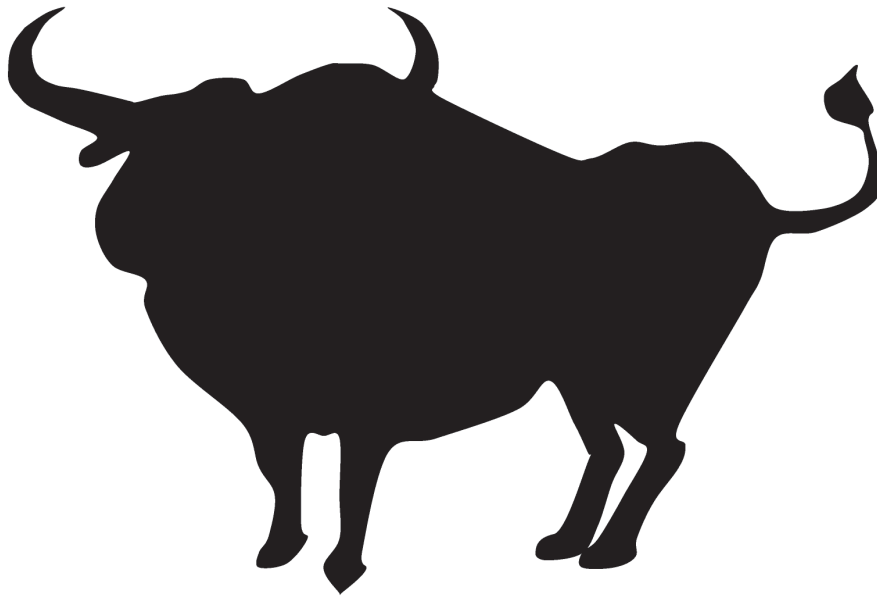


# KS Bull 2020

## Issue 2



# Raffles Institution

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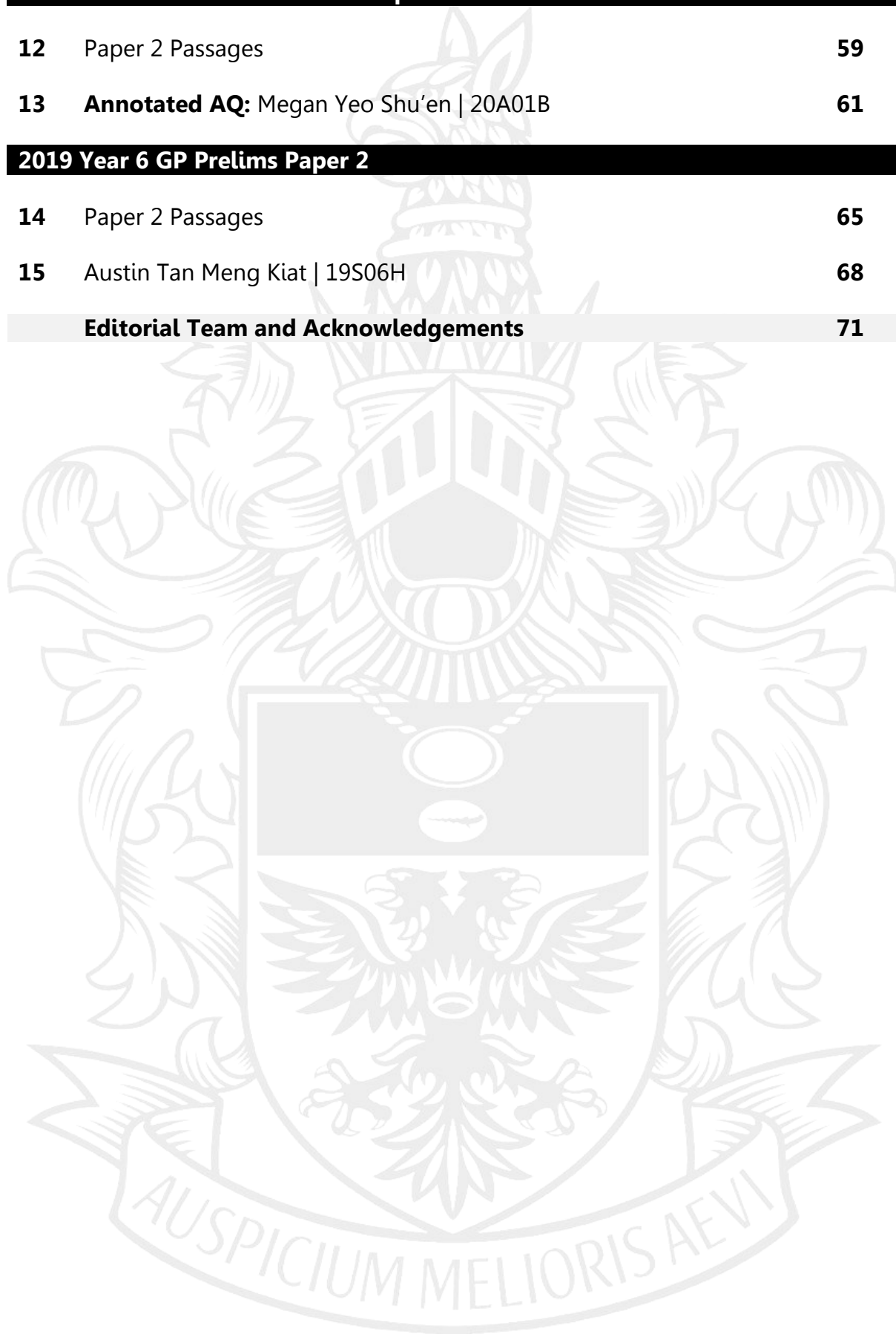
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**‘Artificial intelligence creates more problems than benefits.’  
Discuss.**

The dystopian landscape of robots having the capacity to overtake mankind does not seem to be mere fiction in sci-fi movies anymore. The high efficiency and speed at which simple to moderately difficult tasks can be performed brings great delight to many corporations, but incites a growing fear in the masses, due to the lack of job security. With the looming threat of Artificial Intelligence stealing the jobs of many, coupled with its potential for the production of realistic falsehoods that can affect political landscapes, it is easy to dismiss Artificial Intelligence as far more problematic than beneficial. However, I believe that the progress that Artificial Intelligence has brought should not be feared due to its capacity to alleviate global issues and given that it serves as a tool for better quality work in several industries.

Sceptics of Artificial Intelligence would often cite the negative consequences brought about by technological change, such as the widespread loss of jobs and the ability to manipulate the masses for political gains. Due to the advancement in technology, seemingly menial tasks can be easily carried out at a much faster speed. Those who perform routine tasks in factories or retail stores find themselves being replaced due to the use of Artificial Intelligence, which can recognise, sort and organise items at a far greater rate than humans can. Even for industries that seemingly require creativity that only the human mind can provide, now find themselves competing with Artificial Intelligence. For instance, Artificial Intelligence is now used in journalism and the music industry. Elon Musk’s company, OpenAI, recently used this technology to generate pieces of fake news that sounded highly legitimate — the report was

about unicorns. This was easily achieved through intense “training” of this technology simply by feeding it countless articles and reports released online as news. The wider implication of this is the potential for the proliferation of falsehoods produced without the need for human intervention in the future. This perceived impending doom is what has convinced many that the myriad of issues in today's day and age is caused by Artificial Intelligence. Another example that highlights its capacity for negative outcomes is when Cambridge Analytica, a British political consulting firm, made use of algorithms to harvest the data of thousands of Facebook profiles for Donald Trump's presidential election campaign in 2016. Using the data collected from these profiles, their political leanings were learnt and targeted advertisements appeared on their news feeds in an attempt to manipulate their beliefs. This example highlights how Artificial Intelligence, coupled with the use of social media, can have very significant consequences when used as a means of manipulation and deception. The danger in this technological revolution that the general population can barely understand is how it sets a precedent for dangerous and unethical use of technology when used without strict regulations. Furthermore, the scale of the impact is realised when we understand that the fate of an entire nation was at stake. Thus, it is understandable why many would argue that Artificial Intelligence creates more problems than benefits.

However, I believe that supporters of the stand that Artificial Intelligence brings about more problems than advantages are slightly myopic in their worldview. Focusing on the negative consequences Artificial Intelligence has brought would cause us to neglect the immense aid it has brought to many global issues. Due to the massive amounts of data it can analyse in a short span of time, thus being able to create virtual, yet life-like beings, Artificial Intelligence is able to be used as a tool to lure out predators of cyber-sex crimes. In the Philippines, there is the rising trend of cyber-sex abuse of children, one victim being as young as three months old. Using online chat platforms and dating apps, paedophiles are able to remain anonymous while obtaining the illegal material of child pornography they want. The scale of this crime is not limited to the surface web and extends

to the Deep Web, where the Dark Web is. As the Dark Web is invisible to most users and requires special software to gain access, law enforcement officers are faced with the challenge of not being able to catch these perpetrators. Thus, in 2013, Amsterdam-based Terre des Hommes created a virtual 10-year old named 'Sweetie' using Artificial Intelligence, with the aim of luring out predators of cyber-sex crimes. Within two months, 1000 men from 71 countries approached 'Sweetie' online. Thanks to Artificial Intelligence, the movements of the virtual child seemed realistic enough and was able to show the scale of this cyber-sex crime. Another benefit brought about by Artificial Intelligence is due to its ability to efficiently identify and sort, thus taking over tasks that are low-paying and what seems to be a waste of human resource. For instance, recycling efforts in recycling factories can be very laborious due to the many different kinds of plastics with some being contaminated by food residue. Artificial Intelligence is now able to identify each type of plastic and categorise them so that they can be sent to their respective facilities for recycling. The wider implication is that the global issue of excessive amounts of plastics being thrown away, which is affecting wildlife, can be alleviated through higher efficiency of recycling efforts. Therefore, the relief that Artificial Intelligence can bring to global issues of plastic wastage and cybercrime leads me to believe that Artificial Intelligence can bring more benefits than problems.

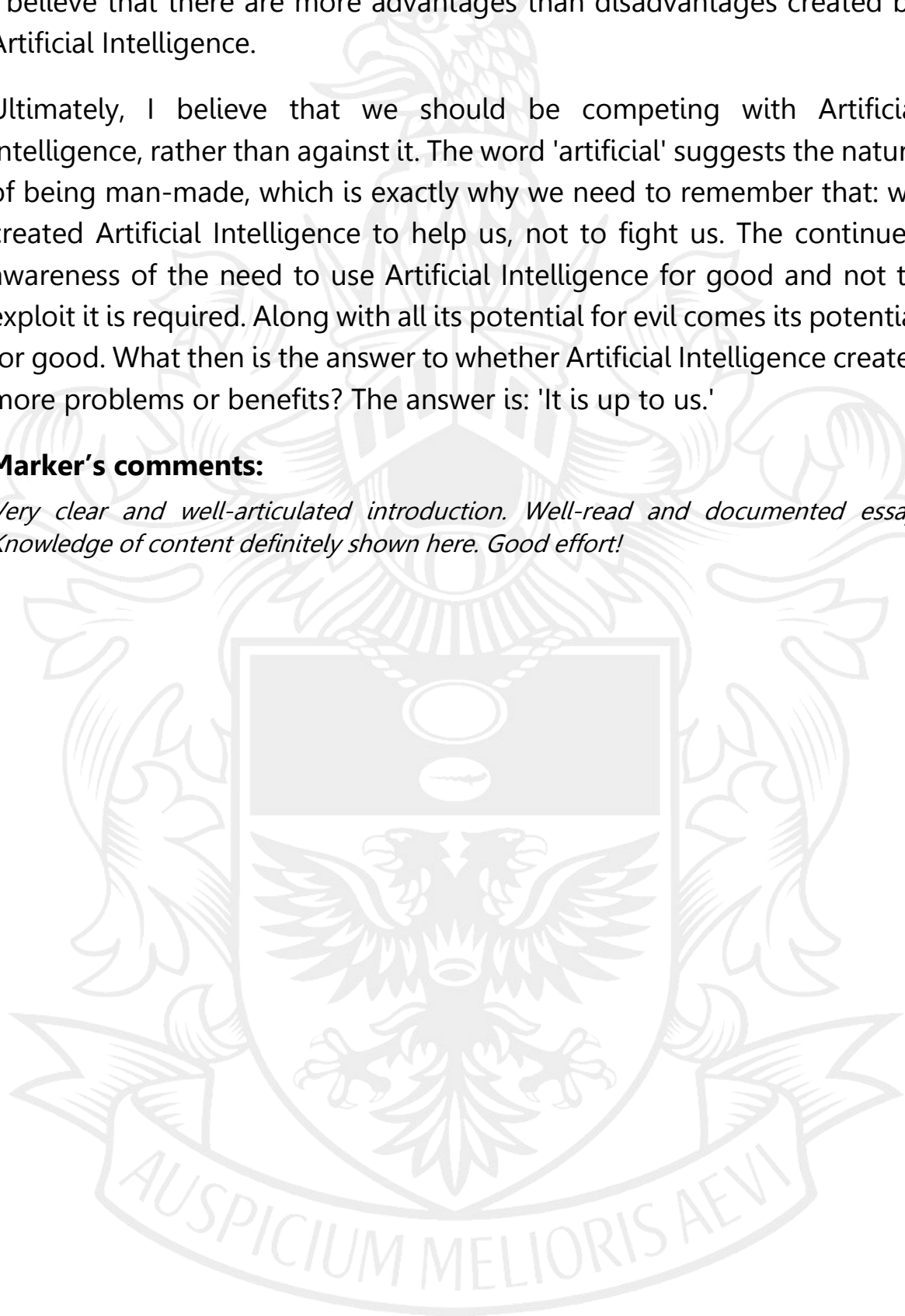
In addition, the higher efficiency that Artificial Intelligence provides also comes with higher accuracy, aiding industries that require both of these factors. In the healthcare sector, accuracy is crucial when it comes to surgical techniques and correctly recognising cancerous tissue. With the rapid advancement of technology, Artificial Intelligence is able to identify the exact region of cancerous tissue and even assist in surgical procedures. This is seen in the increasing prevalence of robots being enabled with Artificial Intelligence. These machines assist with microsurgical procedures by reducing surgical variations and decreasing patient recovery time. In both of these cases, the accuracy provided by Artificial Intelligence is unprecedented and many supporters of Artificial Intelligence claim that it has the potential to aid doctors diagnose

thousands of cases in a similarly reliable way. As the ease of suffering of many patients can be achieved at a much higher speed and with precision, I believe that there are more advantages than disadvantages created by Artificial Intelligence.

