantaging". Here he specifies several key elements of the positive school of thought: that international relations can be assumed to follow a generalised, probabilistic rule of rivalry, that societies have to be seen in terms of sovereign states – clearly defined groups of distinct societies that can be analysed within certain predetermined parameters, and that the interests of the state represent the interests of people as

a collective. He dismisses this viewpoint by advocating the construction of a new mode of analysis and an understanding based instead on the individualised perspective of history, which takes into account ever-changing social factors that transcend the physical parameters set by the positive school.

He further proposes the notion that what we deal with are "international actors", taking pains to avoid the concept of the state, and instead focusing on the needs and impact of individual actors – not to be confused with 'individuals' – and that these actors think based on "different logics", that is, different modes of thought shaped by the unique historical narratives of their contexts, as opposed to the holistic view of the positivists of the self-serving state. Having put forth his own concept of international relations, he finally reaches his conclusion, that a successful platform for engagement would recognise, but keep in the background, these differences in 'logic', and be based on an entirely distinct system of norms and rules informed, but not influenced, by the awareness of the different 'logics'. The ultimate purpose of such a constructed notion of international knowledge is "communicating and acting". Hence his "lifeword" – the body of constructed knowledge promulgated – would not provide eternally certain truths, which to him would be utterly contrary to the purpose of the international engagement. Rather, this set of knowledge would overcome the relativist problem of differences in perception and understanding of the same object by imposing upon it a fundamentally artificial but useful system of knowledge based on naturally occurring changes and disparities in social knowledge.

The author's argument is entirely cogent, and reasonably justified – though his notion of historical knowledge could do with more elaboration and clarification – and for this reason I accept his conclusion.

Marker's comments:

Rather unique way of looking at the argument but I'm not certain Milner would go so far as to acknowledge that the establishment of a common 'lifeworld' necessarily is an imposition of an 'entirely distinct system of norms and rules' rather than accommodation and compromise of existing and differing norms and rules. In fact, I think that Milner would go with the latter but then this discussion would no longer be KI.

essay 22 | **"The notion of what is real differs from discipline to discipline." Discuss with reference to knowledge in the social sciences and mathematics.**

Cheriel Neo | 10A13A

This statement can be interpreted in two ways: it can either be interpreted as saying that the notion of what objects or what knowledge constitutes reality differs from discipline to discipline, or as saying that the notion of what reality itself is differs from discipline to discipline. Both are true, and I will go on to explain why this is so. I will also go on to explain that the notion of what is real (in both senses of the term) differs not just between the social sciences and mathematics, but within the individual disciplines as well.

When it comes to reality, mathematics is a particularly fragmented and divided discipline. Though mathematics may be one of the most internally consistent disciplines in terms of knowledge, mathematicians' views on what is real can often be far more divergent than those of social scientists. This is primarily because many mathematicians would prefer not to associate their discipline with reality at all, and are far more interested in the intellectual challenge that mathematics presents than in questions about how real mathematics is, and what constitutes mathematical knowledge. For those who do concern themselves with such questions, however, there are two main schools of thought: that of the constructivists and intuitionists, who believe that all mathematical knowledge must be found naturally in the world, and that of the Platonic mathematicians, who believe that mathematics is part of a higher reality than the natural world. Clearly, the two views cannot be reconciled with each other.

In contrast, social scientists generally consider their discipline the most real of all other disciplines, in that it is by far the most concerned with the nitty-gritty complex realities of human life. There are disputes among the different schools of the social sciences – for example between the positivists, who claim that society is an independent reality, and the interpretivists, who claim that it is the individual and his motivations that are real – but by and large the social sciences have a far more unified view of what is real than mathematics.

In mathematics, the constructivists and intuitionists believe that mathematical knowledge must be real, in that it must be reducible to concepts found in the natural (the real) world. For example, some have proposed that all mathematical theories and axioms should be constructed using only natural numbers, as other numbers, such as surds and other irrational numbers, cannot be found in the real world, and therefore are only imaginary entities that ought not to exist in mathematics.

Platonic mathematicians, on the other hand, reject the constructivists and intuitionists' ideas of the real world, and believe that mathematics cannot be found in the natural world at all, but must be accessed as a part of the higher reality of the world of forms. Platonic mathematicians believe that the natural world is in fact less real than the world of forms, which is the true reality, accessible through the medium of rational thought in mathematics.

Clearly, Platonic mathematics would dismiss the whole enterprise of the social scientists, and would claim that the social sciences are an unenlightened attempt to understand the natural world, which is only a poor copy of the true reality. Needless to say, social scientists would defend their discipline from the attack of the Platonic mathematicians, and would retort that human society is at the centre of all that is real, and that mathematics is only real insofar as it can be used to document, describe, or predict trends and patterns of human behaviour – social "realities".

Even with the social sciences, however, there are divisions over what is real, most notably between the positivist social sciences and the interpretive social sciences. Positivist social scientists are interested in forming laws about human behaviour and societies, and typically approach the study of society using much the same methodology as a natural scientist. They perform experiments,

record their findings using quantitative methods, and formulate their theories based on the behaviour of a large majority of people. Therefore, positivist social scientists believe that society is an independent reality that controls the individual and that our individual will and consciousness is dependent on the society we live in. To the positivist social scientist, society is thus the reality that must be studied, rather than the individual.

To the interpretivists, however, society is dependent on individuals, and interpretivist studies often focus on the thoughts, feelings and motivations of individuals performing socially oriented actions. To interpretivists, the individual is the reality rather than society, and society is the sum of individuals' social interactions. Accordingly, interpretivist methodology is qualitative rather than quantitative, and focuses on empathetically understanding the subjects being studied rather than forming laws about the behaviour of many.

Even though the focus of all social scientists is on human society, and all social scientists believe that society and human behaviour, rather than mathematics, is what is real, we can see that there are disagreements within the discipline of social sciences over what precisely constitutes that reality. Positivist social scientists would dismiss interpretivist findings as subjective and uncertain, while interpretivists would criticise positivism for ignoring the reality of individual motivations and feelings. Similarly, Platonic mathematicians would criticise constructivists and intuitionists for focusing on a lesser "reality", whereas constructivists and intuitionists would argue that Platonic mathematics is not grounded in the real world.

Although there are disagreements among and within disciplines, one thing that most people (regardless of their discipline) can agree on is probably the idea of reality – that reality is something which is true, which is certain, and which exists independently in the world. All disagreements about what is real usually stem from the first premises of those schools of thought; from assumptions about what exactly makes up reality and where reality lies (for example, in the world of forms or the natural world).

Marker's comments:

Do take note that for math, there are non-realists.

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