

## message from the principal

I hope all of you are familiar with C. S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* which has been serialised and made into movies. C. S. Lewis was a contemporary of Tolkien author of *Lord of the Rings* and both were fellows at Oxford University. Being dons and professors of Literature and the Classics did not mean that they wrote in highfalutin language and complex sentences. In fact, what makes Lewis' novels bestsellers is precisely the simplicity of the language used and the clarity of his meaning.

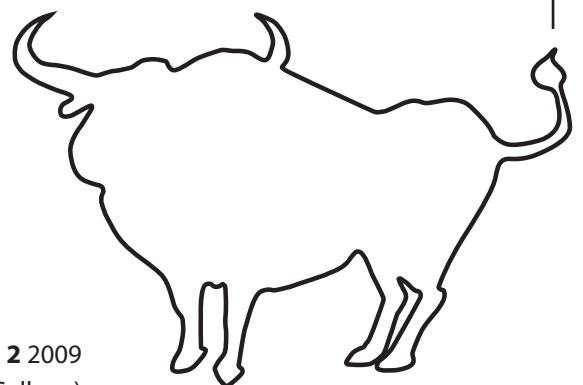
Some of you may have come across Lewis' tips on good writing:

1. Always try to use the language so as to make quite clear what you mean and make sure your sentence couldn't mean anything else.
2. Always prefer the clean direct word to the long, vague one. Don't *implement* promises, but *keep* them.
3. Never use abstract nouns when concrete ones will do. If you mean "More people died", don't say "Mortality rose."
4. In writing, don't use adjectives which merely tell us how you want us to feel about the things you are describing... instead of telling us the thing is "terrible," describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was "delightful"; make us say "delightful" when we've read the description.
5. Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say "infinitely" when you mean "very"; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something really infinite.

Perhaps this advice is worth mulling over as you read through this volume of KS Bull. Enjoy!



Lim Lai Cheng  
Principal, Raffles Institution



Message From the Principal

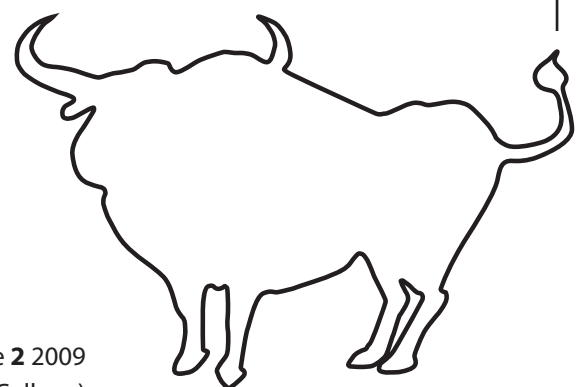
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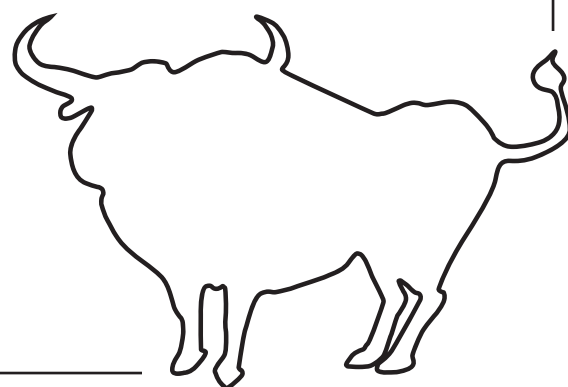
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#### Editorial Team

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**GP****essay 1****“Celebrities make the worst role models for today’s youth.” Comment.**

Claire Goh (09A03A)

In an era when mass coverage and the media have infiltrated every last nook and cranny, and children from Antigua to Albania know the name Britney Spears, it is hard to question the pervasive presence of the celebrity. The rise of the paparazzi and the ubiquity of tabloids have made it well-nigh impossible for anyone with a modicum of, or the remotest claim to fame to do anything that does not eventually end up under public scrutiny and judgment. As such, those catapulted into the public eye invariably must bear the mantle of the “role model”, whether they desire to or not; I will argue that celebrities are not always the worst role models (contrary to popular belief) – it depends on what kind of celebrity status they have achieved and what they do with their fame. To a large extent, how accountable parents are for the correct education of their children plays a large role as well.

The idea of the “role model” is a difficult one to define. Depending on one’s individual value system, it is subjective and therefore one person’s role model may hardly be another’s. For instance, one might approve strongly of Christina Aguilera’s talent, but another more conservative person could point to her once-tumultuous private life as something that negates the extent of her natural gifts. However, fundamentally, a role model is someone that one wishes to emulate, that one looks up to as a personification of one’s desired attainment, and typically there is also the association with having an upright moral standard.

This image, however, runs counter-intuitive to that popularly held of the celebrity. The idea of the celebrity has been so closely integrated with the idea of the entertainment celebrity that the image it conjures is that of a drunk, vacuous and promiscuous person, preoccupied with shallow concerns of appearance and prone to making laughable sartorial gaffes such as going around town sans undergarments, à la Britney and Paris, or suffering “wardrobe malfunctions” on national television. However, I would argue that this impression, whilst an accurate description of many of Tinseltown’s most infamous, does not do justice to those who are celebrated for genuine talent, dedication and the like. Celebrities are not found exclusively in Beverly Hills; they are also often found lending their names and fame to good causes (Angelina Jolie and her work with the UN) or even diligently working on improving their God-given abilities to even greater heights (Roger Federer, Tiger Woods and other sporting talents being good examples). Arnold Schwarzenegger, known better for his muscle and starring role in “The Terminator”, rode on a wave of popularity and fame to political power as the governor of California, where he is dedicated to the environmental cause, implementing policies to reduce emissions and vehicle usage. As can be seen, the tag of “celebrity” does not necessarily mean negative things, nor does it personify everything a good role model should not be.

However, as the popular and well-known song “I Want It All” from the Disney smash hit “High School Musical” goes: “I want it all/The fame and the fortune and more”. This effectively summarises the worst kind of celebrity – that which bestows on celebrities the title of “worst role models”. These “celebrities” are often self-made, creating notoriety for themselves by any means possible. Examples include the multitude of socialites featured in MTV’s “My Super Sweet Sixteen”, who behave horrendously on television for their half-hour of fame on national television, condemning every lavish gift they receive for some minor flaw and generally behaving with a complete lack of gratitude. Imagining this behaviour perpetuated across the nations in a multitude of clamouring children is a frightening contemplation indeed. On a more serious note, since Paris Hilton’s infamous “sex tape” scandal entered the public consciousness, there have been copycat examples as youth grow increasingly desperate for methods to propel themselves into infamy. A prime example can be found in our local context: Tammy Ying, a student, made a sex-tape involving herself and her boyfriend that was released onto the Internet. Whilst it may not have been intended originally for public consumption, the very idea is arguably very exhibitionist: and the implication of it being potentially leaked should already have been considered – nothing is private any longer. (This is reinforced further by the Edison Chen scandal, where nude pictures of his ex-girlfriends were widely published, and the regular reports of such big names as Madonna having their personal contacts and address books made publicly accessible). As is evident, any claim to fame is a valid claim to youth, regardless of what morals it might

supercede. In their frantic scuffle to get in and stay in the limelight, some celebrities have legitimised all means to achieving that goal, from mass killing sprees to sex scandals. Those who fall in this category are the worst possible role models for youth.

Yet we must also consider that the celebrity behaviour we often condemn as a morally degrading influence on our youth is often meant to be part of their private lives. Frequently, the all-invasive nature of reporters and photographers eager for the next big scoop, be it Zhang Ziyi frolicking topless with her Israeli fiancé or Amy Winehouse's latest entrance into rehab, have rendered this demarcation between the public and the private impossible for a celebrity. Take for example the Vanessa Anne Hudgens scandal; she has declared, as befits her image as a wholesome, Disney-endorsed starlet, that she wishes to be a "role model" for girls everywhere. The nude photos scandal she was involved in, however, apparently completely contradicts that declaration – parents of children who were ardent fans of the High School Musical franchise were dismayed and largely condemning of her. But there were some who quietly suggested that firstly, it was hardly her intent to allow what she had done to be known to the world at large; and secondly, celebrities are human and therefore fallible. Be that as it may, arguably, celebrities, by virtue of the other privileges they enjoy, should bear greater social responsibility as equal exchange. Still, rather than immediately taking a stance on their suitability as societal role models, we might first consider if their behaviour was intended to be public or private, and then judge accordingly. Often enough, the media is as culpable (for seeking the most attention-grabbing story to ensure wider readership) for deliberately sensationalising these negative examples of behaviour as the celebrities are.