Ultimately, I believe that we should be competing with Artificial Intelligence, rather than against it. The word 'artificial' suggests the nature of being man-made, which is exactly why we need to remember that: we created Artificial Intelligence to help us, not to fight us. The continued awareness of the need to use Artificial Intelligence for good and not to exploit it is required. Along with all its potential for evil comes its potential for good. What then is the answer to whether Artificial Intelligence creates more problems or benefits? The answer is: 'It is up to us.'

**Marker's comments:**

*Very clear and well-articulated introduction. Well-read and documented essay. Knowledge of content definitely shown here. Good effort!*



**‘Artificial intelligence creates more problems than benefits.’  
Discuss.**

On 29 August 2019, two behemoths in the technological realm convened for an evocative discussion on the boons and banes of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Chinese e-commerce giant and Alibaba founder Jack Ma, and the starkly futuristic founder of SpaceX, Elon Musk. Diving into the crux of this hotly-debated topic, Jack Ma animatedly expounded on the benefits of AI and lauded those who, like him, embraced AI as “street-smart” and criticised any dissidents as merely “book-smart”, blind to the wonders that AI could bring. Unfortunately, his rather superficial understanding of the problems that AI creates was met with a rueful smile from Musk, who said, “I don’t know man, that’s like ‘famous last words’.” Indeed, while society has benefited extensively from AI in a plethora of domains, I argue that beyond the surface of convenience, this unbridled technology creates more problems than benefits.

Proponents of the wonders of AI, like Jack Ma’s staunch legions, would immediately cite the convenience that it brings, from conglomerates and firms, right down to the individual consumer. Commercial behemoths like Alibaba, Google and Facebook are just some notable examples of firms that have been, with the help of AI, using Big Data to collect user data and tailor themselves to the changing needs of the consumer. In ride-hailing apps like Grab and Gojek, for instance, AI harnesses the data amassed by the thousands of data points provided by users each day, to paint a coherent picture of the various hotspots across the district and subsequently deploy more vehicles to those areas where taxis are in high demand. While such algorithms existed before the emergence of AI, they were primitive and slow, whereupon AI and the technology of machine



learning imbued in those algorithms an unprecedented speed and efficacy, the likes of which mankind has never witnessed previously in its millennia of existence. Such convenience in targeting consumer needs not only generates tremendous profits for these firms, but also positive externalities that trickle down to the consumer level, allowing app users to hail rides, order food and shop with much greater efficiency than ever before. With AI integrated into multi-functional apps like WeChat and MeiTuan, a food delivery app in China, the shimmering web of benefits extends far and wide to fulfil the ever-rising demands for convenience in the general populace – there is hardly any successful domain free from the positive impact of AI.

Invariably, staunch advocates of AI would also laud it for its ability to aid humans in fulfilling certain non-material needs, like a desire for company or entertainment. In several prefectures of Japan such as Ehime Prefecture, AI robots equipped with a smorgasbord of useful features like a location-tracking camera and pattern recognition functions have been handed out free-of-charge to elderly folks living alone. These elderly folks, accustomed to the loneliness and social isolation of solitary living, often live far away from their children and have emotional longings for company that stem from humans' innate nature as social beings. With a personalised algorithm that allows the robot to greet and play on demand any music to the user's liking, these elderly folks have benefited in terms of attaining more fulfilment and pleasure; the cameras also aid in monitoring their safety and even facilitate contact between them and their children using the AI robots' ability to update the children routinely via an app. Such home intelligence robots, including the TMall Genie and the Sougou, fill in the gaps left by the increasingly frenetic lifestyles of people and the dearth of human comfort which they so seek. Indeed, Japanese companies have even gone to satisfy the cravings of singles through a handheld device, through which human problems like betrayal or insecurities were effectively circumvented and these non-material needs fulfilled. It is thus apparent that AI not only gives convenience to organisations and individuals, but also has a human touch to it, whereby

it can be programmed to fit even the emotional needs of people seeking such solace.

Woefully, such benefits of AI, while alluring in the short run, fail to address the long-term problems it creates. In an almost fleeting second relative to the long annals of history, AI has transcended the constraints of technology and made light year leaps. Yet as it hurtles forward recklessly at a breakneck speed, it creates hazards and dire consequences that humans have not yet developed any countermeasures for. This is tantamount to steering a space shuttle without knowing where one is heading for, or the potential dangers that lay ahead. Just in July 2017, a rogue robot, supposedly pre-programmed by engineers, killed a German worker at a Volkswagen manufacturing plant, without any premonitions or signs it was going to do so. In March 2018, a self-driving car which was being tested knocked down and killed a pedestrian in Arizona, United States. Though the error stemmed from the programming of AI, such failures in judgment should serve as a dire warning of the problems that surface from it. Who then should be held accountable for the killings? The notion that a robot can be incarcerated seems absurd, so should the programmer of this algorithm be punished? Yet, are we ignoring the potential of AI's predetermined "mind" as a source of agency? This grey area will inevitably lend itself to more accidents and life-endangering problems in the future, and despite so, we have not come up with a suitable moral framework to tackle these issues. A maelstrom of ethical and safety-related problems have been created by AI, but the biggest problem is perhaps that of uncertainty – that AI has a propensity for destruction. In the US military, for example, plans have kicked in to deploy Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), which, with the help of AI, can shoot down enemies in the Middle East and ease the manpower required to man these drones. Such haphazard deployment of human-killing technology casts a dark shadow on AI as a tool to build war machines, creating long-term problems that are difficult to solve.

Compounding that, the ease and convenience that AI indubitably lent us have insidious side effects: AI leads to the degeneration of human abilities

and the displacement of humans from their jobs. From the AI Deep Blue, which defeated the GO Champion, to AlphaGO, AI has trumped human ability in various domains, even domains where the hubris of mankind lends itself to the misconception that its abilities are insurmountable and unconquerable. Although GO has  $10^{37}$  possible moves, even more than chess, AI has progressed so rapidly that humans are left in the dust, with another example being AI winning the game of Jeopardy, a game show on American television previously thought to be only playable by humans. It is then a corollary of that, that humans are now deemed inferior in certain aspects and leave AI to perform duties that were previously performed by humans: from using Siri to make phone calls, to asking Alexa for the whereabouts of one's belongings, AI has superseded humans and rendered some human actions obsolete. Would anyone now be motivated to play an intellectually stimulating game when they know an AI robot could easily defeat them? And would anyone remember phone numbers, or anything at all, when AI can offer a repository of information at one's bidding? Certainly, granted that there are GO players and individuals not subject to the influence of AI, there is an undeniable trend that humans' independent abilities have been overshadowed by AI, causing certain faculties to degenerate, as evidenced by various research studies. With the employment of AI in coding and even in accounting, humans are also displaced from their jobs as the more manual and repetitive labour of counting or even launching simple programmes are taken over by AI.

Penultimately, AI has the propensity to – and has shown that it can – destroy mankind. Though this is not a visible problem and has been brushed off by many as fearmongering, such a problem has its seeds sown ever since the nascent stages of AI development. Fifty years ago, humans were still playing block-shaped arcade games like PacMan, and now, we have AI-equipped games that make us lose our sense of reality by portraying virtual characters in an awe-strikingly life-like manner. In the 1968 film "2001: Space Odyssey", we see the insidious propensity of the HAL9000 to manipulate humans. 50 years later, in Dan Brown's ground-breaking novel "Origin", we see the AI Winston performing a whole myriad of tasks and even forsaking human life to do its work. While such stories

have not yet materialised, the breakneck speed at which AI is hurtling forward may well transform such dystopian tales into a grim reality, as illustrated in the film "The Matrix". In fact, the malignant effects of AI have already begun to rear their head: in 2019, China's government has already been using AI and facial recognition technology to keep the Uighur Muslims under tight control and forgoing human rights in the process, reminiscent of the surveillance state known as Big Brother illustrated harrowingly by George Orwell in his dystopian tale "1984". As there have not been caps or restrictions on the deployment of AI for malicious intents, AI creates the problem of an uncertain future which could possibly lead to an apocalypse, based on an extrapolation of current trends.

Ultimately, as much as we reap in the current, short-term benefits of AI and are blithely unaware of the problems AI creates, let us not be blind to its detriments; let us be cognizant, and see the long-term problems that AI brings as substantiated by the multitude of examples raised. As we leap capriciously into an unprecedented era of human history where AI is a growing force to be reckoned with, let us remember the Three Laws of Robotics of science fiction writer Isaac Asimov – that robots, and AI for that matter, should always have a shutdown button, lest the dystopian reality of the problems that AI already brings unfold.

**Marker's comments:**

*Simon, this is a commendable attempt at a topic with tremendous scope. Your ability to pick out key observations of AI, beyond writing topic-bound paragraph show a highly analytical approach to the question. There are some lapses in development of ideas but overall, this is an insightful response.*

*Strong command of the language; engaging intro and conclusion.*

**To what extent are young people in your society prepared for a world that is constantly changing?**

Nicknamed the "Strawberry Generation", the Millennial and Gen Z generations in Singapore are quite often looked down upon by the older generations. Youths in Singapore are often categorised as reckless, selfish and apathetic to problems in society. While such attitudes are definitely changing in today's world, with many youths stepping up to effect a positive change, many are still doubtful of the capabilities of the youth. However, youths have shown that through their education and interest in current issues, they are very well-versed in the changes and uncertainties of society and are more than prepared to tackle such problems head-on.

The reputation of youths definitely precedes them, causing them to appear idealistic, irresponsible and rather unprepared to take on a world that develops at an unprecedented rate. Youths on mainstream media are often depicted to be unruly and embarrassing. Multiple news reports on Straits Times often feature youths fighting, behaving indecently in public and gambling under void decks. Furthermore, reports on Stomp, a popular citizen-contributed news outlet, target youths more than ever. Painting youths in such a bad light fuels the idea that youths do not think in a mature way, often seeking instant gratification instead. Youths have also begun to diversify, more moving out of the cookie-cutter mould of an ideal life of a Singaporean: studying hard, working hard to earn money for the family, then taking care of the family. This results in many of the older generations fearing for how youths are no longer prepared to go into the workforce or face issues that are constantly emerging in the world.

However, it is important to note that diversifying into things like computer games, sports, and music are not necessarily bad things. In fact, it is an asset to Singapore in a world that is constantly changing its interests. A country can no longer remain relevant simply based on stable economies or great governance. By branching out and chasing their dreams, they are getting the opportunity to excel in an area outside of academia. More than ever, youths are already taking the changing landscape of interests in the world in stride, investing their time into up and coming industries such as esports and sports. Some examples of youths branching out include Joseph Schooling, who did the nation proud by clinching the Gold Medal at the Olympics. Clearly, in a world that quickly moves on from one thing to the next, the Olympics was one of the trends that Schooling rode on to bring glory to the nation. The world may be ever changing, but youths make up this world and change with it, and thus are more than prepared to deal with changes, arguably even more than the older generations due to their flexibility and adaptability. Trends move faster than ever, and it seems that the only generation that can truly keep up with them is the youths.

The education system in Singapore is also well-rounded and holistic, equipping youths today with more skills than ever to manage and understand new issues that may arise. On top of academically rigorous subjects, schools also have mandatory community and character education lessons in place. In an increasingly educated world, hard knowledge is no longer enough to prepare youths for any trials or hardships they may face. The increasing importance of soft skills and awareness of current issues are evident in lessons in Singapore. Project Work, an 'A' Level subject, prepares students by making them consider issues and come up with solutions to solve them. This development of a problem solving mindset, as well as teamwork building skills, allows youths to be able to think out of the box and be creative in solving or attempting to solve issues that are much more intangible, as an increasing number of issues in the world are shaping up to be. Students in primary schools are also introduced to coding lessons, a new addition to the curriculum. In a world where technology is becoming more powerful and

all-encompassing, it is clear that youths have to keep up and equip themselves with relevant skills. By teaching the younger generation the basics of technology, it paves the way for them to be better educated in a medium that is the quickest at developments. The education system is holistic in its extracurriculars as well, producing youths who are able to think on their feet, creatively and most importantly, it equips them with the necessary skills, both technical and soft, to tackle problems they may not anticipate.

Youths have also proven to be more proactive in taking action, spearheading movements and taking charge of youth activism, not allowing their inexperience to stop them. The annual Step Festival organised by the National Youth Council transformed into YouthX, a festival for youths to showcase projects and set up booths. The festival preached environmental consciousness, with vendors being encouraged to use reusables instead of single use plastics. Youths there were all passionate about their various initiatives, from setting up thrift stores to opening a social entrepreneurship business. The Kint Story is an online thrift shop that collects and sells second-hand clothing, spreading the detrimental effects of fast fashion and textile waste. It was started by two youths who were concerned with the environmental effects and exploitation of sweatshop workers, the problems with the previously unquestioned textile industry. Youth activism also takes shape in Outward Bound Singapore (OBS), where youths organise biannual trips to Pulau Ubin and Coney Island for beach clean-ups, habitat restorations and more. Through such initiatives, they are able to amass hundreds of youth volunteers, showing how youths are not as apathetic as society makes them out to be. In fact, many take the extra step to serve the community and take charge of projects that have lofty ambitions. Climate Change is one of the largest issues in the world right now, and it requires attention more than ever. Youths stepping up and calling for change suggests that not only are they prepared for an ever-changing world, they are also quick to identify issues and take charge of the changes they wish to see in the world.