The onus, therefore, is on the parents to keep in touch with what their children are interested in and review it accordingly. Whilst this is not to advocate a kind of "Big Brother" mentality, the immediate influence of the surrounding moral environment probably has the most impact on a child or teen's behaviour. By examining the idolised celebrity's behaviour together with the child or teen and identifying how it is incorrect, or by highlighting positive role model examples, parents and educators can demonstrate to the youth clearly what the "right" values are and how or why they should be espoused.

In conclusion, celebrities can either be good or bad role models, depending on who is the celebrity in question. More important in shaping youth's value system is the influence of the adults that surround them – whether by their teachings or by their own actions. In fact, it should be noted that the proliferation of celebrity publicity, and therefore the influence they exert, is fuelled by our own inherent impulse to judge – we may in fact relish it when the celebrities do wrong, that we may judge them accordingly; but we must take care not to let impressionable youth, unaware of moral standards, be unduly influenced.

#### Comments:

**This is work of superlative quality. Arguments are cogent, persuasive and show maturity of thought. Command of the language – superb. Great job on a question that is very hard to do well.**

**GP****essay 2****“Celebrities make the worst role models for today’s youth.” Comment.**

Zhang Hongchuan (09S03L)

Given the pervasiveness of the printed and non-printed media today, youths are now more susceptible to the influences of television stars, entertainers and famous or even infamous figures. Indeed, the influence of celebrities in this day and age, given their constant exposure on news headlines or tabloids, has grown to the extent that some youths regard them as role models. Some have argued that these celebrities, usually famous for superficial reasons such as appearance or sex appeal, actually make the worst role models for today’s youth as they engage in socially or morally unacceptable behaviour. However, is this necessarily true? In my opinion, celebrities could be bad role models but not necessarily the worst.

It is often argued that celebrities are the worst role models for youths as many engage in activities ranging from drug abuse, sex scandals, physical violence to even excessive slimming. These actions are often either illegal, or considered strictly unacceptable by society. Youths are highly impressionable and emulating the actions of celebrities such as excessive slimming could only damage their long-term wellbeing or twist their lifelong perspectives. For example, one of the most publicised scandals involving celebrities was in 2008 when nude photos of many female celebrities with a Hong Kong actor named Edison Chen were circulated around the internet. This scandal caused an immediate uproar from the locals and even from overseas, as these celebrities – some known for great appeal to youths – were seemingly encouraging a promiscuous attitude to sexual behaviour. Furthermore, the subject of drug and alcohol abuse has also been a problem amongst celebrities as they often engage in wild parties, some even subsequently engaging in physical violence that was publicised by the media feverishly. It is noted that such behaviour plagues not only young celebrities in their twenties but also older celebrities. For instance, many Taiwanese celebrities whose careers were stalling in their mid-thirties to forties were sent for drug rehabilitation in 2007. If youths were to be misguided into thinking that such prevalent behaviour amongst celebrities is acceptable, the consequences on the moral code of the future generations would be unimaginable. Taking into account the wide range of unacceptable activities that celebrities engage in, it does seem that celebrities fall miserably short of the yardsticks of a role model for the youths as they do not exemplify positive qualities at all.

However, it would be a sweeping statement to say that celebrities are the worst role models because for every celebrity taking drugs or feverishly slimming down, there are also celebrities who make use of their fame and thus, media influence, to benefit the community or to raise awareness about societal issues. A frequently quoted example is that of the actress Angelina Jolie, known widely for her status as a sex symbol and action star to moviegoers. She adopted three children, all from different developing countries, and raised them as her own. Contrary to popular scepticism, labelling her adoption acts initially as a publicity stunt, she continued adopting children and even moved on to do charity work in collaboration with the United Nations. It is in this respect that figures like Angelina Jolie, or the late Princess Diana of England – who was a fierce advocate of curbing HIV in developing countries – make use of their influence and undying media attention to promote causes greater than themselves. Thus, it would not be unreasonable to label them as role models for the youth as they do make contributions to the society at large alongside a generally respectable but perhaps, occasionally controversial reputation. An example of a good celebrity role model closer to home could be that of Eunice Olsen, a former Miss Singapore Universe and a local celebrity. She became active in community service, advocating various causes, and eventually became a Nominated Member of Parliament to serve as one of the few independent voices in the decision-making body of the country. As seen from her example, celebrities do have the power to effect change using their celebrity status as a springboard. Given the various important causes championed by many celebrities today ranging from climate change, gender equality to even speaking good Chinese in Singapore, they are definitely role models worthy of youths to emulate. While some may doubt the level of altruism behind their acts of publicity for their pet causes, it remains undeniable that celebrities serve, at the very least, to raise awareness about their causes.



Most of all, having established that celebrities can be role models for youth of today, the essential question is: Are celebrities the worst role models? Perhaps it is plausible that there are other role models that are worse than celebrities.

Youths today can also look up to many other figures as role models, such as members of their immediate family, or even political figures, many of whom have overcome insurmountable barriers to reach where they stand today. However, there is potential that family members who guide the youths wrongly, such as by abusing them physically or verbally could have even more lasting damage on youths. Studies have shown that most smokers took up smoking as a result of having acquaintances or family members who smoke. In this respect, should family members engage in undesirable behaviour, they could perhaps be even worse role models for youths than celebrities, given the frequent contact that youths have with them.

Political figures could also be worse role models for youths than celebrities, should these figures commit illegal acts or influence youths in extreme ideology. Politicians are often respected by people in society due to their exceptional qualities of leadership, advocacy or enlightenment on various social issues. It is no surprise then that there may be youths who look up to them as role models. However, there have been instances of great leaders of their time misleading the public and causing lasting harm to the society. Mao Zedong of China used his influence and status as the founding father of China to stir up youths in the 1960s to join what became known as the Cultural Revolution. While his great charisma and appeal inspired youths to adopt his radical ideologies such as to rid China of old traditions, it was wrongly directed as these youths caused lasting damage especially to the cultural and societal fabric of China that some claim has not completely recovered. In that respect, charismatic politicians could possibly serve as worse role models than celebrities if they influence youths in radical behaviour that could damage society. The amount of negative influence politicians could wield is also much greater than celebrities as they are the ones ultimately charting the progress of a nation. Steering fervent youths in the wrong direction, such as in acts of terrorism or violence could cause lasting damage to generations of youths and even their societies.

Overall, I acknowledge that there are celebrities who are the worst role models for youths as they live and even promote lives of debauchery. However, on the flip side of the coin, there exists celebrities who use their influence positively to champion social causes, as well as possibly worse role models like politicians or even family members who could influence youths more negatively. As such, we see that those figures who have the potential to be good role models are also those who could be the worst role models for youths, depending on how they use their formidable influence on youths and what they channel it into. Thus, there are definitely bad role models, as "exemplified" by certain celebrities, though perhaps none that are definitely the worst.

In conclusion, the statement is not true to a large extent.

#### **Comments:**

**Excellent work, especially under timed conditions. You addressed the demands of the question succinctly and it was a wise strategy to benchmark celebrities against other would-be role models. Just be careful not to write too lengthy paragraphs in future.**

**GP**  
essay 3

Is investing in the arts ever worthwhile? Discuss the question with reference to your country.  
Lin Tong (09A03A)

The first time the arts came under the serious attention of the Singapore Government was 20 years ago, in the first concept plan prompted by the President in 1989. Singapore, then in the midst of a struggle to become a developed country, began to consider the possible benefits and the essential need for the arts to play a role in Singapore's development, while acknowledging our circumstances and limited resources. The arts, a pursuit of creative and intellectual expression in forms such as the literary arts, visual and performance arts, had an innate value then and even more now for the nation of Singapore.

Detractors claim that investing in the arts, particularly when using public funds, is a gross waste of money on a luxury only the rich enjoy. Museums and galleries are frequented mostly by the wealthy with the ability to wine and dine and afford fine art. Investing in the arts might be seen as subsidising a privileged few over the needs of the masses, where money might be better spent on education or healthcare to improve the lot of all. Such criticism is heightened when governments seek to invest in the arts by paying exorbitant amounts to secure native artistic treasures, such as China's Culture Ministry's continual acquisition of Chinese art at the expense of other, possibly more nationalistic pursuits. Nevertheless, investing in the arts in principle has intrinsic value and the crucial point is the approach by which such investment is undertaken, that may determine how worthwhile it may be.

There is for example, great worth in investing in the arts as a means of social and cultural development. The arts, in promoting self-expression and creativity, often encapsulate the essence of a people's identity, presented in various forms. For example, books and literary works by acclaimed local writers such as Catherine Lim and Professor Edwin Thumboo, record Singapore's past, how we saw ourselves then and now, and they continue to inspire us today. Professor Edwin Thumboo's Merlion Poem, displayed at the base of the Merlion, has become a literary landmark in the local writing scene, where every local poet is deemed to need to write their own version as part of a coming-of-age rite. The arts can thus foster a sense of identity and belonging to Singapore, as well as shape and influence how this sense of being "Singaporean" is formed. Such engagement is crucial for Singapore, being a young migrant nation whose socio-cultural fabric is being challenged by globalisation and the influx of migrants that add to an increasingly diverse population.

The Renaissance City Plan 3, newly launched in December 2008, by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, recognises this value of the arts. As such, programmes such as HeARTbeat, which seeks to bring art to the heartlands of Singapore, are heavily funded. Such programmes bring performances of street theatre, dance and music to the local neighbourhoods, serving to "democratise" the arts, by allowing the working class, who otherwise may not be able to afford exposure to the arts, to experience performance art. Such investment in art will help promote social cohesion and reduce the inequality of opportunity. It is not only the wealthy who can experience art. Investing in allowing all Singaporeans a stake in our cultural and artistic psyche is a laudable pursuit.

Yet, investing in art may be contentious in the extent of the investment. Many of the benefits of art in promoting social and cultural development are arguably largely intangible and often difficult to quantify. When seeking to improve Singapore, there may often be greater inclination to instead invest in causes with more direct or obvious benefits, such as infrastructure or skill training to develop our economy.

However, considering the economic circumstances now, with Singapore seeking to better her workforce's skills and become a truly knowledge-based economy, the arts may serve as a promising sector for future economic development to bring about tangible benefits. The culture industry sector is among the fastest-growing sectors in the world, and continues to play an increasing role in the economy despite the global downturn. Singapore, whose fortune is closely linked to trade, should seriously consider the development of the arts as an economic sector. Lucasfilm set up an academy in Singapore in recent years, which has led to increased growth and provision of employment opportunities in the digital art and animation sector.



Such developments are promising and may serve Singapore well, especially as she seeks to reduce her dependence on manufacturing, with the rise of competitors such as China and Vietnam.

The future opening of the National Art Gallery in the former City Hall testifies to the potential that investment in art may bring. The National Art Gallery will showcase works by local and regional artists that will add to the vibrancy of the local cultural scene as well as attract investors and tourists. As globalisation causes countries to open up and develop, many cities too have the advanced infrastructure, highly-skilled workforce that Singapore can offer. To differentiate herself, Singapore needs to develop the city environment and a unique cultural identity through the arts. As a selling point for investors, investment in the arts signifies recognition of the civic importance of the arts. Furthermore, investment in the arts would enhance Singapore's standing as a Global City.

For the private sector, investment in the arts has grown from strength to strength. Increasing numbers of auction houses, such as Borobudur and notable galleries dealing in international and regional art genres have been set up in Singapore. The art sector provides lucrative employment and profit opportunities for both industry insiders and collectors alike. While the recent economic crisis may have dampened the market, art, in particular contemporary Asian Art, continues to enjoy high demand. Singapore, in the heart of a region with a rich cultural and artistic tradition, and in proximity to the wealthy consumer markets in the Pacific, has a location advantage that should be maximised by investment in the local sector. Investment in the art sector through the promotion of local initiatives and attracting foreign galleries, performance companies and investors to Singapore, would promote a vibrant work-live-play environment that would further increase Singapore's attractiveness as a destination for other types of investment – financial, research and development, to name a few. Development of the sector itself would also provide greater diversity in career choices and opportunities for Singaporeans. Private initiatives such as Old School at Mount Sophia seek to combine entrepreneurial ventures with an appreciation of art's economic, social and cultural value. The refurbishment of the former Methodist Girls' School allows for urban rejuvenation of a local landmark to suit changing needs and allows local artists affordable space to creatively express themselves in the framework of a profitable business model. Such initiatives demonstrate the potential of the arts to foster development and create value, while leveraging on Singapore's advantages to carve out a niche in the growing creative industry.

With all the potential and benefits of investment in the arts, we might expect a natural movement towards this area. However, as with all other sectors not yet tried and tested, the arts require the commitment and initiative of far-sighted private investors and the government agencies to reach its full potential in Singapore.

While there are many other areas of economic or social importance that do deserve our concern as well, the foresight and experience of President Wee Kim Wee in 1989 should be remembered as we manage the multitude of needs and cope with the challenging economic situation. As Singapore struggles to overcome the present circumstances, she should, as she did in 1989, keep an eye on the future and how present actions may bring about greater opportunities. As a means of economic growth, cultural enrichment and identity creation, the arts are indeed worthy of our investment of time, money and effort for the future of Singapore.

#### Comments:

**This is a highly competent piece with numerous relevant, well substantiated arguments. However, please do not put too many ideas in one paragraph. If some ideas don't support the topic sentence, they should go into a new paragraph.**

**GP**  
essay 4

“To lodge all power in one party and keep it there is to ensure bad government.” (Mark Twain) Do you agree?

Gan Yu Neng (09A03A)

In a world where democracy has been seen as the ideal system of government for decades, there has been increasing international pressure for countries that have yet to conform to reform their political systems. “Government by the people, for the people!” has become an overused rallying cry. Dictatorships, socialist countries and those seen as having single-party systems have been denounced for a variety of reasons such as being overly restrictive – limiting the freedom of their people – or being corrupt, as is sometimes the case. While history has provided many examples on why dictatorships fail, it may still be too hasty to leap to the conclusion that any country where only one party holds all power is by default badly governed.

It is quite true that countries that have been under a single party for too long can suffer from poor administration. Where incumbency and incompetence combine, a problem is certain to emerge. In Zimbabwe, for example, due to delayed and undemocratic elections, Robert Mugabe has become a powerful dictator. In order to force down food and housing prices, Mugabe imposed price caps – a poorly thought-out strategy according to economic theory. The black market in Zimbabwe thrived, and inflation shot up to an estimated seven sextillion (also written 7,000,000,000,000,000,000) percent. Aside from clumsy policy making, Mugabe is also known for detaining dissidents and political activists, thus preventing any possible improvement in the system. Due to Mugabe’s poor political decisions and the lack of alternative rulers, the people of Zimbabwe suffer from severely low standards of living.

While Mugabe has begun to relent according to more recent news, another problem dictatorship that shows no sign of releasing its grip is North Korea. Under Kim Jong Il, North Korea has adopted a range of xenophobic policies, severely limiting the flow of migrants, trade and media personnel, especially from its border-sharing neighbour, South Korea. While this would not have been such an international concern if North Korea were entirely independent from the rest of the world, this is not the case; North Korea is highly reliant on aid, as well as imports of gas and manufactured goods. In addition, neighbouring countries – not least South Korea – have been often threatened by North Korea’s research into nuclear missiles and other long-range ballistic weaponry. Instead of focusing on making the lives of his citizens better, Kim Jong Il appears to prefer using his power to unsettle other countries. Without any fear of being deposed, his dictatorship continues to govern the country without a thought for its people.

Another problem with keeping only one party in power is the lack of representation from other interest groups. In Malaysia, for example, where the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) coalition – helmed by the Barisan Nasional, or BN for short – has held power since the country’s independence, the country’s policies in business, civil service, education, healthcare and even jurisdiction have largely been biased towards upper-middle class Malay Muslims, which make up just over half of the population. While this satisfies the slight majority of the population, the large remaining percentage are marginalised as a result. Chinese students who score better academically than their Malay counterparts are turned down for university places and must look overseas for higher education, while Tamil and Hindi Indians are granted meager religious facilities. Malay businesses are granted loans with more guarantee than Chinese businesses, and few Chinese and Indians are able to climb the career ladder in the civil service. Because of this, Malays have been accused of complacency and lack of drive, and with the Chinese and Indians crippled by this discrimination, Malaysia suffers as a whole. However, so long as these damaging policies serve to keep them in power, UMNO will sustain them to general detriment.