The motivation and drive in youths are often also channelled into intellectually rigorous projects that showcase their abilities and pursuit for improvement and excellence. These are traits that will benefit the world on a larger scale. More youths are going into research in Science and Technology. Technology competitions have a large participation rate as youths attempt to build robots that would serve the community by helping disabled people or elderly with mobility issues. These innovations show how youths keep abreast with technological developments and use them to solve problems. On a political level, Model United Nations (MUN) is also becoming more popular amongst youth. The mock conference simulates the international body, the United Nations, and often has large participation from Secondary School to Tertiary School students. These budding politicians are invited to debate on global issues, much like how the actual United Nations would, and come up with solutions that take the form of resolutions. MUNs, while only simulations, are of great intellectual rigour and challenges delegates to think on their feet and satisfy enough of a majority to pass their resolutions. Participating in such rigorous competitions, their motivation and drive to do more for the world, no matter what it may throw at them, speaks heaps about their level of preparedness. By using such competitions to cross the hurdle of inexperience, youths show that they are aware of the constantly evolving issues, the complexities of the world, and constantly improve themselves to keep up. Another way that youths improve themselves is by being involved in Meet-The-People sessions, where they engage in dialogues with ministers and grassroots leaders. By involving themselves in current legislation and being more aware of current policies and reasons behind them, youths are not only able to learn from it, but can also potentially improve it. It is evident that the drive and energy that youths possess and are characterised by are not useless. In fact, they are channelled into efforts to better themselves and prepare them for the world ahead of them.

The potential in the youths of Singapore is definitely not something to be slept on. Despite the odds against them and public opinion, youths have proved, time and time again, that their ability to rise up to the occasion



and tackle challenges thrown at them. Their flexibility and adaptability, and their hard work, has more than sufficiently prepared them for any issues or challenges that this constantly changing world may throw at them.

**Marker's comments:**

*Content - Thoughtful and consistent engagement with the characteristics of Singapore youth and how they impact a changing world. Relevant, logically developed, coherent TS and evaluation. Deepen evaluation by considering why the youth have such traits, and a more diverse profile of youth beyond junior college. Also, a clearer laying out of characteristics/trends of a changing world could be attempted and connected to youth.*

*Language - Clear, fluent, mostly grammatical. Varied vocabulary and sentence structure.*

**Consider the notion that the Arts are aesthetically pleasing but of little real value.**

Step into any art museum in Europe, and you will be bombarded with figures that embody the Renaissance ideal: sleek, supple, muscular forms of heroic men and divine women immortalised in pure marble. Rodin's "The Kiss" embodies this beautiful form, the acme of sculptural creation as a passionate moment between two lovers has been captured in stone. For time immemorial, the Arts have been lauded for their ability to evoke aesthetic pleasure, be it through reading a good book or poetry collection (Think the delightful fancies of Andrew Marvell as he ponders "a green thought in a green shade"), or admiring the graceful concertos of Bach in a grand concert hall. The Arts have traditionally been associated with the indulgence of the upper echelons of society, a bourgeois pastime that can undeniably bring beauty and superficial entertainment, with witty ditties or expressive impasto on canvas a visual and auditory feast. Beyond aesthetic please, however, the value of the Arts seems to fade into ambiguity and relative insignificance. Critics have often condemned the Arts as having little real, tangible value or benefit to the individual or society beyond aesthetic pleasure, merely a thing of frivolous leisure that can do little else but be pretty on a museum wall. However, I believe that to adopt such a view is far too myopic, trivialising a rich and complex discipline that can bring about tangible economic, social and political benefit to society, not to mention the value it has innately as an art object. The Arts have bountiful value in society beyond mere aesthetic pleasure, and we should look at Rodin's "The Kiss" beyond its aesthetic merit, for it has far more to offer us than what initially meets the eye.

Some critics espouse the view that the Arts are nebulous and lack a groundedness in reality, fanciful stuff of our imagination intended only to evoke "oohs and aahs" from an audience. Romantic artist Friedrich's "Wander above the Sea of Fog" romanticises exploration to the realm of ethereal wonder, the lone figure in the painting looking out at a world enveloped by smoke and fog, his beautiful, expressive strokes bringing us to the height of aesthetic ecstasy as we are enticed, even bewitched by this haunting image. Yet, beyond the indubitable beauty and awe the painting inspires, what more can it truly offer us? Friedrich painted the work entirely from his imagination, working within an art movement that in itself was merely intended to evoke aesthetic emotion and expression. The lack of grounding in any semblance of reality means that the Arts can only remain a pretty picture, with little relevance to our everyday life, unable to be translated into any kind of meaning or value in reality. Indeed, it seems as if the only real value the Arts can offer us is that of aesthetic pleasure, empty in meaning and purpose beyond an expression of stuff and fancy, intended only to evoke pleasure in the viewer from the quality and beauty of the work. Jane Austen herself wrote of her own magnum opus *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is rather too light, bright, and sparkling", lacking any real "substance" that can provide tangible enrichment or value in one's life or impact society at large. We may lose ourselves in the fairy-tale romance of Elizabeth and Darcy, but when the novel is over we cannot bring anything from it into our everyday reality; after all, can a novel full of superficial, humorous characters, near caricatures in their absurdity, really tell us anything about reality? The Arts then merely become a means of aesthetic pleasure, yet can have little value beyond provoking our imagination and sparking fancy.

Moreover, even arguments that the Arts have the power to tangibly enact change in society seem superficial and even contrived, particularly because the Arts has long been considered the pastime of the elite, a kind of aesthetic self-indulgence that cannot truly enact change in society, even as some artists masquerade under the pretence of doing so, but in actuality provide little real value to society. Street artist Banksy rose to fame with her anonymous street art that ostensibly gave the

disenfranchised and marginalised a voice where they had none, stencilling poignant images of refugees and migrants on concrete and asphalt in the dark of the night. When morning broke, people were struck by the powerful, haunting images intended to spark social change, yet after snapping a photo and revelling in the intricacies of the stencilling, continued their journey without a second thought. The aesthetic quality and unorthodox locations of Banksy's work were what gave the artist clout, yet did little in really sparking any kind of change in society. Furthermore, the kinds of social messages Banksy purports seem to lose weight in light of the fact that he has often been accused of copying other, lesser-known street artists' work and parroting them as his own, oppressing and exploiting a disenfranchised group in apparent support of another. The only real value in his work remains in the aesthetic realm, as his skill with the stencil and a bottle of spray paint is unrivalled. Further, Banksy himself sells his work in the most elite, highfalutin of institutions like Christie's or Sotheby's, cementing the Arts as a highbrow, elite discipline that cannot really bring about change precisely because it is so far removed from the hoi polloi. Similarly, we can appreciate the lilting, melodic symphonies of Mozart and Chopin, but whether they will be heard and appreciated by the general masses is another matter altogether, let alone as an effective tool for social change that can really bring us tangible value in terms of its ability to move and shape society.

Yet, to say all this and conclude that the only corollary that follows is that the Arts have little value beyond the aesthetic would be to condemn the Arts as an entire discipline in one fell swoop, and is overly generalising and unfair. In fact, one can argue that the democratisation and increased accessibility of the Arts have allowed it to take on more purpose and value beyond pure aesthetics in our world today, allowing us much to gain from this incredibly complex and intricate discipline.

Most tangibly, the Arts are able to bring about substantial economic revenue to a society, and is not short on financial value. Why else would Singapore invest millions in a Renaissance plan intended to allow the Arts scene in Singapore to flourish, attracting millions of visitors to our

National Gallery and ArtScience Museum that rake in hundreds of thousands of cold hard cash annually? One only needs to look at Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, the two richest artists in the world, to realise the financial profit one can earn from the Arts. A burgeoning Arts scene is arguably crucial for the economic success and prosperity of a city, allowing the area to gain both materially and in terms of cultural capital that can further cement its status as a happening, forward-looking city of progress and prosperity.

Beyond pure economic benefit, the Arts are in fact able to bring about tangible social change, given the increasing democratisation of the Arts that have allowed them to be accessible to all. Perhaps art still remains a pursuit of the wealthy in the high salons of art that the likes of Banksy and Hirst operate in, but today, many forms of art are popular and accessible to the masses, and if used appropriately, can serve as a compelling and poignant means of inciting social change and uniting communities. In the realm of music, Lin-Manuel Miranda's composition of an enchanting and deeply meaningful song to raise money for hurricane victims in Puerto Rico simultaneously expressed his solidarity with the victims while at the same time functioning as a call-to-action for influential public figures to help the victims, who lacked sufficient and immediate aid from the government due to bureaucratic red tape and racial tensions. Miranda's melody brought together other prominent musicians like Camilla Cabello to support the cause, a key example of how music and the Arts can unite people for a common cause. Closer to home, Pangdemonium's "This is What Happens to Pretty Girls" was a response to the rising tide of voices against sexual harassment with the #MeToo Movement, using the stage as a subtle, more visceral medium to bring to light this social issue in Singapore, a place where more direct and outright confrontations like marches and petitions cannot be easily organised. The Arts then serve as a powerful, alternative tool for social change and an expression of ideals, especially since the discipline itself is so deeply imbued with emotion and meaning, bringing about real value to society in beautiful and compelling ways.

Moreover, the Arts can function as important cultural markers that reflect the social psyche of society, allowing us to chart our history in a complex and interesting way that gives us a deeper understanding of our culture and society, where aesthetics are deliberately woven with meaning. Japanese film Godzilla burst onto the cinematic world at a time where Japan was recovering from the violence of World War II, the destruction and palpable terror Godzilla created with its leathery scales a crucial reflection of societal psyche at that time. Even more significantly, such works of art not only reflect society, but are critical in providing alternative narratives and discourses to monolithic, state-sanctioned narratives that can enrich and alter our understanding of the past. Sonny Liew's graphic novel *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, which provides an alternative history to the Singapore Story we have been fed is a pertinent example, while an Indonesian artist collaborated with Singapore Art Week 2019 in the exhibition "State of Motion" to produce works transposing images of the pontianak onto a national monument of the Gerwani women, a blatant calling out of the Indonesian regime for their previous mistreatment of this group of women, whose pain and suffering has been erased from history by that government. The Arts are thus critical and inherently valuable in creating discourse and providing insights into our culture and history.

So, the next time a scornful critic dismisses a painting or white marble sculpture as merely aesthetically beautiful but with little real value otherwise, let us not be too quick to agree. Indeed, who is to say that aesthetic beauty does not carry real value to an individual? A piece of art can arguably have merit simply by virtue of the fact that its aesthetic qualities have the ability to touch someone deeply and irrevocably. Now more than ever, the Arts are becoming a discipline that is full of burgeoning potential, adding substantial value to our lives that Augustus Rodin himself would be proud of. The next time you step into an art museum, let us look beyond aesthetic beauty and see the wealth of value the Arts have to offer.

### Marker's Comments:

*A fully relevant response with awareness of issues shown through the various values of the Arts and the examples used. There's also engagement with the aesthetic throughout. To deepen evaluation, consider why the Arts are able to serve such functions. The response is well-organised. While expressions can be better controlled, personal voice is evident.*



**Assess the view that your society is not doing  
enough to eradicate prejudice.**

Singapore has long been championed as a rare success story: an immigrant colony under the British, it is near miraculous that people from all around the region managed to come together to forge a nation that initially did not seek independence; a pre-condition of which was different groups putting aside their prejudices and being willing to work together. This is the narrative of racial harmony in Singapore, one that we often champion and herald as a sign of our progressive and accepting nature; peaceful co-existence between different ethnic groups is something that does not come easy in many societies across the world, and Singapore's apparent success in this area perhaps suggests our success in eradicating prejudice. However, I beg to differ. Such a view of Singapore is too sweeping, and there remains significant prejudice in our society today that we have not done enough to eradicate. Our central belief in meritocracy as a society has perpetuated our prejudice against the socio-economically disadvantaged, and our lack of open and mature discourse, as well as our tightly-held views on religious beliefs, has led to sustained prejudices against other groups to society.

Let us explore our society's most significant and sustained effort to fight prejudice: that of racial difference and racial stereotypes. Our government has arguably done much to seek to address racism and racial tensions through its policies and educational programs within our society, with relative success. Race has always been a very contentious issue in societies across the globe: most would be familiar with the long battle for civil rights in America that persists to today and even in our region – the civil war between the Burmans and the Karens in Myanmar reflects long-



standing racial tensions between the different ethnic groups. Singapore had a taste of such racial tensions boiling over when the 1964 racial riots broke out – simmering tensions between the Chinese and Malay communities eventually culminated in a racial riot that killed dozens in only a few days. Subsequently, the Singaporean government has sought to eradicate prejudice in Singapore with regard to race, especially through its education system: any Singaporean student above the age of ten will have attended a social studies or civics class where they were taught about the 1964 riots, and the importance of racial harmony. Furthermore, Racial Harmony Day is celebrated in schools, designed to foster mutual understanding and the transference of cultural knowledge between children of different ethnic backgrounds. To this end, the government's efforts to eradicate racial prejudices have been relatively successful: in a recent poll across secondary schools, it was found that 64% of students had more than one friend of another racial background, and 88% of students reflected that they had family friends of a different racial background. Therefore, we may argue that, given the controversial and tense histories often surrounding race, the Singapore government's efforts in eradicating prejudice has been relatively successful.

However, such success must be qualified: has prejudice really been fully eradicated? I believe that the government's approach, on its own, may be too top-down or prescriptive, and is thus limited in truly eradicating prejudice. The government alone cannot do enough to eradicate racial prejudices. When taking a broader view of society, we may problematise the claim that racial prejudices have been eradicated: perhaps due to Singaporean society only recently being able to discuss issues of race, there remains a lack of open and mature discourse about race, and this has allowed for racial prejudices to rear its ugly head and manifest itself in recent days. For instance, a recent local advertisement about cashless payments in hawker centres drew much attention and backlash as a Chinese actor darkened his skin to portray an Indian man and donned a hijab to portray a Malay-Muslim woman. Accusations of blackface and racial stereotyping followed, but often devolved into ad hominem attacks between those upset by and defenders of the original advertisement. In

fact, a claim that racial prejudice has been eradicated in society, where in fact civic discussion regarding “sensitive” racial issues have until recently been strongly suppressed, may have contributed to decades of underlying tensions and accumulating prejudices among the different racial groups, allowing for the environment in which such a tone-deaf advertisement was produced. Therefore, while the government has tried to address and redress racial prejudices in our society, such understanding may be superficial and prejudice remains deep-rooted. Mature and open discourse is needed to create an environment more conducive to truly eradicating racial prejudice.

Moreover, there remain other sources of prejudice in our society, perpetuating biases in other aspects of life. For instance, the central belief in Singapore in meritocracy has created an environment that does not acknowledge structural inequalities building within our society, and arguably has therefore led to prejudice against the socioeconomically disadvantaged. Even though discussions on the limitations of meritocracy have begun, these remain in its infancy. Meritocracy purports that one can achieve success if one is willing to work hard and put in the effort to achieve one’s goals: the logical conclusion, then, is that those who fail to succeed fail because of their own sloth or failure to delay gratification for the attainment of future, larger goals. Meritocracy assumes no barriers to social mobility whatsoever, and thus enables people to freely look down on the socioeconomically disadvantaged, condemning them as lazy or lacking drive. However, Teo Yeo Yenn, in her collection of essays *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*, argues that such a view is limited: richer parents are able to secure many more opportunities for their children such as tuition to enhance their learning, where poorer parents may not have the means to do so for their children. Therefore, the system rewards richer children and allows them to rise to the top, while children from poorer families have fewer resources at their disposal and must cross many more barriers to success. Over time, those that are rich can better ensure that their children stay on the top, while the have-nots are less able to achieve such success, perpetuating structural inequality. This suggests that structural inequalities are prevalent in Singapore. However, Teo remains a

lone voice while many continue to have faith in our meritocratic system, and a continued and perpetuated belief in meritocracy in our society can easily enable those who have achieved financial success in our society to believe it is due to their merit alone, and thus freely and condescendingly disparage the have-nots. Until a more holistic and reflective view on success that broadly considers our socioeconomic standing in society is established, we cannot claim to have done enough to eradicate prejudices.

Finally, other types of prejudice remain endemic to our society, that we are far from doing enough to eradicate. One manifestation of this is in the realm of gender inequality and prejudice: perhaps due to Singapore being a relatively conservative state, conservative conceptions prescribing the role of women in society endure, feeding prejudices against women. For example, although women now have roughly the same work hours as men in Singaporean society, a recent Straits Times poll revealed that women remain expected to perform a majority of housekeeping and child-rearing roles, revealing enduring biases against women in prescribing traditional gender roles even if women appear to be approaching parity with men in the workplace. How is this enough? Additionally, a limit restricting the proportion of women in the National University of Singapore medical school to one third was only lifted in 2003, just over a decade ago, suggesting just how long we have left to go in eradicating prejudice against women in our society. Another manifestation of lingering prejudices based on social norms lies in how religious groups have been able to spread disapproval and even animosity against the LGBTQ+ community in Singapore – in recent years, the Pink Dot movement advocating for LGBTQ+ rights has been met with a “Wear White” rally by a group of churches, advocating for the retention of heteronormative, “family” units. The resulting deadlock and prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community led to angry, personal attacks on Facebook and a silence in Parliament regarding the issue, constituting a lack of any real, sustained effort to eliminate prejudice. Even the petition to repeal Article 377A, and decriminalise homosexuality, was met by a similar, angry petition to retain such legislation, and eventually nothing was done to address the situation.

Therefore, there remain forces impeding the eradication of prejudice in Singapore.

In conclusion, Singapore, with the government's tight control on discourse regarding issues of race, language or religion until recently, widespread conservative social values and a widely-held, blind trust in pure meritocracy, suggests that not enough has been done to address social prejudice despite efforts to do so. In the words of a National Day song exalting our country's successes, "we've come so far, and there's still a long, long way to go".

**Marker's Comments:**

*Content: Thoughtful and consistent engagement with the Contention. Wide scope of discussion points, types of prejudice and examples of such prejudices – you know the topic very well. Clear, logically developed PEEL paragraphs.*

*To nuance the argument, consider if there is a difference between prejudice and discrimination, and if much of your discussion engages either one.*

*Language: Clear, fluent, grammatical, with strong personal voice.*

**Should we place limits on scientific or technological developments when they have solved many of our problems?**

With the advent of the fourth industrial revolution and exponential advancements in science and technology, mankind has taken great strides in overcoming many problems faced by humanity. Simply consider the number of diseases that have now been eradicated, thanks to vaccination and new cures, how genetically modified food has helped us in the fight against world hunger, or how engineering robots in artificial intelligence have provided us with alternative, safer ways to perform tasks. Placing limits on such useful tools appears to undermine the ability of science and technology to solve our problems, and as such we seem to be doing ourselves a disservice. However, one must realise that the dichotomy between the problem-solving capacity of science and placing limits on science and technology is a false one; much progress can still be made even in the presence of such limits. In fact, imposing such boundaries is crucial to ensuring safety and preventing harm, preventing more problems from arising. In light of the reasons above, though scientific and technological developments have solved many of our problems, I believe that we should place limits on scientific or technological developments.

I must concede that imposing limits on science and technology has limited its progress, and hindered it from solving many problems that we face. Such boundaries could seem unjustified, especially when we consider the fact that these limitations could be ideological or religious in nature, and such views are only upheld by a small minority. In adhering to the religious or moral views of the minority, the benefit that science and technology could bring to the majority is compromised, and many

problems still remain unsolved. For instance, embryonic stem cell research has been credited for providing cures to various diseases affecting almost all parts of the body, as these cells can differentiate into almost any cell type. In fact, 18 individuals deemed to have incurable eye diseases reported improvements in vision after embryonic stem cell therapy, showing its enormous capacity to solve problems. However, due to religious reasons and the view that an embryo is a human life, former US president George W. Bush banned embryonic stem cell research for almost a decade. One cannot help but think about the number of diseases that could have been cured, and the number of problems that could have been solved without such limits. Is it really fair to place such limits, given that the ability of scientific and technological developments to solve our problems has recognised and proven? In such cases, placing limits would seem unjustified, and humanity appears to be doing ourselves a disservice.

However, one must recognise that even in the presence of limits on science and technological developments, scientists are still able to find alternative ways to solve many of our problems. Such methods may be safer, less harmful or even better than previous protocols, and are able to avoid ethical grey areas, thus bringing greater benefits to all. For example, pluripotent stem cells have been found to be almost as effective as embryonic stem cells in curing various diseases, and do not treat the embryo as just a source of "spare parts". To prevent doing more harm to innocent creatures in research involving animals, scientists have found sophisticated methods such as growing human cells instead or using computer programme modelling software to predict the effects of mutations on protein structure, which is even more precise than doing such experiments on real life animals. We are now able to avoid cruel research practices such as animal abuse when cutting animals open even while they are alive. Such advancements were only made after the UK government imposed strict animal testing laws in research, and banned funding for research which did not adhere to established animal testing laws. Hence, the presence of limits on scientific and technological developments can even spur scientists to discover better methods of

research and avoid unethical practices while still being able to solve many of our problems.

Furthermore, though it is true that scientific and technological developments have solved many of our problems, restrictions on such developments are still necessary to ensure that research is not used to exploit others and compromise on safety. If such limits are absent, science and technology, being an amoral tool, could resort to practices that compromise on the welfare of other people, and be exploited by profit-driven firms as a means to an end. This may exacerbate social inequality and create even more problems, defeating the very purpose of science and technology. For instance, toxin testing has been performed by unscrupulous firms on innocent individuals in developing countries with lax laws on research and development. In the testing of a drug on pregnant woman to cure morning sickness, 14 out of 3000 pregnant women died due to side effects of the drug, and all the women had come from poorer families. This shows how the underprivileged in society could be easily exploited by firms in the absence of restrictions, showing the necessity of limitations in ensuring a safe regulated research environment.

In addition, while science and technology could solve many problems, one cannot help but think that few people would accept a world where there are no restrictions on science and technology, as we would be giving it free rein to perform research practices that break moral or ethical boundaries. This could result in severe implications, causing us to step into unprecedented ambiguous areas of ethics. Some practices could even undermine the fundamental integrity of being human, and may result in unintended consequences. For example, there has been much talk of the idea of transhumanism, and the use of CRISPR-Cas 9 technology to edit the human genome and produce designer babies, to create a 'better' or more superior human race. Yet this removes our 'weaknesses' which are perhaps what make us truly human. Or consider the use of artificial intelligence in the development of lethal, autonomous weapons (LAWs): today, if a drone kills an innocent human being, who is responsible? This is why while technological tools like LAWs have much potential to ensure



safety of soldiers and prevent loss of lives of soldiers in war, more than 1000 artificial intelligence programmers signed a petition to ban LAWS. Clearly, the potential of research developments to go beyond ethical limits which are universally recognised outweighs the potential immediate benefit that it can bring, especially when the long-term implications of such developments are relatively unknown. We should be cautious and avoid hasty decisions to reap short-term benefit while compromising on our ethics.

Ultimately, the definition of the worth of scientific and technological developments by its ability to 'solve many of our problems' is problematic. Are these problems pressing issues? Or simply inconveniences? Skin-whitening creams and creating designer babies also 'solve our problems', but are they really necessary? We should be looking at the nature and urgency of such problems as well when deciding whether placing limits on these developments are justified.

In conclusion, we should place limits on science and technological developments to protect moral boundaries, and be aware of the long-term ethical implications in comparison with short-term benefit. We should also consider the urgency of the problems that we face, and prioritise the advancement of technologies that are more urgent and necessary. Only then can we solve more problems for humanity.

### **Marker's Comments:**

*A thoughtful response with fully relevant points raised throughout. There's a clear awareness of issues in your analysis and a consistent focus on limits. To improve further, some examples can be better developed, but overall, this was a well-informed response.*



### **With the rise of online commerce, is the physical store dead?**

Technological breakthroughs and new innovations have disrupted many aspects of our lives, forcing us to alter our lifestyles in radically new ways so as to take advantage of new developments. Just five years ago, it would be mind-boggling to consider the possibility of fresh produce being promptly delivered to our doorstep at the press of the button. Yet, today, supermarkets around the world armour up with the newest technology to avoid becoming obsolete. There is but one question that plagues the mind of both consumer and producer: With the rise of online commerce, is the physical store dead? I am of the view that with the rise of online commerce, the physical store is not dead as physical stores allow consumers to experience a product in real life, physical stores allow for the sale of personalised and customisable products and services, and physical stores can employ new technologies to keep an edge over their online counterparts.

Critics opine that online commerce can potentially cause physical stores to become obsolete due to the sheer efficiency and convenience of online commerce. In many aspects, online commerce is able to maintain an edge over physical stores since it is highly cost-efficient. One can set up an online store for close to no cost, and keep it running for a long time with few maintenance fees outside of advertising. Even buying an online domain or website can be an affordable one-time purchase. On the flip side, setting up a physical store involves costs associated with renting space to set up the store, furnishing costs, as well as labour costs. Online commerce has effectively removed all barriers to entry with regard to the retail industry, flooding the market with tough competition that physical stores often cannot beat. For example, fast fashion brand Forever 21

recently announced that they had plans to declare bankruptcy, leading to many around the world expressing their shock and surprise at the news. Forever 21 is a store that has existed for decades and thousands of stores throughout the world. Hence, few would expect that it has become unprofitable. However, many suspect that the advent of online commerce is the main reason for Forever 21 going bankrupt. E-commerce stores like Taobao and Alibaba sell fast fashion at ridiculously low prices due to low labour and production costs overseas as well as rapidly falling shipping costs. Hence, many suspect that such e-commerce stores are acting as fierce competition for brick-and-mortar stores like Forever 21, forcing them out of business and hence causing them to become obsolete due to their higher prices. Another example is Toys R' Us going bankrupt due to the rise of mobile gaming companies that have provided the much cheaper and engaging alternative of video gaming, causing traditional toys and games and hence physical toy stores to become obsolete. Online commerce, with its low costs, has become more and more able to undercut the prices of physical stores, forcing them to lose their competitiveness. Unable to match the low prices of online commerce due to higher costs associated with running a physical store, such stores go under and hence die. As a result, the rise of online commerce has rendered the physical store dead.

However, I feel that moving businesses online is not the only way to take advantage of new technology in cutting costs and increasing profit. Physical stores can also employ new technology to keep an edge over online counterparts. By being open and making full use of new technology such as self-checkout systems, brick-and-mortar stores can cut costs such as labour, causing them to become better able to fend against the fierce competition of online commerce. For example, e-commerce website and tech giant Amazon has its own physical grocery store that employs new technology to make grocery shopping more convenient as well as cut costs associated with labour and stock management. Customers can simply put their desired grocery items into their bags, and Amazon's technology is able to detect which items are chosen and in what quantity. Upon leaving the store, the customer is automatically charged directly to

their Amazon account. In a traditional grocery store, this would be theft, but it is precisely the convenience of walking into the store, taking what you want, and leaving, that makes such technology so enticing. If more grocery stores around the world are able to employ such technology, they too can both become more popular with consumers and cut overhead costs associated with labour and stock management. This would allow them to become more profitable and be less vulnerable to the threat of online commerce. Another example of how new technology can help physical stores stay relevant is the new innovative mirrors from e-commerce store Alibaba, which show different clothes on a customer when he or she is standing in front of it. By utilising new augmented reality technology, such mirrors eliminate the need for repeated visits to the changing room and allow customers to experience all that the physical store has to offer in a matter of minutes. Hence, consumers experience the same convenience experienced through online commerce, but in a physical store. As physical stores can potentially employ new technologies to keep up with competition, I believe that with the rise of online commerce, the physical store is not dead.