Despite all these cases of poor governance resulting from countries being ruled by a single, powerful party, however, one line of argument in favour of keeping one party in power still stands: that it is the only way to ensure that policies that are unpopular in the short run but beneficial over the long term can be enacted. Economic theory states that when the economy is doing badly and unemployment is high, the government can increase spending to boost employment and generate income. Politically, this is generally a highly popular decision, as it appears to benefit the people quickly. On the other hand, when the economy is swelling at an unsustainable rate, the same economic theory suggests that governments should cut

spending, for example by delaying infrastructure projects or decreasing civil service salaries and bonuses. While beneficial to the economy in the long run, it is easy to see how these measures may be unpopular in the short run; this is the reason why many governments such as the Bush administration in the United States boost spending to unhealthy levels without bringing it back down.

One country that has not fallen into this spending trap is Singapore. The People's Action Party (PAP) has been in power since Singapore's independence in 1965, and due to a weak and fragmented opposition, is likely to remain in power for many more years. While this has attracted no small amount of international criticism from most advocates of democracy, these same advocates grudgingly admit that the key to Singapore's economic success is its ability to make unpopular decisions – precisely because the government has no fear of being unseated by the popular vote. In fact, the people themselves appear to recognise this, taking the recent increases in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from 3% to 5% and then to 7% in their stride. In return, the PAP gives handouts to lower income families, continually upgrades infrastructure, and subsidises skills upgrading courses, ensuring that citizens in Singapore have a decent standard of living. Most of the benefits of PAP policies such as the increases in GST are only visible in the long run, yet it is able to confidently make these decisions because there is no threat to its power.

It may be true that power can corrupt – Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Kim Jong Il of North Korea have demonstrated this to the detriment of the people. However, it does not then follow that to keep a single party in power is to necessarily invite bad government. With a disciplined government made of capable, competent people who consciously work towards the goal of the country, a single-party rule may actually be superior to the Western ideal of democracy, as the former combines both the intent and knowledge to improve the lives of the people with the ability to do so. To rephrase the quote by Mark Twain: To gather all intellectual competence and public spirit in one party and keep it in power is to ensure long-lasting good governance for all.

**Comments:**

**This is a fluent, coherent and well-substantiated piece. However, I was hoping for examples other than Singapore to support the argument on benevolent dictatorships.**

**GP**  
essay 5

“To lodge all power in one party and keep it there is to ensure bad government.” (Mark Twain) Do you agree?  
Quek Xin Er (09S06U)

In today's world where the political landscape in close to three-quarters of the world's countries is democratic to varying extents, a one-party government, a one-man regime of dictatorship, or a military junta almost definitely warrants disapproval from many in the international community. In our democracy-based ideals, it seems counterintuitive to consider that anything other than multi-party political participation can possibly produce good governance. When all power is lodged in a single party and kept there indefinitely, our democratic world tells us that such a power will be corrupt, ineffective and self-serving. The interests of the people it has a duty to serve can be disregarded with little or no backlash, and the wealth and vitality of the country can be siphoned into the pockets of those few in power. However, I think it is being overly idealistic to jump to such a conclusion without first examining real-life, present examples of successful one-party governments, as well as the potential pitfalls of a perfect, ideal democracy.

Firstly, on the concept of an ideal democracy that most countries around the world strive to achieve, lies fundamental social principles that are not only appealing to the man in the street, but are also necessary to ensure the dignity and advancement of humanity. Liberty, equality and justice are the revered principles of a democracy, and indirect power is placed in every citizen's hands in the form of an election vote. They can decide who to represent their interests in a legislative assembly and which party will best govern them for the next four to six years. The nature of such a political system provides many checks and balances against any existing power, by the mere fact that there are many contesting parties that can threaten to overthrow the current ruling party's power at the next general election without having to resort to bloody revolution. Special interest groups, the freedom to form unions and assemble to discuss state policies, ensure that everyone's interests will at least be voiced and heard. Assuming that each man knows best what his interests are, the opportunity for citizen participation in influencing state policies allows for an effective, successful government that advances the country towards prosperity.

To consider the opposite of a democratic situation would almost be immediately conceding that one-party or indeed, one-man rule, is corrupt and ineffective. Behind the closed doors of their ivory towers, away from the watchful eyes of educated citizens and opposition parties keen to have a share of political power, governing politicians can be up to all sorts of wrongdoing that may never come to light. This is especially so because the press is not given the freedom to report on state affairs and issues that the government deems too “sensitive” or simply, unfavourable towards them to share. With the media heavily-censored in most of these one-party governments, a key watchdog and check against the government's power is eliminated. Take for example the totalitarian regime of Kim Jong Il's North Korea. The media is heavily censored and only state-approved news is able to make it to the pages of newspapers. If knowledge is power, and ignorance the deprivation of that power, then the people of North Korea certainly have their lives controlled tightly by the state. The sky they see above their heads is only what Kim allows them to see, and their knowledge of the world outside is perhaps distorted and surely inadequate. In absolutist regimes like this, the people who have a stranglehold on power go unchallenged and unchecked. They do not even have to bother accounting for their decisions to curtail their citizens' freedom or impose unreasonable policies. They can be openly corrupt without having to face the political repercussions of being ousted.

In Myanmar for example, where a military junta of generals rule the country, bad government can further give way to a humanitarian crisis, the outright abuse of citizens' human rights, as witnessed in 2008 when Cyclone Nargis hit the country. Myanmar's government refused international aid by preventing aid groups from entering the country, amounting to murder by neglect as thousands of lives that could have been saved were lost. In these regimes, dissent is immediately quelled and perpetually unthreatened. Among the thousands of political prisoners is Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Myanmar's democratic party, Nobel Peace Prize winner, who has been under indefinite house arrest since the 1990s.

With such compelling evidence against one-party rule, it seems at first, difficult to argue that good government can be achieved in this way. However, multi-party rule which democracy advocates for its system of checks and balance has its pitfalls. Most obviously, it is extremely bureaucratic and inefficient. In Japan for example, any reforms or policies a minister wishes to implement must first be introduced to the Lower House of Parliament for debate and discussion, where the opposition party which forms the majority poses many obstacles and challenges. The process is then repeated in the Upper House. This time-consuming process could render the policy irrelevant when it is finally passed and implemented. Hence, coalition governments, though providing many checks against a rogue power, can very well be ineffective if political parties spend more time hindering one another and preventing any useful work for the people from being done.

Secondly, there are non-democratic, one-party states that, if not having the best government, are at least progressive and enjoying prosperity. China for example, a communist state ruled only by the Communist Party of China, is seeing its GDP grow by double digits every year in the past few years. Indeed, the rise of China has been described as the awakening of a long-sleeping dragon and this cannot be possible without an effective, visionary government intent on lifting its people out of poverty by encouraging development and wooing foreign investments.

Coming back home, a very good example of effective one-party government lies before our eyes in the form of the People's Action Party of Singapore. This year marks the 51st straight year that the party has been in power since 1959. Only two seats out of 84 in the parliament are ceded to opposition parties. In every general election since 1959, the Singapore people have faithfully voted for the PAP against a myriad of opposition parties like the Workers' Party and the Singapore Democratic Party. Surely, it cannot be that the opposition parties have been unable, election after election, to field capable candidates? The continued good performance of the PAP in governing Singapore and bringing economic prosperity and social stability to the country results in their strong mandate evident after each election. Hence, although the PAP is a "one party" power "kept" there more than half a century, it is not the result of mere coincidence or government coercion to keep their hold on power, but graft-free, effective governance that is consistently addressing the concerns of the people.

In conclusion, Mark Twain is very likely to be right as there is a strong tendency in one-party governments to abuse their power to serve the rulers' own interests rather than the people. Absolute power indeed corrupts absolutely more often than not; however, there are governments around the world that are showing their effectiveness despite not being an ideal democracy. The key to a good government lies in the competence of the politicians to deliver results, and more importantly, their genuine concern for and desire to serve the interests of the people, and not in whether this political power is only lodged in one party or not.

#### **Comments:**

**Good grasp of the language, excellent commentary and analysis. Well organised and clear.**



**GP**  
essay 6

“Globalisation makes the world a better place.” To what extent is this true today?

Lee Jia Wei (09A01A)

Only a century ago, India was six months away from Britain by ship, Africa would trade with no one but their colonial masters, and China was still an isolated, mysterious nation most Americans were unaware of. But fast-forward to the 21st century, and Malaysia is an email away from France, countries which wish to prosper must engage in a modicum of free trade, and immigrant populations in New York, Tokyo and Singapore have generated the cross-cultural awareness of the cosmopolitan citizen. It is hard to imagine a world without globalisation.

Indeed, technological advances that reduce communications to a mere click of the mouse and travel time from months to hours have manufactured a world where barriers are materially insignificant. Globalisation has, in the span of half a century, brought down the walls that separate foreigners from each other and brought them together in an unprecedented era of interconnectedness. And yet, the suggestion that free trade, immigration, or expedited communication has made the world better off beggars belief. The paradigmatic sea change of globalisation for our world suggests that there is no reliable model to judge relative progress. Instead, the different changes that globalisation has brought about create a set of individualised problems that our new sense of interconnectedness struggles to resolve.

Globalisation's defenders allege that our new interconnectedness encourages sharing. The transference of ideas, technology and cultures is, presumably, a good thing for everyone. This is true to some extent. Japanese innovation has given us affordable family cars from Toyota, while American genius lets the world profit from the personal computer. China can share its art with the world, and everyone can visit Greece to experience its collective history in the cradle of democracy. Sharing is a necessary function of globalisation, and relative to a time of isolation, we can now enjoy the fruits of another nation's culture or knowledge.

But sharing is not merely about the benefit. Like it or not, interconnectedness means we pass on our burdens to the world. Consider climate change. On the one hand, countries being brought closer together suggests that polluting methods of production be passed on from America to China, China to Vietnam. One by one, nations pollute the shared environment with technology spread across nations by the hand of globalisation. This means that Australia bears the burden of the Indonesian haze, and South America suffers from Brazilian deforestation.

A similar transfer of burdens happens with the phenomenon of immigration. As air travel becomes increasingly fast and cheap, the dream of moving to a country that promises a better future is within reach of people mired in mediocrity or poverty. This is why America struggles to fend off the millions who have poured into her borders, sometimes even illegally. True, immigration may seem to create a multicultural awareness, but foreigners take jobs away from locals. Immigrants place a burden on welfare services. If they are illegal immigrants, they form enclaves that are ridden with crime, as do Palestinian immigrants in Jordan. The “lowering of barriers” that globalisation entails also means richer nations have to pick up the pieces of poorer nations unable to satisfy the needs of their people.

Further, globalisation creates absolute inequity and exploitation. The barriers that globalisation brought down/lowered may have been shields that weak nations needed to survive. Now free trade means that China can dump its cheap goods in Europe, forcing prices of local companies down and driving them out of business. The European Union has had to resist globalisation by creating its own protectionist barriers. Even more insidious is how rich, powerful multi-national companies (MNCs) pry into the impoverished labour markets of Africa and Southeast Asia and exploit them. Children were forced into backbreaking labour 14 hours a day by Nike, and Chevron did not compensate the families of their workers despite their deaths following industrial accidents. The exploitation is also true for the environment – the Nigerian delta was polluted beyond repair by Shell in the 1990s. The Ogoni peoples living on those lands had no legal recourse against Shell because of their country's poor labour laws. If anything, the barriers on protection

these nations desperately need are taken down, only because globalisation demands that these countries open up to foreign investment – what else can Nigeria or Asia do when held at ransom by companies that hold their people's employment and livelihoods at stake?

Clearly, globalisation creates its own set of grievous problems. Yet, it seems to resolve such problems as well. In response to every set of problems that the globalised world faces, the globalised world bands together to combat them. When climate change became an imminent threat to our existence, the world came together in a common fight against pollution. They conceived of the Montreal and Kyoto protocols, the former of which seemingly succeeded in bringing down CFC levels to near zero.

Similarly, the world fought poverty together. The UN regularly sends humanitarian aid to regions most direly afflicted by starvation and poverty, such as Sudan or Zimbabwe. Powerful, wealthy nations dole out developmental aid to Vietnam and DR Congo in the hope that it will kick-start growth. The might of globalised communication has set in motion an angry campaign against exploitative firms like Shell, indeed succeeding in generating so much media pressure that Shell agreed to recompense the Ogoni peoples and embark on a billion-dollar campaign to clear up the delta. Such concerted international efforts were made possible by the interconnectedness of a globalised world, and seemingly positions us in better stead to combat new challenges.

Yet, has our collective struggle been effective? For two reasons, our united front is and will always be deficient. First, self-interest continues to plague our united efforts. For all the bravado that accompanies the world's claims to fight global warming, China, the USA and a whole host of other countries exempt themselves from emissions reductions under the Kyoto Protocol. The motivation is a selfish want to protect its own industries – weaning off our reliance on emissions is too painful and costly a blow to countenance.

The spectre of self-interest haunts development as well. For all the lofty assertions of helping countries progress, these efforts have been token at best. US aid to DR Congo in 1976 was a one-off payment, made to ensure the democratic leader Joseph Mobutu was installed into power. It did not matter much that Mobutu siphoned off all the aid money for himself – the USA had a Cold War to fight, and Congo was the least of its priorities. The 1994 Rwandan genocide was much the same. The pictures of dead bodies littering the streets pricked the world's conscience, but that was all. The pathetic attempt made by French forces to defend Tutsi civilians ended within months, adding to a roll call of tragedy that comprised acute starvation, mass poverty and ethnic slaughter. Self-interest means that despite globalisation foisting us together, we do not quite care for the lives of people outside our borders so long as our French, US or Italian troops are safe.

Second, globalisation may create interconnectedness, but it does not mean complete understanding. That we may try to help does not mean we will succeed just because globalisation exists. Consider the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) austerity measures. In response to a debt crisis in Africa and Latin America in the late 70s and 80s, the IMF extended loans on the condition that these economies structurally readjust to cut spending on healthcare. These methods worked in the developed world, because the basic welfare infrastructure was already present. But imposing the philosophies of the developed world onto the developing was a mistake. Cutting down on government spending meant millions in Brazil and Mexico lost jobs in the construction sector, were cut off from basic healthcare and denied welfare support. It took Brazil almost 20 years to get back into some semblance of economic health. Clearly, globalisation may only bring about attempts to impose one worldview onto another utterly incongruous reality. Interconnectedness, after all, does not equate to homogeneity.

On balance, globalisation is a mixed bag of harms and benefits. To assert that it is "better" on the basis of its spread of a collective benefit is to ignore the collective detriment it entails. Accordingly, the best way to see globalisation is not as a good or bad thing, but something we must remain agnostic about. Fundamentally, to suggest that 2009 is a better place than 1909, is fallacious and naïve. The world of 2009 is, by virtue of globalisation, a completely fresh paradigm. It is a world of challenges we have never seen before, and of equivalently unbeknownst responses. To compare and claim that a world with globalisation is better than one without is impossible, simply because the struggles and joys we share are unique from

era to era. All that can be said of globalisation is that as people come together in such a manner, we will share both burdens and benefits. That globalisation is the medium by which we will meet our future is the inevitable reality.

**Comments:**

**Balanced, well-structured argumentation that conveyed the complexity of the issues of globalisation. Good range of issues and examples raised, demonstrating an excellent grasp of current affairs. But the essay needs more judicious writing: cut down on the descriptive examples if one or two for each point can suffice. Instead, focus on discussing the pertinence of your examples to the point being made. Examples were at times hurriedly thrown together and the link to the topic sentence was left unclear.**

**GP**  
essay 7**“Globalisation makes the world a better place.” To what extent is this true today?**

Rishabh Srivastava (09S06S)

If one ventures into Bangalore after a gap of ten years, one is bound to be astounded by the change that the city has undergone. Within ten years, Bangalore has been transformed from a crumbling city to a lush metropolis. Narrow, pot-holed roads have been changed into wide, smooth highways; streets strewn with litter have been transformed into spotless avenues; and wastelands have turned into call-centres that provide jobs for thousands of young Indians. Bangalore – and indeed, many other parts of the world – have benefitted tremendously through the money and resources pumped in by multinational corporations. Globalisation has made the ‘world’ a much better place in these cities. Yet, there are those who argue that the benefits of globalisation are split between too few and that it has not made the world a better place. However, I oppose this view. In this essay, the benefits that globalisation brings to the world will be delineated by examining its political, economic and social implications. In doing so, it will be shown that globalisation has indeed made the world a better place.