In addition, physical stores have an edge over e-commerce in that it provides the unique experience of interacting with a product in real life. In many cases, the quality and overall experience of a product are still key to the customer. While an e-commerce site can show you a picture of the product and tell you its dimensions, it is unable to place the product in your hands, such that you are able to feel its texture, material, and size. This is apparent in many different types of retail stores such as fashion and furniture, where the fit and vibe of the product is especially important. For example, e-commerce site Hipvan opened its own brick-and-mortar store in Singapore a few years ago. It did this so that customers could better experience the furniture it was selling on the website, and hence make a more informed decision in their purchase. In addition, fashion stores like Uniqlo and Abercrombie and Fitch have started to venture into e-commerce so that customers can browse and purchase their products through alternative means. However, they still see a large majority of sales being done through their brick-and-mortar stores due to the sheer

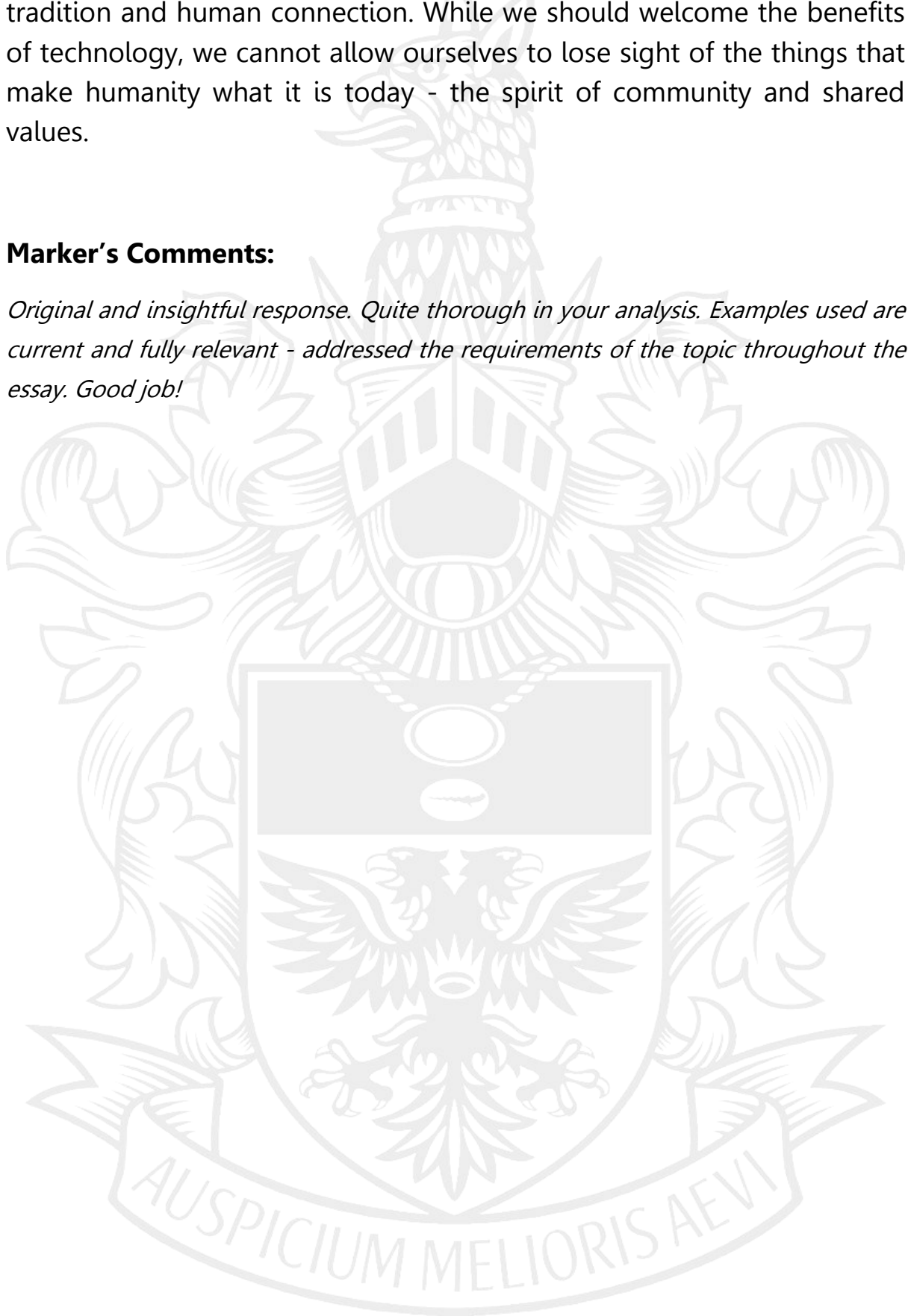
importance of the fit of the clothing; a quality that can only be evaluated in a physical store. While online shopping may be most convenient, and new developments in augmented and virtual reality have aided e-commerce in becoming one step closer to giving customers the real-life experience of a product, there is no doubt, for now at least, that only a physical store is able to give consumers the complete experience of interacting with a product in full. Hence, physical stores still have value and are relevant by maintaining such an edge over online commerce. As such, with the rise of online commerce, the physical store is not dead.

Lastly, while online commerce might be becoming increasingly widespread in a plethora of industries, there are some products and services that are personalised or customizable and hence cannot be sold online. Products like tailored suits require a professional seamstress to interact closely with the customer; to take his measurements so as to produce a highly personalised product. Such a service cannot be replicated through online commerce simply because technology is not advanced enough to take over the jobs of more highly skilled commercial personnel such as seamstresses. Another example of this is luxury boutiques. It is rare to find expensive luxury brands such as Dior or Prada selling their fashion online. Even if they are, online sales are weak. This is because the experience of an expensive boutique, where a sales assistant is able to create a luxury experience for the customer, cannot be replicated through soulless technology. In many aspects, online commerce lacks the human touch and connection that is found in physical stores - an experience that many crave for when shopping. One clear example of this human touch would be Build-A-Bear, a toy store that allows children into the process of manufacturing a bear; from stuffing it to putting a heart in it. Build-A-Bear is so successful because children interact with a shop assistant to customise their own bear; an experience that is wholly different from buying a teddy bear off Amazon. It is in this respect that online commerce fails to compare with physical shopping; since it does not provide the human connection required for such products.

In conclusion, the physical store acts as a testimony of the importance of tradition and human connection. While we should welcome the benefits of technology, we cannot allow ourselves to lose sight of the things that make humanity what it is today - the spirit of community and shared values.

**Marker's Comments:**

*Original and insightful response. Quite thorough in your analysis. Examples used are current and fully relevant - addressed the requirements of the topic throughout the essay. Good job!*



**Consider the argument that it is impossible to solve climate change in today's world.**

In 2015, more than 196 states came together to sign the Paris Agreement and committed to taking action to halt global warming in a range between 1.5°C to 2°C by 2030. However, a further report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2018 revealed that even within that 0.5°C spectrum, we are likely to face extreme weather conditions and natural disasters such as flooding, and will experience the extinction of numerous species of plants and animals crucial to global ecosystems. This grim outlook, coupled with the blatant refusal of some governments to acknowledge the existence of, much less take action on, climate change has led to a general perception that climate change is impossible to solve. After all, what is the point of Germany phasing out coal power as Australia declares a new expansion into coal mining? And how can we celebrate the Paris Agreement when the US, one of the world's largest and most powerful states, refuses to be a part of it? Nevertheless, I believe that there is hope. Climate change is a multifaceted issue that impacts all, regardless of background or geographical location, and "solving it" is perhaps a term too simple to describe it. I posit that by breaking down the key obstacles to climate change action and addressing them systematically we will be able to generate meaningful change and take steps towards solving the larger issue at hand.

Climate change appears unsolvable primarily because of the sheer scale of the problem as well as how deeply ingrained the problem is in our daily lives. Firstly, climate change is something that occurs on a global scale and requires global cooperation over and above national interests or boundaries. All nations on this earth must engage in consistent action and

investment to combat the problem. Unfortunately, those who suffer the most from the effects of climate change are often in no position to do much other than lobby. Take for instance the Pacific Islands, whose leaders met with larger powers Australia and New Zealand with the hope of delivering a strong message on the urgency of climate change earlier this year: due to Australia's domestic policies that advocated the expansion of coal projects to boost economic growth, they insisted that the language in their declaration be watered down, and declared a climate crisis only for the Pacific Islands but not for Australia. As a result, Australia is almost given leave to de-prioritise the matter as something that affects other states and is their responsibility, although in actual fact the islands are at the mercy of rising sea levels caused by emissions produced by larger states exactly like Australia – ones that they have no control over. Similarly, although Singapore may have one of the world's highest carbon emissions per capita, our relative size and impact compared to the rest of the world is minuscule. The inconsistency of policy, especially between smaller states faced with the existential threat of climate change as opposed to those equipped to exact meaningful change, is hence one of the reasons why climate change solutions seem fundamentally impossible in today's world.

Secondly, actions that cause climate change are so deeply ingrained in our lives and states' economies that there is overwhelming inertia to change. In fact, some chose to ignore the problem entirely. On an individual level, it is simply too easy or comfortable to make decisions that harm the climate. In Singapore, a large proportion of Singapore's population can afford to own a car and does so despite the relatively efficient public transport system and relatively short distances we have to travel as opposed to larger countries like neighbouring Malaysia. When purchasing items at stores, plastic bags are freely given even if they are likely to be discarded within the hour. The convenience afforded by such options makes it difficult to make changes, such as choosing to leave a bit earlier to take the train to work or carrying reusables wherever one goes throughout the day. On a state level, the pursuit of economic growth is often a top priority, and choosing to make short-term trade-offs for long-



term gain is not only unpopular but also incredibly politically inflammatory. This is particularly evident in the United States, where current president Donald Trump panders to large corporations and oil companies with his policies, actively seeking not only to roll back environmental restrictions enforced by his predecessors, but also to distort current research on the effects of climate change by shortening the time frame for predictions into the future. The reduction of restrictions would provide a boost to industries such as car manufacturing and energy production (in oil and other fossil fuels). These decisions are almost understandable when faced with an opposite example of Germany, where plans to phase out coal power will affect the livelihoods of over 20 000 workers and cost the government over 40 billion Euro. Solving climate change hence appears impossible due to deeply ingrained mindsets that encourage climate-harming action for its convenience, and a lack of political will on a state level.

However, while some individuals in power refuse to implement sweeping or drastic change, there is at least widespread awareness of the problem and a ground-up movement advocating for climate solutions. Fuelled by the rise of social media, many have taken to creative avenues to broadcast how climate change is a real and existential threat to the world. For instance, Adobe and Pantone, two well-known companies that produce products for creatives and artists worldwide began *Glowing Gone* on Instagram, a campaign that encourages photographers and visual artists to make use of three fluorescent colours in their work to highlight the loss of coral reefs due to rising sea temperatures. These colours were meant to mimic what corals look like right before they bleach white and die. The campaign helped to raise awareness about the plight of the reefs and the extent of the situation by broadcasting the message visually, even to those who might not actively read about it. In other cases, politicians have stood up to leaders who have not taken sufficient action – the Green New Deal in the US is one such instance, where state representatives are committing to upholding climate policies even in the absence of federal US regulations. In the presence of increased awareness and lobbying, there is



hope that even entrenched mindsets can shift, and greater pressure can be placed on those in power to solve climate change.

Lastly, hope lies in good alternatives – the earlier problems of economic inertia would then be solved. Advancements in solar power and other renewable sources of energy can be and should be made easier to deploy on a wide scale and make up for or reduce fossil fuel options. The rise of electric cars that do not guzzle large amounts of diesel or petrol is also a positive, if small, improvement in reducing the carbon footprint of our daily actions. These innovations even extend to animal feed. The process of feeding livestock for meat is known to produce hefty amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, especially for free-ranging cows that consume huge amounts of plant matter daily. However, some companies are experimenting with the use of black fly larvae to produce animal feed, making the process more carbon efficient without forcing us all to go vegetarian. The presence of good alternatives means that moving towards solving climate change is not something that will be viewed as a trade-off, but rather as a better step towards a brighter future.

Solving climate change is perhaps the greatest challenge to affect mankind. In today's world, where continuing to fuel it is far easier than making sustainable lifestyle choices, and where even large states refuse to sacrifice short-term economic losses for long-term human good, it seems impossible to overcome. Nevertheless, that is no reason to sit on our hands and sigh pessimistically. We must seize on the glimmer of hope present even in our daily lives and believe that climate change is combatable with the right action. For the question is not about ability, but about obligation – we must solve climate change in today's world, lest there be no world of tomorrow.

### Marker's Comments:

Content: Very thoughtful and consistent awareness of contention. Very wide knowledge of topic and examples. Clear, relevant, logically developed and coherent PEEL, with many evaluative insights and examples to support them.

Language: Fluent, varied vocabulary and expression. Engaging hooks in introduction and conclusion. Nuanced, mature stand.

Well done!



**Consider the argument that it is impossible to solve climate change in today's world.**

The sixth mass extinction of life is upon us now, and for the first time in natural history, it will be a result of the actions of Man rather than geographical events. Anthropogenic climate change has had huge impacts both on the natural world and the human one, with the disruption it has caused propelling it to become an urgent matter on the political agendas of many countries around the world. As the impacts become increasingly severe, the question of whether it is humanly possible, in today's world, to find solutions to this mammoth issue has come up. Upon consideration of the fact that the magnitude of the problem today is simply too great for mankind to deal with, it must be said that in today's world, it is impossible to solve the issue. Furthermore, the lack of international consensus and cooperation on the issue and the polarised nature of debate regarding climate change further point to the intractability of the issue. Nevertheless, certain positive developments in terms of the building of stable political and economic systems give a hint of the possibility for change.

In today's world, climate change must be considered to be an impossible issue to solve due to the great magnitude of the issue. The neglect displayed by humanity in dealing with man's impacts on the environment in the past has finally caught up with us, culminating in a situation today where the amount of change that is required is simply beyond mankind's capacity. This is made most evident in the simple statistic that if carbon emissions were to continue as they have done for the past few decades, there would be an overall increase of four degrees Celsius in global temperature: two more than the recommended amount. To prevent such

a situation, the changes required will need to be wide-ranging and deep, spanning across the economies and societies of every nation. In terms of industry, an energy-industrial revolution that dramatically restructures existing industrial structures and boosts energy efficiency significantly would be needed. In terms of energy consumption, a complete shift away from carbon-emitting fossil fuels towards cleaner, renewable sources of energy would be required, both in industry and society. Beyond economic restructuring, societies too will need to undergo great reform, in terms of the planning and structure of cities. Currently, the great concentration of humanity in urban areas means that cities are having a devastating impact on the environment, consuming more energy and natural resources than is sustainable. For today's situation to change, there will need to be a seismic shift in the way we plan our cities, with the incorporation of 'green' structures and low-carbon infrastructure key in any plan. Furthermore, this change needs to occur now, as stalling on such action can lead to the infrastructural lock-in of environmentally-harmful structures, which will continue to degrade the environment for years to come. As illustrated, the scale and pace of change necessary are great. Combined with the fact that such change needs to take place in all countries around the world, the magnitude of change required is unbelievable. Yet only with such change can we have any hope of solving climate change. Therefore, given that the situation mankind faces today, even without any consideration of politics and economies, is of such grave extent, it must be said that climate change is an impossible issue to solve.