With regard to political implications, globalisation has led to increased interdependence between countries. With the increasing economic importance of China, India and the European Union, the political dominance of the United States has diminished significantly. Countries witness unprecedented levels of economic interdependence. For instance, China and the United States are increasingly concerned about each other’s economic well-being. The Chinese finance minister recently expressed concerns about the economic conditions in the US since China has a large stake in the United States’ Treasury Bonds. This interdependence has led to increased political stability. A war between China and the US – a looming possibility in the days of Mao Zedong – is highly unlikely to occur now because of the extent of economic interdependence between the two countries. Moreover, political stability has also increased because economic sanctions against ‘rogue’ nations are more impactful today than they were before the dynamics of globalisation were at play. In view of this, it can be seen that globalisation has made the world a better place by inducing greater political stability.

With regard to economic implications, globalisation has had an immense impact on people around the globe. The forces of globalisation have given individuals the power to ‘compete, connect and collaborate’ across the world. Mr Nandan Nilekani, the chairman of Infosys – the crown jewel of the Indian software industry – remarked that “the global economic playing field is being levelled” as a consequence of globalisation. Individual and small firms which were previously limited to few resources can now collaborate with counterparts all over the world. From a macro-economic perspective, globalisation has led to an influx of wealth, capital and resources from the rich world to the poor. Growth in countries like China and India has largely been fuelled by foreign investment. Indeed, the Chinese economy has grown by 20 times since it opened its doors to foreign investment. Hence, the global economic playing field has truly been levelled as a consequence of globalisation. This has led to a large number of people getting out of acute poverty. In China, 300 million people have moved out of acute poverty in one generation. In view of this, globalisation has made the world a better place by inducing greater economic equality and by mitigating poverty.

From a social perspective, globalisation has led to greater social liberalisation in many parts of the world. In many parts of Asia, women have become more empowered since the advent of globalisation, due in part to their improved economic situations. Women in Hyderabad, India, for example, have been demanding for equal paying rights in recent times. Also, despotic regimes are being channelled in countries that are more interconnected to the rest of the world. Moreover, an increase in wealth (a consequence of globalisation) has led to a decrease in crime rates in countries like China and India. As such, it can be seen that globalisation has made the world a better place from a social perspective.

However, for those who are left out of the ‘interconnected’ network, globalisation has brought about several detriments. People without access to computers and people living in closed economies have not benefitted significantly through globalisation. For a hungry child in Africa or the average person in Timor Leste, the political, social and economic benefits have been few, if any. Also, the tools that are fundamental to

globalisation – email, Voice Over Internet Protocol and File Transfer Protocol – might be used for malicious purposes. The same tools that led to the birth of Firefox were used by Al Qaeda to spawn 9/11. Those who are alienated by globalisation are threatened by it. And the interconnectedness that globalisation has brought about has made the world more vulnerable to those who would tear it down.

Yet, for all the repercussions that globalisation has brought about, it has induced more benefits that counter them. While it might not directly benefit the poor in India and China, it does enable the governments of these countries to redistribute income and bring people out of poverty. While it does not necessarily make life in Africa better, it does allow scientists across the world to create technologies that will bring a continent out of misery. And while it might leave our world more susceptible to attacks by terrorists, it enables security forces across the world to collaborate and ensure that 9/11 is not repeated. In short, globalisation has made the world less prone to war, levelled the economic playing field, brought hundreds of millions of people out acute poverty and has catalysed innovation throughout the world. It has truly made the world a better place.

**Comments:**

**You have a confident command of the language and a number of valid arguments with a wide range of interesting examples.**



**GP****essay 8**

Is ambition always to be encouraged?

Ngai Kuo Ying (09A03A)

It is human nature to harbour ambition, to strive for excellence and success. It was ambition that drove Thomas Edison's many inventions that are inseparable from us today. It was ambition that launched the first spacecraft into space, despite knowing that there were huge risks involved; and it was also ambition which led Hillary Clinton to run for presidency, even though she knew not all Americans were ready for a female leader. A world without any sense of human ambition, whether for oneself, or for mankind, would be virtually untenable, as there would have been no daring changes nor radical improvements in our lifestyles as compared to those of early civilisation. I am of the opinion that healthy ambition should definitely be encouraged, but those that aim to destroy should be curbed.

Although ambition has definitely served our race well by spurring development and healthy competition, when this innate sense of self-improvement evolves into one that is hungry for power and domination, letting it run wild and free would inexorably result in dire consequences for mankind. An example would be Hitler's megalomania, which brought about the destructive forces of World War II. In such cases, ambition blinds our sense of what is just and what is not, making one charge forward irrationally and greedily with only one's desires of power, wealth or fame to guide one. There have been many instances of such 'ambition' in schools and workplaces, where individuals are clouded by their intent to succeed and resort to unscrupulous methods to score in a test, or ascend the corporate ladder. While the consequences of such cases may not be as severe as those of Hitler unleashing his ambition of world dominion, these instances evidence the fact that human ambition can work against us, in the face of misguided desires for achievement and as such, should not always be encouraged.

Another instance where ambition may not necessarily be an ideal trait to embody would be when such ambitions become wholly unrealistic, precluding one from achieving other goals in pursuit of a futile one. While watching reality TV, such cases are most evident. Many contestants who audition for popular talent searches such as "American Idol" or "So You Think You Can Dance" have spent years of effort and money – or their parents' finances in pursuing a career that they believe would entail fame and fortune. Countless contestants who claim that they have been undergoing vocal or dance training since the age of three fail to display even the slightest sense of pitch or hand-foot coordination and yet swear to return for another chance when rejected by the judges. These misguided, and often irrational pursuits often arise out of the many human desires that shroud our judgement in deciding where our talents or abilities lie in, driving our ambitions in the wrong direction. In such cases, ambition should not be benevolently encouraged but gently dispelled or steered in the right direction for one to attain the progress and improvement it promises.

Having said that, to be able to tell an ambition of merely childish and stubborn daydreaming from one that may actually prove viable eventually is easier said than done. When the Wright brothers dreamt of building a vehicle to enable human flight, many labelled them insane and unrealistic dreamers who would never see their ambition fulfilled. As can be seen, the rest is history and the aircraft is now an important and indispensable part of human operations. Human ambition is undeniably a powerful tool that can overthrow oppressing forces, transforming our lives in radical ways. Since the beginning of history, there have been countless wars fought and numerous lives slain to achieve freedom from unreasonable and cruel oppression. The American War of Independence, a result of this innate sense of ambition towards a freedom that seemed impossible then, accorded millions of Americans a new life detached from British rule, even until today. In dystopian novels such as Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" as well as Huxley's "Brave New World", totalitarian leaders seek to suppress any form of ambition with immediacy, because it is the one force that will render them powerless. As such, ambition should be fuelled and encouraged, as it brings betterment for the human race not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well.

In a nutshell, ambition should be encouraged, as it is driven by human nature to strive for improved conditions to live in. However, ambition should be powered by proper and justified ideals, and not be

influenced by distorting desires that are also innate. Ambition, in its purest form, can bestow upon Man the will and ability to transform idle dreams into a reality scarcely imagined by others.

**Comments:**

**This is a competent, fluent piece with balanced, well-substantiated arguments. You may want to give real-world examples rather than fictional ones towards the end of your essay.**

**GP****essay 9**

Should euthanasia be legalised in Singapore?

Anish Kumar Hazra (09A01B)

Euthanasia, as a concept, is easy enough to understand. It is the choice of a terminally ill person – often in physical and psychological pain – to end his life with the assistance of a medical professional. The word is of ancient Greek origin and literally means “the good death”. What is less easy to understand are the moral, ethical, social and economic quandaries that legalising euthanasia can create. This essay shall examine both sides of the euthanasia debate to demonstrate that legalising euthanasia in Singapore is not only the practical, but also the moral choice to make.

Opponents of legalising euthanasia tend to cite four main arguments to build their case. Chief amongst these arguments is the idea that life is absolutely sacred and cannot be violated. The premise of this argument is that life is the most basic and fundamental of all rights. It is the basis on which all other rights operate. After all, one cannot have the right to freedom of speech, for instance, if one is not alive. This, it is argued, is the reason life must be placed on a pedestal above all other rights – even the right to choose one’s death. Further, life is not perceived to be a creation of Man. It is often perceived as a “gift” from Providence. If we are to approach the concept of life from a non-atheist point of view (as most Singaporeans do) then life is not the property of an individual but rather, is a divine gift. Hence, the individual has no right to take his own life, as it never was his to begin with – it is the property of a divine being. Thus, on a secular as well as religious level, the right to life can be seen as sacred and therefore inviolable, leading us to the necessary conclusion that euthanasia should not be legalised.

The second argument often cited by opponents to euthanasia is that the pain and agony of a terminally ill patient is not so great that it warrants the act of him committing assisted suicide. The suggestion of this argument is that modern palliative care is effective enough to mute the physical suffering of the sick individual. Drugs such as morphine or medically prescribed heroin can go a very long way to dulling pain and allowing a terminally ill person to live his final days in relative comfort. In a developed country such as Singapore, access to these drugs and the medical facilities required to administer them is far from impossible. Hence, if the tools to reduce pain are available, why should we take the risk of legalising an immoral act on the basis of that avoidable pain? As this essay will go on to show later, opponents to euthanasia may be overestimating the efficacy of palliative care as well as ignoring the psychological dimension to being terminally ill.

The third argument often put forth against euthanasia is that there exists an immense propensity for abuse. The basis of this argument is that the terminally ill are extremely vulnerable. Their illness prevents them from exercising their full range of mental faculties and the physical pain that they are in prevents them from guarding against the possibility of being manipulated. While we do not wish to think ill of the patient’s family, Singapore cannot afford to take the risk that family members will push the idea of euthanasia onto the sick patient. Especially in this time of economic crisis (with unemployment expected to rise in the coming year), desperate family members might be very keen to rid themselves of a financial burden or to gain access to their inheritance. Even if the family is not manipulative, the terminally ill individual might himself feel bad about the burden he has created for his family and might choose to die on this basis rather than out of a genuine desire to end his life. This argument concludes that the risk that euthanasia might be abused is too great to warrant legalising it in the first place.

The final argument against euthanasia is centred on doctors. The premise of this argument is that doctors have sworn the Hippocratic Oath – which explicitly states that doctors should “do no harm” to the patients that they are caring for. All Singaporean doctors must swear to uphold this oath before they are allowed to practise in Singapore. If the Hippocratic Oath compels doctors to “do no harm”, legalising euthanasia would compromise the ethics and integrity of the medical profession and hence should not be allowed. This essay, however, will go on to argue later that this is a narrow misreading of the Hippocratic Oath and is not in line with the spirit of that same oath.

As this essay will go on to show, the arguments brought by euthanasia's opponents either present problems that can be overcome or are simply erroneous. Proponents of euthanasia often support their case with three lead arguments: first, the idea that the right to life is wholly the property of the individual who is living that life and hence he has the right to relinquish his property. The premise of this argument is that for every right, there exists a converse. We are endowed with the right to speech, but we also have the right not to speak. We have the right to freedom of movement, but also the right to stay where we are. Inherent in every right is the option not to exercise that right. This principle is something Singapore subscribes to when we advocate that rights like the freedom of speech should be exercised judiciously. Singapore accepts that there are scenarios where individuals should choose not to exercise their rights. If the converse exists for all other rights, why does it not exist for the right to life? Simply saying that the right to life is more important than other rights does not negate its basic nature as a right that can have a converse. The philosophically consistent stance to take is that (like all other rights), the right to life does have its converse – the right to death. Further, in absence of proof of the existence of a divine being, it can only be assumed that the individual is the owner of his life. He exercises all bodily functions associated with his life and is, often, the sole determinant of what path his life should take. If the individual owns his life (and we cannot prove otherwise) and the right to life comes with the choice not to live one's life (and this is the case), then euthanasia should be legalised as the individual has a right to his death if he so desires.

The second argument to be made is that there can be no arbitrary distinction drawn between the right to life (or life itself) and the quality of that life. The premise of this argument is that life can only have meaning if one has access to the full schema of rights that allows one to participate in meaningful activities that one enjoys. A terminally ill patient in the final days of his life is often bedridden and has lost any and all control of his body. He effectively can have no access to higher order rights like the right to speak as he is physically incapable of exercising those rights. Opponents of euthanasia are prolonging a life for the sake of prolonging life. In fact, they demean and oversimplify life by suggesting that quality of life has nothing to do with whether one should choose to live or not. If one believes one's life is no longer meaningful, then one should be able to decide to end it.

While palliative care can reduce pain somewhat, opponents often grossly overstate the effectiveness of this care. Cancer patients on morphine drips have been known to wake up in the middle of the night screaming because despite the medication, the pain is still unbearable. On compassionate grounds, euthanasia should be legalised. Even if we are able to accept that palliative care can be effective, what sort of life does that lead to? A patient who is pumped full of drugs often spends his final days passed out – unable to clean himself or have control over his basic bodily functions. Effective palliative care has the potential to rob individuals of their agency and their dignity. On the grounds of protecting human dignity, euthanasia should be legalised. Doctors, in fact, can be participants in the euthanasia process. In carrying out euthanasia, doctors are relieving their patients of immense physical and mental trauma. That is certainly doing "no harm". The quality of life cannot be divided from life itself.

The final criticism of euthanasia is that abuse may occur. This can be avoided through effective policy making. The Netherlands legalises euthanasia but compels all patients to go for psychiatric tests and patient counselling before they make that decision to ensure that they are of sound mind and that they are making this decision on their own. Given Singapore's medical resources, such a policy could be implemented here.

Euthanasia should be legalised as criticism against it is unfounded and there exists moral, legal and ethical arguments in support of it.

#### Comments:

**Many of your arguments are thoughtfully presented and you certainly display passion in justifying your stance. Although you do not manage to present entirely strong counter-arguments (some of the concerns that opponents of euthanasia have aren't addressed, such as patients not wanting to be an economic burden to their families, for example), your essay displays a good balance and knowledge of the pertinent issues of euthanasia. Do consider, though, that many terminally ill patients who are initially shocked and depressed when they learn of their condition also experience different mental/emotional stages at different points in time – they may move on to accept and manage their illness, and they are often emotionally stronger when they experience the love/care/support of people around them. Hence, the initial desire for euthanasia may dissipate.**

**GP****essay 10**

Should euthanasia be legalised in Singapore?

Wang Zhemín (09S03L)

Seventeen years ago, a near fatal accident reduced Eluana Englaro to a vegetative state, rendering her entirely dependent on life support systems to sustain her existence. Seventeen years down the road, all medical efforts have been proven futile, and she recently passed on after being taken off the life sustaining equipment. Euthanasia, otherwise known as “mercy killing”, has been a central issue subjected to heated debate. Proponents of euthanasia have indignantly questioned the quality of life experienced by the patients, as well as the financial and emotional burden upon the family. Detractors have conversely refuted acceptance of euthanasia, arguing on the grounds that life is sacrosanct, and the prospects of “miracle” recoveries that could occur should the patient be kept alive. It is difficult to reconcile these seemingly diametrical perspectives, or to measure its value with a single yardstick. Therefore, in deciding whether euthanasia should be legalised, it is of paramount importance to consider the socio-cultural fabric of a country, and factor in the more pragmatic concerns of public response and the ethos of society. In Singapore’s context, the dynamic evolution of our milieu offers the possibility of exploring “liberalising” certain practices, but the largely traditional and conservative Asian cultural influences that are entrenched in the social fabric must not be left out of the picture.

The underlying rationale for euthanasia lies in the marginalisation of the patient’s quality of life. The very value of human existence is to be able to experience life, and the experience and enjoyment of life can only take place in a state of conscious being. Unconscious patients living off life support systems are thus unable to fully experience life and its associated enjoyments. The definition of “life” should not merely constitute biological existence, but also conscious existence that gives all meaning and purpose there is to life. By extension of reasoning, a patient who is deemed to be unrecoverable from a vegetative state should not be artificially kept alive.

Moreover, the ramifications of a patient dependent on life supporting mechanisms extend to his family. The financial burden and the emotional turmoil of having to watch a loved one lie unconscious in a hospital ward can indeed be agonising. The financial costs of long term use of life support systems are exorbitant, and may not be affordable for an average or low income family in Singapore. Some families may also seek catharsis in putting an end to a loved one’s suffering, and would therefore hope for the availability of such an option. It would be unfair and inequitable to mandate families to bear the heavy financial burden of supporting the patient, as well as to go through the prolonged suffering of seeing the patient kept alive on life support systems.