The successful resolution of climate change is further made impossible by the lack of international consensus and cooperation on the matter. The global nature of the climate crisis necessitates a strong international response that sets out comprehensive frameworks to deal with the issue. The necessity for the international nature of alleviation strategies cannot be emphasised enough, considering that only a coordinated response that delineates responsibility and obligations for action between countries can hope to solve this mammoth issue. However, in today's world, there is a distinct lack of political will in the international arena to tackle the issue. While it may seem like there is increasing action taken on climate change

by world leaders, two fundamental limitations restrain the effectiveness of such action and continue to engender a situation of division and inaction. The first is the inability of the international order to include all major nations in climate change talks. This is best exemplified by the withdrawal of the US from the 2016 Paris Agreements. While certain domestic political conditions may have resulted in this disastrous move, the withdrawal of the world's largest carbon emitter from humanity's best bet at a solution implies a weakness in international action. Secondly, the voluntary nature of all international agreements precludes the formation of effective strategies, since any agreement would have to first satisfy the short-term economic interests of the countries involved. This is most evident in the Paris Agreements, which were accused by sceptics of setting out 'safe' targets rather than necessary ones. These two fundamental weaknesses have limited the ability of world leaders to forge any meaningful action. Therefore, the lack of international consensus and effective cooperation in today's world means that climate change must be said to be an impossible issue to solve.

Beyond large-scale political ineffectiveness, the climate change issue is also made intractable by the polarised nature of the debate regarding it. In the absence of international action, humanity's best hope would be to depend on the collective political will of the people, in that a united people demanding urgent action of climate change can have as deep an impact in sparking the resolution process as the actions of political leaders. However, the presence of deep polarisation in the public discourse over climate change precludes the possibility of meaningful action. This is most evident in the US, where people are split between two opposite camps. On the one hand, climate change denialists refuse to countenance the reality of the situation, often as a result of longstanding political bias and economic motives. On the other hand, climate change activists blindly espouse the possibility of completely ridding us of the issue, without careful analysis of the current situation. The complete disagreement on the facts of the matter, with the denialists not recognising the presence of an issue and activists refusing to accept the extent of the crisis, has resulted in an inability to find common ground, stifling the efforts of

society to deal effectively with climate change. In the context of such polarisation, it is simply impossible to garner the societal commitment necessary to institute wide-varying reforms. Therefore, the lack of agreement on the societal level, as evident by the polarisation of discourse, further cements the impossibility of the situation.

It has been established that the combination of a lack of international political will, an inability to forge societal cooperation and the simple magnitude of the problem faced means that in today's world, the climate change crisis must be said to be impossible to solve. However, it must also be acknowledged that there have been certain positive developments that show the path towards resolving the crisis in the future. In certain countries, the institution of sound political and economic frameworks have led to positive effects, signalling their potential for dealing with the crisis. In Canada, for example, a complete ban on one-use plastics has resulted in a drastic decrease in plastic pollution in the country. This piece of legislation was one that was supported by the people, and signed into law by a prime minister committed to tackling climate change. In the US, subsidies have been given to the renewable energy industry, increasing their economic viability as an energy resource alternative. The success of such political and economic strategies in dealing with climate change suggests that this issue can indeed be tackled if sound decisions are made by policymakers, and supported by the general public.

In today's world, the inertia preventing international action and the polarisation of society on the issue mean that climate change, which of itself seems to be too large an issue to handle, must be said to be impossible to solve. However, the existence of potential solutions means that humanity must not give up its efforts, in the hope that current situations and trends would reverse.

## Marker's Comments:

Content - *Very thoughtful and consistent engagement with contention, and wide knowledge on topic evident from wide scope of / comprehensive discussion.*

*Tight TEEER (Topic Sentence, Explanation, Example, Evaluation and Reiteration) structure and very evaluative and insightful. Consider providing more details of real-world examples, and to have a more impactful conclusion.*

Language - *Fluent, with a competent vocabulary, expressions, and transitions. Engaging and concise hook in introduction. There is also evidence of a balanced, objective personal voice.*





**To what extent is progress achieved at the expense of our welfare?**

Governments love likening progress to an inexorable march. Whether in Singapore, or in other countries like Rwanda, Japan or Germany, this metaphor seems to aptly summarise what progress appears to be. It is an endless road towards greater economic growth, better standard of living indicators, and higher rankings in Ease of Doing Business indices; as we journey forward, some of us forge ahead, others trail behind, and even others get left entirely in the dust. While we may benefit from opportunities that enhance our material welfare, progress is often unequal, and comes at a cost: our psychological health. This does not have to be the case. Nominally, a broader definition of what progress can constitute — beyond material progress, developments in political discourse and representation too — can reveal the full picture of the benefits that it can actually bring. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of the spoils of progress does not preclude a general improvement in living standards. Our quest for progress may indeed be an indefatigable march, but it is one that does ultimately improve our welfare.

Nevertheless, the criticism most often levelled at progress — that it exacerbates inequality and comes at the expense of the lower strata of society — does seem to suggest that it is achieved at the cost to welfare. Fundamentally, it appears as if economic progress can never be distributed equitably amongst the people in any country: those who possess the wealth and capital to profit from their investments are ostensibly guaranteed to benefit more than the poor. In cities like Singapore and Hong Kong, this problem is most acutely felt. Both cities have been lauded for their liberal capitalist economic policies: promoting free capital flows, abolishing inheritance taxes, and implementing

shockingly low taxes on income and profit. Hong Kong does not even have a corporate tax! Because of this, both metropolises have seen extraordinary growth, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates just under 10% annually since the end of the Japanese Occupation. Describing Singapore and Hong Kong as paragons of economic progress does not seem far-fetched. Even indicators used by economists to approximate material welfare, when taken at first blush, reflect stellar improvements for both cities; they now rank with countries at the top of the charts for real GDP per capita, surpassing industrial juggernauts like Japan and Germany. Yet, as is often the case, progress in Hong Kong and Singapore is less golden and more gilded. Behind the veneer of stellar growth rates is a far grimmer truth: that it has come at the cost of great inequality. Hong Kong's growth has led it to soar in other indicators as well, with her Gini coefficient — used to calculate the inequality of income distribution within a country — is 0.52. Singapore is not far behind either; with a Gini coefficient of 0.45, this ranks us comparable with some African countries like Namibia, also plagued by an unequal distribution of the spoils of progress. Of course, such indicators are imperfect measures of welfare and progress, and may not perfectly account for inequity. Nevertheless, the bleak picture that these seem to paint does suggest that progress has come at a cost to our welfare. Additionally, such a phenomenon is not isolated to large urban agglomerations like Singapore or Hong Kong — countries like Rwanda and Botswana which have also seen starry growth are clouded by these same problems of inequity.

Furthermore, progress also seems to take a huge toll on our psychological welfare, as the pressure to keep up with those ahead of us, and to stay in front of those we perceive as poorer, is a huge contributor to stress and anxiety. Evinced by the experiences of countries like Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, economic development is often built on the back of hard work by the people. 50-hour work weeks are coupled with long nights spent fraternising and socialising with colleagues, in order to build rapport and enhance productivity in the workplace. When these intrinsic pressures to earn higher incomes and to climb up the career ladder are further paired with extrinsic pressures from governments entirely devoted

to economic growth, a psychological toll on the people does seem inevitable. Dissatisfaction festers, and when people are tired of being exhausted, they take to the streets, as in the case of South Korea. Such occurrences are not events of the past either. China's stunning economic progress in recent decades after Deng Xiaoping's opening of the country has caught the eye of many foreign investors, but also drawn the attention of Western media outlets, which report on the toxic work environment of many of China's top technology firms. Employees moving to Beijing in search of employment prospects for themselves – to send money for infrastructure to boost the welfare of their families – are instead fettered by the '996' system; these innocuous numbers mask an extraordinarily tiring work schedule: 9am to 9pm, 6 days a week. The results of such a Sisyphean workload are telling: a spate of suicides, and the occurrence of protests and strikes even in an authoritarian China, suggest that the psychological toll of progress on the people has been immense. When economic progress comes into conflict with personal welfare, it is often the latter that gives way, as our psychological health appears to take a backseat in our drive towards material gain.

Nonetheless, economic progress is but one measure of development. The corollary of it, social progress, often comes in tandem with increases in our welfare, as more and more of us are given franchise, and have our issues and challenges pulled back from the margins and into the mainstream. Furthermore, even if economic progress is inequitable, it does represent improvements in the standard of living of nearly everyone in a country. Progress brings with it immense and indisputable costs to our welfare, but it can also herald significant improvements in other aspects of our welfare that more than offset even these enormous detriments.

With a broader definition of progress that includes socio-political progress, we can realise that progress in fact causes our intangible welfare to soar concomitantly. Humans need more than frivolous commodities to thrive; the opportunity to be represented and make one's own voice heard can often outweigh the benefits of materialistic consumption. To this end,

progress in the social and political spheres uplifts us all and boosts our welfare enormously. As society develops, we often become more accepting of alternative or marginal perspectives previously shut out in our single-minded drive towards economic growth. Greater political consciousness arose first in the 1960s, then in the 1980s in America, as students and workers alike began angling for more freedom and greater liberties in the Land of the Free. A post-war economic boom enabled Washington to provide more infrastructure like the Interstate, and to invest in better education facilities; however, more important was the social progress achieved with the Civil Rights Act that legitimised the struggle of millions of African-Americans. Even if inequalities still persist in America today, economic or otherwise, the initial achievement of such landmark legislative victories had to come as a precursor to future improvements in standards of living, as well as psychological welfare. Other marginal groups in other countries have benefitted greatly from social progress as well: in a country like Saudi Arabia where patriarchal systems proliferate, even small token victories deserve praise. With the passage of a law granting women the right to drive, Riyadh has signalled its willingness to grant even more freedoms to the half of its population bound to the demands of men. Admittedly, the situation is still imperfect, whether in Saudi Arabia or in other countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan where women are systematically oppressed. Yet, the attainment of social progress, however paltry, nevertheless represents an improvement to the welfare of marginal groups now, and — as the development of the US has shown — a portent of future gains to be had as well. In this light, social progress seems especially beneficial for the welfare of minorities and marginalised groups; it certainly does not come at their expense.

Even economic progress — in its inequities and with its psychological toll — can bring about greater benefits to the welfare of a people, as it does still ensure greater access to tools with which to improve their own lives and to escape the mire of poverty. As is the case with social progress, it is in fact the underprivileged who stand to gain the most. The most obvious and oft-cited manifestation of this would be the construction of Housing

Development Board flats. This narrative of poor Singaporeans moved from the squalor of slums to the comfort of high-rises, even if a truism, are emblematic of the benefits that progress can bring. Even if the richest in Singapore can purchase \$200 million mansions at Nassim Road, or \$80 million penthouses in the Central Business District, this inequality does not preclude the gains in material welfare made by the Singaporean who has bought his first flat or moved into her new home. Progress may end up perpetuating inequity, but it comes as an imperative for a more equitable distribution of resources in society. Of course, this is not to say that the manifest inequities we see in society should be an ideal, or even tolerated; rather, without the progress that enabled such inequities to even form in the first place, the material welfare and creature comforts we take for granted may not even be possible. In Rwanda as well, where Paul Kagame has purported himself as the new Lee Kuan Yew, such a proposition holds true. Kigali would not be able to invest in an expansion of road infrastructure, or an efficient healthcare system, if not for the economic progress it has effected. And as evinced by the stunning majority with which Kagame won re-election, the rampant inequalities are clearly no object to the average Rwandan, whose own material welfare arising from economic progress is still paramount. Therefore, for all its costs in exacerbating divisions in distribution and worsening our psychological state, progress does bring about vital welfare gains for the most impoverished, who may otherwise be left struggling to stay abreast of, or even drowning in the mire of economic stagnation.

Hence, this march of progress appears to be a necessary slog. While our journey may be painful and arduous, and come at significant costs to our welfare in the short-term, it is the glimmer of hope, and the tangible benefits we have gained, that suggest that the benefits of progress outweigh its costs to our welfare. Progress certainly comes at the expense of our welfare, but, in the long-term, it brings about enormous benefits that make the journey worth the toil.

### Marker's Comments:

*Overall, a fully relevant response with some thoughtfulness. Awareness of issues is clearly shown in your points and examples. To improve, some of your paragraphs can better engage with the issue of expense, but overall this was a well-informed response.*

*Personal voice is evident and overall response is well organised. There can be greater control over your sentence structure and details raised, but otherwise, a clear read.*



**To what extent is progress achieved at the expense of our welfare?**

The Keynesian Economic Revolution in the 1960s sparked a stark change in the momentum of global progress; countries that were utterly decimated by the woes of World War 2 were beginning to restructure their economies and looked towards economic growth as the key driver to achieving progress and the development of their countries, and there is no doubt that the pursuit of progress through economic means brought about revolutionary developments to even the smallest of populations. The rise of the Asian Tigers in the 1980s, the Middle East in the 1990s, and the overall come up of Southeast Asia are testaments to the fact that progress indeed translates to tangible improvements in the standard of living of populations. However, this progress is achieved at a cost; the overcommitted and overworked nature of the working class is often neglected in the conversation of progress and the question of whether progress is indeed enjoyed equally amongst all stakeholders involved is often overlooked. With that being said, the mutually dependent nature of welfare and progress has led me to stand with the view that progress, more often than not, is not achieved at the expense of our welfare.

Economic growth is essential to uplifting populations and achieving a greater standard of living; however, beneath the façade of prosperous economies lie the largely strenuous and taxing nature of first-world occupations, compromising on the work-life balance of the working populations, and hence their welfare. Markers of economic progress, such as GDP per capita and Real National Income (RNI) only present the unbiased evidence and statistics of the final product, that is, economic growth. However, these cold numbers often conceal the progress that leads to the attainment of desirable growth. The sweat and tears of the



working population remain hidden and the absurd working hours demanded of workers are never discussed. For example, Singapore and South Korea boast unparalleled and steady economic growth achieved right from the onset, but the same Confucian values that have contributed to the unprecedented growth in the beginning have been taking a toll on the working class. In both countries, the just and equal meritocratic system has indeed provided equal opportunities for all, but has bred a highly toxic and competitive culture that has only served to demoralise and alienate “underachievers”, leading in higher incidences of depression and suicide; in South Korea, it is reported that following every national examination, a spike in suicide rates are observed. The torment of the obsession for growth does not end here; even in the workplace, pressures of scaling the corporate ladder and the insatiable thirst for economic gains have compromised on the happiness of the population, with both Singapore and South Korea ranking relatively low on the Global Happiness Index, as compared to their moderate counterparts. As a result, while a greater material standard of living has been attained, this does not necessarily translate to greater non-material welfare improvements in these countries, and the working populations continue to be burdened by the undying culture of achieving progress at all costs.

However, it would be myopic to simply consider progress and welfare as mutually exclusive entities; in reality, they are largely interdependent, and in most cases, progress does indeed bring tangible improvements in the welfare of populations. While we have previously considered the evils that progress brings about in first-world countries, it is imperative to consider that economic progress has indeed eliminated numerous problems that continue to plague third-world countries today. For example, in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Congo and Somalia, poor political environments and economic growth have stagnated the progress of the region for decades, with many states averaging a measly GDP/capita of less than US\$300. As a result, many fundamental issues of poor sanitation, lack of access to educational services and healthcare, as well as the availability of food sources cannot be solved, and these countries remain ridden with Malaria and HIV epidemics borne solely out of these

conditions that remain simply incurable. So, before we consider the “first-world problems” that arise as a by-product of progress, we must understand that the same progress is crucial to solving pandemic crises in third-world countries. It is only through economic growth that the populations of these countries can attain better access to key services such as healthcare and education, seek employment and become active contributors to the economy and perpetuate this cycle into the long-term, through which these crippling issues can finally be solved. Therefore, when the conditions in first-world countries and third-world countries are juxtaposed, it is clear that economic progress is of utmost importance in solving some of the most basic problems that weaken third-world states today, and only through which a better standard of living and social welfare can be attained.

While we have established that progress indeed brings about tangible and substantial improvements to the welfare of first-world populations, the indicators of this progress often omit a glaring reality, that this progress is often not enjoyed equitably within a population. Hence, when considering all stakeholders involved, progress does not always contribute to improving the welfare of all, equally. In many first-world countries like the USA and Singapore, economic growth is often concentrated in the hands of an elite few, and while as a whole their gains account for the vast increments in the GDP per capita, these statistics barely account for the disparity of growth among populations. For example, while Singapore can be commended for its unprecedented economic growth in the region, its relatively high Gini coefficient, which is the measure of income distribution, points towards large income inequality in the country. As a result, it would be foolish to assume that the social welfare of all has improved, as many remain struggling under the poverty line, juggling two to three jobs just to make ends meet, as one job alone would not suffice against the high cost of living that economic growth has brought about. Therefore, while structures for social mobility are present within these countries through the policy of meritocracy, systemic imbalances often undermine efforts to scale up income levels, as people living under poverty often lack access to key facilities that the rich

have access to on demand. This form of socio-economic inequality can often hurt the social fabric of countries, as the poor often feel neglected and marginalised, compromising on the social welfare of the population. Hence, when considering progress, all stakeholders must be considered, across all indicators of progress. When doing so, a can of worms is often inadvertently opened as from a superficial perspective, these structural inequalities are often overlooked; but upon closer inspection, it is relatively clear that progress is never enjoyed equally, leading in different experiences and levels of welfare in a population.

All this while, we have explored progress through its most important indicator, that is, economic growth. However, when judging progress, progress in terms of a shift in global mindsets and perspectives over the decades have undoubtedly improved the welfare of populations across the world. For example, the shift in global political order to a much more liberal mindset in recent years have contributed to the empowerment of the marginalised: women, LGBTQ+ members and ethnic minorities have mostly experienced an improvement in welfare in recent years. These days, women enjoy greater liberty through tangible legislative changes and have concurrently assumed positions of leadership, such as the appointment of Angela Merkel and Theresa May as the respective leaders of their countries. On the other hand, gay marriage has been legalised and decriminalised even in rather conservative Asian countries like India and Taiwan. These developments are a testament to the fact that socio-political progress has brought about a greater standard of living for the previously neglected. While these developments are not representative of all countries and are unequally felt across countries, the sheer momentum and pressures that they bring are enough to force conservative countries to follow suit. For example, Brunei's sultan Hassanal Bolkiah had recently announced the implementation of the death penalty for sex between men and adultery. However, the immense pressure from world bodies and the mass boycotting of hotels owned by the Sultan have since forced him to reconsider his stance. Therefore, when considering the social and political progress that we have experienced recently, we can firmly embrace the

fact that welfare improvements are starting to be felt more equitably in other domains besides material welfare.

Therefore, when considering progress, the notion of progress and its definitions are interpreted differently across countries. For Africans in Sub-Saharan Africa, better access to healthcare and food sources could be all they desire to improve their welfare; on the other hand, for CEOs in Singapore, more leisure time could mean better welfare. Ultimately, these different conceptions of welfare meant that the intricacies of progress must be considered when improving standards across countries as well as to gauge welfare in these countries. Furthermore, the understanding that progress and welfare are not mutually exclusive is key, as it is only through being cognizant of this relationship that first-world countries can mitigate the drawbacks of economic growth to ensure greater equity in the progress achieved. Ultimately, the insatiable nature of human desire to progress can never be satisfied, hence, regardless of any point of development, a perfect balance between progress and welfare cannot be achieved.

**Marker's Comments:**

*A fully relevant response with some thoughtful insights. An awareness of issues is shown through your topic sentences and evaluation which focuses on the relationship between progress and well-being. To improve, examples can be better illustrated.*

*Use of language is clear and organised throughout. Personal voice is evident with some felicitous expression.*

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice Paper 2 Passages

Passage 1

*Michael Lewis explores why art has lost relevance today.*

In 1971, the performance artist Chris Burden stood against the wall of a California art gallery and ordered a friend to shoot him through the arm. That air rifle shot was the opening salvo of a movement that came to be called 'endurance art' – an unnerving species of performance art in which the performer deliberately subjects himself to pain, deprivation, or extreme tedium. Try as he might, Burden never quite matched the shock of his spectacular debut (and he did try, once letting himself be crucified onto the back of a Volkswagen Beetle).

As fate would have it, I had just shown my students at Williams College the grainy footage of Burden's shooting when we learned of his death in May 2015. Curiously, the clip did not provoke them as it had their predecessors in my classrooms in decades past. No one expressed any palpable sense of shock or revulsion, let alone the idea that the proper response to the violation of a taboo is honest outrage. One student pointed out the legal liability of the shooter; another intelligently placed the work in historical context and related it to anxiety over the Vietnam War. This refusal to judge or take offence can be taken as a positive sign, suggesting tolerance and broadmindedness.

But there is a broadmindedness so roomy that it is indistinguishable from indifference, and it is lethal. For while the fine arts can survive a hostile or ignorant public, or even a fanatically prudish one, they cannot long survive an indifferent one. And that is the nature of the present Western response to art, visual and otherwise: indifference.

In terms of quantifiable data – prices spent on paintings and photographs and sculptures; visitors accommodated; funds raised; and square footage created at museums – the picture could hardly be rosier. A case in point is a Christie's auction on May 11 2015, which set several records, including the highest price ever paid at an auction for a work of art: USD179.4 million for Picasso's *Women of Algiers*. Clearly, the art market is robust. One can expect more such record-breaking in the next few years as the art market is increasingly roiled by Hong Kong dollars, Swiss francs, and Qatari riyals.

But quantifiable data can only describe the fiscal health of the fine arts, not their cultural health. The picture is not so rosy. A basic familiarity with the ideas of the leading artists and architects is no longer part of the essential cultural equipment of an informed citizen. Fifty years ago, educated people could be expected to identify the likes of Saul Bellow, Buckminster Fuller, and Jackson Pollock, while today, one is expected to know about the human genome and the debate over global warming. Today, nobody is thought ignorant for being unable to identify the architect of the Freedom Tower or name a single winner of the Tate Prize (let alone remember the name of the most recent winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature).

The consequences are dire. The fine arts and the performing arts have indeed ceased to matter in Western culture, other than in honorific or pecuniary terms, and they no longer shape in meaningful ways our image of ourselves or define our collective values. This collapse in the prestige and significance of the arts is the central cultural phenomenon of our day.

Indeed, this estrangement has been a disaster for the arts, which need to draw inspiration from the society and culture that is its substrate. It is a myth that an art withdrawn from the realm of

public inspection and disapproval is a freer and superior art. The impulse to evade censure can inspire raptures of ingenuity. We hear much about art enriching the human experience, which is an agreeable platitude. But it is the other way round. The human experience is needed to enrich art, and without a meaningful living connection to the society that nurtures it, art is a plucked flower.

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## Passage 2

*An arts association investigates why art continues to remain relevant today.*

What does a painting on a wall, a dance performance, a meme, a selfie, and a street art have in common? They are all art. To put it simply, art is anything that evokes a reaction – positive, negative, or anything in-between. There is no specific definition of art. From its beginnings on caves, to being considered as the hobby of the elites, to being a medium of marking territories, art has managed to survive the confines and practices of what was considered as ‘true art’. In what ways is art still relevant today? Can it function as a medium of change or is it merely to be admired?

Art is a form of performative and visual language and for many, it has been an important contributor to an existing discourse. It has even created a new narrative around a particular issue. Art has also exposed and helped resolve issues of social justice. As a cultural tool, art has helped humanise and actualise the emotions, grievances, and fears of those who may not have another place to voice concerns. As an illustrative tool, art has shocked and inspired us to action. What art depicts can elicit a visceral, almost cellular reaction. For instance, in September 2014, artist and student Emma Sulkowicz began her senior thesis, *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)* (2014-15), a startling piece and ambitious work of endurance that famously involved Sulkowicz carrying a standard Columbia University mattress around campus with her at all times. The burden would quite literally be lifted only after one of two things happened: when the student who Sulkowicz (and subsequently others) accused of raping her left or was expelled from the school, or with her own graduation. Her endurance piece compelled many to act in a transformative way – one that spoke both to and beyond her specific case.

However, not all forms of art are seen equally. In fact, art and popular culture have been considered as polar opposites. The money-minting nature of popular culture, which monetises overused and repetitive tropes, has caused some to dismiss it as not art even though it could challenge the perspective of the masses. This is causing only certain forms of art to precede others. However, popular culture that challenges mainstream perspective can still have a positive impact on society. For instance, Beyonce’s visual album *Lemonade* highlighted the struggles of black women because of their race and gender, and was an important contribution to the narrative around the Black Lives Matter movement.

Art is everywhere, whether we consciously realise it or not, and that is why it continues to be relevant to many. Increasingly, art and cultural institutions play a key role in preserving art over the decades and thus, have become a visual biography of their surrounding culture. Mallika Sarabhai, a pioneer of using dance and the arts for social change put it best in her TED Talk, *Dance to Change the World*, ‘What I need to say to the planners of the world, the governments, the strategists is, “You have treated the arts as the cherry on the cake. It needs to be the yeast.”’



**Michael Lewis asserts that art has lost relevance while the author from the Pearey Lal Bhawan association argues that art continues to remain relevant today. How far do you agree or disagree with the views expressed in the two passages? Support your answer with examples drawn from your own experience and that of your society.**

I find Lewis's argument less applicable and Bhawan's argument more applicable to my society, where the arts are growing in significance due to changing mindsets, and the arts serve as an important tool to express alternative viewpoints in a regulated media landscape.

Lewis claims in lines 41 to 42 that "[The] collapse in the prestige and significance of the arts is the central cultural phenomenon of the day." I find this less applicable to my society, where the arts are seen as increasingly important due to local artists championing the arts and concerted government efforts. For instance, we have seen a rise in home-grown stars in the past decades such as Kit Chan or The Sam Willows, as well as local authors such as Alfian Sa'at, who have become popular with the local population, and have promoted the vibrancy of the local arts scene. Artists like Alfian Sa'at, for example, has captured the experiences of

There is a clear stand, with a good justification offered. Even in the introduction we see evidence of understanding how Singapore's broad context (changing mindsets; regulated media landscape) makes the author's arguments uniquely relevant.

There appears to be a reasoning gap here—'a rise in home-grown stars' and their 'popularity' is not synonymous with the idea of artists 'championing the arts' so that the latter remains significant in the lives of Singaporeans.



Singaporeans especially their own perspectives on topics such as race in their works, which have contributed towards discourse on our shared values and experiences as a society, hence contributing to “defin[ing]” our collective values as Lewis highlights in line 41. Furthermore, the government’s support of the arts scene, through the establishment of a specialised School of the Arts, or through providing grants and subsidies through the National Arts Council, has contributed to the growing arts scene, increasing the attractiveness and ease of becoming an artist. Grants for students to patronise the arts have further encouraged the promotion of the arts in education. Hence, we have seen the growth of local artists. It must be qualified, however, that there are limitations to this rise in prestige—the pragmatic mindset<sup>1</sup> prevalent in Singapore has usually emphasised other sectors seen to be more practical, such as the STEM fields. This results in many children, from a young age, being told that a career in the arts is not viable. On a national level, this has also translated into a perception that the arts are a “good-to-have” rather than a “must-have”—a recent Straits Times survey found that 71% of Singaporeans felt that artists were “non-essential”,<sup>2</sup> highlighting that as a society, we have a long way to go in valuing the arts. Nevertheless, the furore that erupted online in response to the survey,<sup>3</sup> and the government’s overall support of the

What works? Providing examples such as Alfian’s racially-themed short stories in *Corridor* and *Malay Sketches* (as well as his debut poetry collection, *One Fierce Hour*), would show a keener awareness of Singapore’s literary scene and help show how they have “captured the experiences of Singaporeans”.

Evidence of evaluation here, coupled with a careful explanation of the factors involved. We see

<sup>1</sup> A valid evaluative point.

<sup>2</sup> A current example which reveals an unfortunate sidelining of the arts in SG, in view of more pressing bread-and-butter priorities as a result of the pandemic at present.

<sup>3</sup> This, in turn, has been strengthened by the student’s consideration of differing/divergent perspectives on this

arts from a policy and institutional standpoint, suggest that society can and is moving towards valuing the arts more, although a change in mindsets may be slow.

A crucial aspect of the significance of artists in Singapore is the social impact they have, which Bhawan highlights in lines 9 and 10 where he argues that art is an “important contributor to an existing discourse” and “exposed and helped resolve issues of social justice”. I find this highly applicable in Singapore, where given a highly regulated traditional media landscape, art has become a particularly important tool to express alternative viewpoints and challenge mainstream narratives. We saw this in the example of [Preetipls](#), who created a rap song discussing and exposing the issue of Chinese privilege in Singapore, sparking discourse on racial privilege in Singapore. Small production companies have also contributed in this manner—a [short social realist film](#)<sup>4</sup> depicting the experience of a migrant worker, for instance, has shed light on the plight migrant workers face that is rarely reflected in mainstream media. However, we must be cautious in evaluating the amount of tangible change that occurs, and the extent to which the arts can “shock” and be a tool to challenge viewpoints, for the arts scene remains highly regulated by the government—for instance, Preetipls was made to take down her video, highlighting that the space for art to challenge and

issue, evincing a nuanced understanding of the issue and its complexity.

While Preetipls is a relevant and topical example, we can **strengthen this example** with other powerful examples such as Seelan Palay’s performance, *32 Years: The Interrogation of A Mirror*, which references the 32 years in detention served by the longest serving political detainee, Chia Thye Poh, in our political history and offers a critical response to the notorious Internal Security Act in SG. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Seelan’s performance was met by strong disapproval from the authorities, with the artist-activist arrested and subsequently charged for his attempt to stage an illegal protest.

<sup>4</sup> Ramasamy Madhavan’s ‘\$alary Day’ (2020)

As again, the introduction of examples such as *Tango Makes Three*, *The White Swan Express* and *Who’s In My Family: All About Our Families* would have helped not only show understanding but also, by

“shock” people is limited due to regulation, and the pulping of books by the National Library Board considered to be promoting LGBT content shows a limitation to the capacity of the arts to represent different perspectives in a highly controlled environment, creating a potentially chilling effect on the arts. Hence, while art can raise awareness on issues, the extent to which these views must still be in the confines outlined by the government inadvertently limits the ability of art to create discourse.

Hence, I find Bhawan’s views more applicable to my society.

emphasising the number of different books, highlight the extent of the issue.

How can we develop this evaluation further? Consider a few ideas as to what this evaluation could say about your society:

- 1) An implicit inability on the part of the authorities to create more room for free discourse?
- 2) A paternalistic anxiety on the government’s part in persistently wanting to regulate what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable?
- 3) That those who offer contrarian views that unsettle the conventional, pro-establishment stance often experience an unfortunate and at times excessive backlash?
- 4) That such a tightly regulated and curtailed space for discourse might inadvertently end up ‘infantilising’ the population?

### Marker’s Comments:

*A good, consistent attempt to evaluate and analyse the constraints or limitations involved for each issue, coupled with a nuanced and fully balanced treatment of each issue. An insightful understanding of issues and their implications has been shown throughout this answer.*

*Observations and examples are consistently well-contextualised.*

### Editor’s Notes:

This is a well-done piece. The purpose of this additional critique is to show how there can still be room for improvement – nothing we present here is perfect – and emphasise that the KS Bull should be used as an exercise in identifying the good and refining it, rather than a reference for memorising the best and regurgitating it.

2019 | Y6 | GP Prelims Paper 2 Passages

Passage 1

*Devika Khandelwal discusses how the use of social media can bring about positive change.*

The aggressive use of different online platforms during electoral campaigns has made it evident that many political leaders are widely using platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to spread their election mandates and garner widespread support. Moreover, in the past few years, the use of social media has gone beyond politics and has contributed towards starting a global conversation amongst the citizens of the world to spread socially relevant messages and demand justice. In today's global world where many countries witness gross violation of human rights and political and social chaos, different online platforms have become a much-needed safe place to share their ordeal and demand justice. It is not just used by social workers and activists, but on several occasions ordinary citizens have taken to Twitter, Facebook or Vine to share their stories.

The internet provides us with platforms where we can fight for our rights and against injustice, support people from all across the world in gaining justice, and helping people become better informed citizens of the world. The massive explosion of videos, hashtags and photographs on Twitter which are retweeted thousands of times, help people voice their concerns to a billion people in a span of seconds, especially when they think they are not being heard. From #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo to #BringBackOurGirls, digital platforms have helped start a social revolution to help marginalised, oppressed and minorities fight for their rights. The internet helps people validate their experiences, share them as they happened without any colourful interpretation by media giants.

Sharing issues and starting a dialogue on the internet with millions of people can help bring about radical changes in our society and help push social movements in the forefront of relevant authorities and mainstream media. It can help gather rallies and hold protests in a small amount of time and bring about real change. Moreover, social media platforms are also being widely used to hold people accountable for their offensive actions and speeches. This was held true when famous actor Kevin Hart had to step down as a host at the Oscars after a public outcry regarding his offensive and homophobic tweets. This also holds true in the case of famous writer-director James Gunn who was fired from Walt Disney Productions when his offensive tweets on molestation and paedophilia written 10 years ago were recently uncovered and caused an uproar. As it is famously said, 'what is written on the internet stays there forever,' the rise of social accountability helps hold people responsible for their actions and demand justice.

The plethora of online platforms available to the citizens of the world can be used in an extremely beneficial manner creating a positive environment. All it takes is one person to come forward with his/her story, which encourages thousands to come forward and share their experiences. It can help people deal with their inner demons, share their ordeals and also help overcome with any kind of mental illness.

In this ever-growing world of online platforms and the rise of social revolution where more and more people are sharing their battles and ordeals each day, digital media provides people with an unbiased platform to fight for their rights. They help in spreading socially relevant messages and stories amongst billion of people and bring to our attention different issues faced by people in different countries. Whether it is the oppressed Saudi Arabian women or the unfair treatment of the African-American community, or even the gross human rights violations faced

by citizens of war-torn countries, the stories posted online lead to an international outcry for justice, attract attention of rule-makers, non-governmental organisations, journalists and help hold authorities and people accountable for their actions.

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## Passage 2

*M.J. Crockett discusses some concerns of social media activism.*

No one was surprised when yet another school shooting devastated a U.S. community, this time in Parkland, Texas, on Valentine's Day. But the survivors' response has been nothing short of astonishing. Their exquisite fury has flooded social media, pushing a national conversation on gun violence. Will the Parkland students succeed in transforming U.S. gun-control policy? Perhaps – if they can harness the volatile power of moral outrage in the digital age.

In 2014, researchers at the University of Illinois published a study in *Science Magazine* that tracked the everyday moral experiences of more than a thousand North Americans over the course of several days. They found that people were more likely to learn about immoral acts online than in person or through traditional forms of media such as TV, radio or newspapers. And the online content triggered stronger feelings of outrage than immoral acts encountered in person or via traditional news sources. Altogether, this suggests that online news platforms may be artificially inflating people's experiences of outrage.

How does this work? Because companies such as Facebook and Google compete for our attention to make money from advertisements, their algorithms promote content that is most likely to be shared. Social scientists at the University of Pennsylvania have discovered that the best predictor of sharing is strong emotions. Moral emotions, such as outrage, have particular sway: A New York University study found that every moral sentiment in a tweet increases its likelihood of being shared by 20 per cent. Clickbait headlines, then, are a natural by-product of an information ecosystem that selects for the most engaging content – think "survival of the fittest" for headlines. Unfortunately for us, this means that the algorithms select for the most outrageous content, regardless of its social value or whether it is even true.

In addition to providing a constant supply of outrage triggers, social media dramatically lowers the costs of expressing outrage. Offline, punishing bad behaviour is difficult, stressful and risky. It's hard to be harsh to someone's face, and they might retaliate – sometimes with drastic and tragic consequences. But online, you can express outrage with the click of a button and hide among thousands. This means the threshold for shaming and punishing others is much lower online.

On top of all this, digital platforms amplify the personal rewards of expressing outrage. Naming and shaming wrongdoers benefits people by signalling their moral quality to others, and online networks multiply these benefits. People are not necessarily conscious of their reputations when they express outrage, but anyone paying attention to their "likes" and "shares" is bound to learn, at least implicitly, what kinds of expressions are socially valued.

All this social reinforcement may make expressing outrage habitual. Posting outrageous content is one of the best ways to get "likes" and "shares," and these dopamine boosters are delivered at unpredictable times – a pattern of reinforcement that neuroscientists have shown leads to habit formation. This is intentional. Tech companies design their platforms to reward us in this way because the slow drip feed of social rewards reliably keeps us hooked to our screens.



Social-media companies, hostile foreign actors and the National Rifle Association all profit more the longer we sustain our social conflicts. Online platforms seem to be designed to keep us trapped in furious feedback loops that distract us from the difficult work that will ultimately lead to social change. An important step forward is recognising that if moral outrage is a fire, social media is like gasoline. It's worth considering whether we want to cede control of some of our strongest moral emotions to algorithms that are, at best, indifferent to our own welfare.



**Devika Khandelwal discusses how the use of social media can bring about positive social change while M. J. Crockett discusses some concerns with the use of social media. How far do you agree with the views raised by both authors, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?**

Khandelwal shares about the valent benefits of social media in galvanising change, while Crockett cautions against some of the problems with doing so. Just as in the rest of the world, social media acts as a double-edged sword in civic engagement locally. However, it is also heartening that the balance is increasingly tilted in favour of a more cohesive and nuanced understanding of social issues over social media.

In Paragraph 3, Khandelwal discusses how social media has enabled the rise of social accountability. The online Singaporean citizen would likely concur with this phenomenon, given how quick Singaporeans are to jump on the moral bandwagon and lambast those who post insensitively. Take Amy Cheong for instance, a former Assistant Director at NTUC who received swift flak and online criticism for her insensitive remarks about Malay weddings at void decks, ultimately causing her to be fired from her job. Another example would be that of Anton Casey, who posted disparaging comments about public transport and middle-income earners with a photo of his son in the train, drawing public outrage and causing him to lose his job and return to his home country. Lastly, Amos Yee, who made insensitive comments about late founding father Lee Kuan Yew as well as religions like Christianity, drew public criticism and even death threats before his conviction and subsequent fleeing of the country. The above trend of examples elucidate how the trend of the 'social justice warrior' is just as present in the online community locally, and perhaps



made stronger by our small size where expression of outrage gets around quickly. Crucially, the outrage is built upon our unique pluralistic demography and multi-culture, necessitating harmony and serving as a convenient trigger to exert vigilante justice swiftly on bigotry.

Yet, in Paragraphs 4 and 5, Crockett postulates that outrage expression has become easier and more rewarding and thus made social media less efficacious in effecting change. This is contrasted with Khandelwal's claim in Paragraph 3 that social media provides a much-needed catalyst in galvanising change through the sharing of stories. In Singapore, the extremely high variance with respect to civic engagement in the online sphere means that both phenomena may be observed in the Singaporean context. For the former, take the recent controversy over the Nets e-payment brown-face ad (where actor Dennis Chew was made to play a 'brown-faced' Malay woman) as well as local influencers Preeti and Subhas Nair's rap song in response (containing lyrics such as "Chinese people always out here f\*\*\*ing it up" and "CMIO - Cancel Minority Is Ok!"). In the subsequent aftermath, furore ensued on various forums and comment threads, with online citizens starting to point fingers at each other and being extremely heated towards 'the other', throwing out terms like 'casual racism' well, casually. This example may be sharply contrasted with another that supports the latter point: the incident of Monica Baey, whose story of sexual harassment and recording of her showering on campus by student Nicholas Lim Jun Wei, was shared and spread voraciously on social media, eventually leading to stronger punitive measures against the offender and mounting pressure on NUS to harden its stance on the sexual protection of women, an issue often casually swept under the rug. Evaluating the two case studies, it is evident that their efficacy and consequences have been vastly different: the difference comes from the level of divisiveness of the subject matter, where the former's emotional and divisive nature led to a more heated clash and clouded judgement, and the latter's more objectively clear moral boundaries, with a clear cause, victim and perpetrator, allowed online furore to be better directed. (A separate example which similarly elucidates this point would be the conservation of Chek Jawa due to its

ecological value and strong support by environmentalists in response to the government's plans to redevelop the area, with environmental conservation being a more rationality-based and clear-cut issue.) That being said, increasingly heartening trends point towards Khandelwal's claim likely taking root in the long-term, with the more responsible and well-managed use of social media by Singaporean youth and the influencers they follow, as seen by local influencers' Xiaxue, Hirzi and Dee Kosh's discussion over three videos about the issue of race and race politics in Singapore, or Rice Media's rather eloquent piece on the Singapore government's paternalistic take on race issues today. As youth influencers and readers are increasingly the users of social media, as they are less weighed down by the trauma of the past relating to race clashes, the youth are better able to come to a more nuanced understanding of race today. This thus allows social media to do good even in more tenuous subjects, thus being an optimistic force for good into the future.

**Marker's Comments:**

*Well done! Comprehensive analysis and well evaluated throughout. Good/relevant examples provided to substantiate. To improve, more attention could be paid to why some issues are, as you note, more divisive than others in Singapore.*

## KS Bull 2020 | Issue 2

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### Acknowledgements:

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