While these claims are founded and indeed true, detractors perceive the sanctity of life to override any practical concerns at hand. It is argued that life is a God-given right that has to be respected and protected under all circumstances. Furthermore, euthanasia would be seen as an involuntary termination of the right to life as the patient would be unable to actively make that decision for himself. This would thus compromise the patient’s right to life and human existence.

There have also been cases of miracle recoveries that have occurred in seemingly incurable conditions. Euthanasia would thus eliminate all possibility, no matter how slight, of a potentially successful recovery that could allow the patient to once again experience life. The complete termination of this prospect could perhaps be too hefty a risk to take.

Having considered the varying views towards euthanasia, what is of greater importance is evaluating the applicability of such a practice to Singapore’s context. It is evident that globalisation and modernisation has engendered liberalisation of views and changes in moral standards. The recent attempt to repeal penal code 377A against homosexual acts may not have been successful, but it shows Singaporeans’ willingness to bring such issues, which were once deemed as taboo, up for discourse and discussion. The older generation of Singaporeans may perhaps be more apprehensive of embracing euthanasia, perceiving such a practice as a form of unnatural termination of life.



Religious groups and human rights advocacy groups may raise a furore if euthanasia were legalised. When the Singapore government was in its deliberation phase of deciding the construction of the Integrated Resorts, the churches in Singapore responded fervently with full-fledged campaigns to inform the public about the potential detriments. No doubt the government eventually proceeded with the conception of the two integrated resorts, but dealing with euthanasia that involves the termination of life would have to be handled with greater sensitivity and attention to the nuances of our socio-cultural fabric.

Legalising euthanasia would indeed be an emphatic political statement on the part of the Singapore government, especially in the Asian continent where neighbouring countries are very much largely conservative. In fact, even amongst the Western nations, only a handful of governments like the Scandinavian nations have taken the bold step to legalise euthanasia.

It is likely for a public outcry to result from the legalisation of euthanasia. However, its legalisation should not be seen as a disregard for human life, but rather the opening up of an option or avenue. Cases of terminally ill patients on life support systems cannot be considered as homogenous. Each case will involve different circumstances and different nuances, and euthanasia might be a more feasible and desirable option in some cases. For low-income families who cannot afford the hefty costs of life support, it could serve as a viable alternative. But for well-to-do families who want to keep their loved one alive in hope of recovery, there is always the option of doing so.

It is unlikely that Singapore today would be prepared to embrace euthanasia given the largely conservative mindsets that still pervade the population. But progressive steps could be taken to find out about the general public sentiments by putting the issue through a litmus test of public discourse and discussion.

#### **Comments:**

**You cover most of the bases with regard to this question and show an awareness of Singapore's unique position of being a modern and yet traditional nation state – as well as the consequences that come along with it.**

**Apt use of examples and a very strong command of the language that very clearly enables you to put forth your case convincingly.**

**GP**  
**essay 11****“More government intervention, not less.” Is this the best way to solve the problems we face in the world today?**

Yong Xin Tian (09A01C)

Free-market advocates frequently decry the use of the “visible hand” – government intervention to manipulate the economy and indeed, the day-to-day lives of citizens. However, in light of the plethora of problems that we face in the world today, perhaps government intervention is a shining beacon of hope, for direct intervention can, and perhaps is the only way, to protect people from such problems as terrorism, epidemics, and chronic poverty. Nevertheless, it must be qualified that such problems are global ones, and it will never suffice to rely solely on individual governments’ intervention to repair them.

With the recent financial turmoil that invoked memories of the Great Depression in the 1920s, many European citizens have taken a socialist turn, demanding that their governments protect local industries and jobs. Clearly, government intervention serves as a tool to protect, as they did in the 1920s, her citizens from a recession, and in the worst situation, poverty. After all, Iceland’s people know only too well what the lack of intervention in the financial system can do to the economy – make it collapse, taking down together with it billions in savings, millions of jobs, and any mandate the government had. This can be contrasted to China, which has grown at an amazing pace of 10% in GDP annually since Deng Xiao Ping took over at the country’s helm, allowing deregulation yet maintaining a tight rein over the economy. No surprise, then, that millions of Chinese were lifted out of poverty in the past decades. If we borrow our experiences from history, then there is no doubt that government intervention in the economy is crucial to solving the loopholes in an economy guided merely by Adam Smith’s “invisible hand”, reducing financial crises and stabilising the volatile free market, an imminent problem we face today.

Furthermore, state intervention is critical in solving the emerging problems of disease outbreaks. Without a good public healthcare system to manage a countrywide epidemic, the disease will not only cripple an entire nation but easily spread to other countries, what with the advent of globalisation today. Already, scientists are racing to find vaccines and cures for such hitherto unknown diseases as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and even, well-known ones as the Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV). Even if they manage a breakthrough, however, their work will be futile without state-led nationwide screenings, free vaccinations and subsidies for treatment. An example of success is the Singaporean government, whose swift measures to contain SARS were so effective that the country was lauded by the World Health Organisation for the good work.

There is a third major problem we face today. The threat posed by terrorist networks like the Al-Qaeda or, closer to home, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Philippines, could very well unleash chaos worldwide if state security forces do not step in to eradicate these groups. The firm hand of the law is necessary in order to solve the problem of increasing destruction caused by these terror “cells”. Newly-appointed President of the United States Barack Obama knows this – that is why he engaged the Afghan tribe leaders to help in fighting terror as his predecessor George W. Bush did in Iraq – there is no way to stomp out terror without the cooperation and aid of locals, and not least their leaders. Bush’s programme of incentivising local Iraqi chiefs met with respectable results; there is little doubt that Obama’s will, too. Likewise, Gloria Arroyo’s persistence in employing government forces to take out the MNLF in the jungles has paid off fairly well, cornering the MNLF into accepting a dialogue with the government for a ceasefire.

Global warming, the fourth major problem facing our world today, needs government intervention in order to be halted, if not reduced. As the US Department of Energy’s Steven Chu noted with regret, something of Nobel-calibre is required to stop the impending apocalypse that climatologists have predicted will happen in our lifetime. Indeed, the primary stumbling block to enforcing measures to cut carbon emissions and the like is political will (or rather the lack thereof). Most memorably, Bush refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol, afraid it would hurt a US economy that was contributing the highest amount of carbon dioxide emissions to global numbers. China’s Central Government has similarly been slow to face the pollution problem, blithely putting vocal environmental activists in jail without explanation. The extreme willpower of such leaders as Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is perhaps the last hope for resolving the issue of global warming – he promised to make California, his governing state, the greenest city on Earth. It is a pity he stands alone in his government and that his state debts have detracted from his environmental efforts.

It would be naïve, of course, to pretend that government intervention is a cure-all. One can examine this on two levels. First, there is bad intervention; and second, intervention from the state does not suffice.

Government intervention with the wrong intention will not be helpful. The heartbreaking way in which civil wars in Africa have unfolded and are unfolding puts forth the question of the value of state intervention. The Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, for instance, altered the Constitution to extend his term in power (some say terror), and when an uproar among Zimbabweans ensued, he responded by opening fire. Kim Jong Il is another example of a leader who enforces government intervention, but one so extreme that one suspects nary an event or activity goes without his knowledge. His extravagant lifestyle empties government coffers so quickly that nothing is left for the impoverished millions of North Koreans under his “care”. Government intervention is not always the best solution, evidently.

Neither is it sufficient a solution. The aforementioned problems are global problems – issues that require the continued efforts of the global community working towards a solution in unison. Government intervention without global cooperation is what some term the “ostrich mentality”, akin to an ostrich burying its head in the sand. Needless to say, less developed countries will always need the help of developed countries in solving their, and the world’s problems. When it comes to the financial crisis, extensive government intervention will invariably lead to protectionism, which is a bugbear of Third World nations like Uganda, which desperately need trade in order to survive the financial storm. As Zambian Dambisa Moyo writes, the “glamour aid” that developed countries lavish on Africa is “dead” – insulting and useless, especially in view of corrupt governments as earlier mentioned. Obama’s call to American firms to buy American steel has pricked the ears of countries worried that such an important market would close its door to their exports, which they badly need to sell to stay afloat.

When it comes to terrorism, a lone state fighting terror in its backyard is possibly futile without aid from global partners since it is largely constrained to Third World countries as well. Especially due to the increasing popularity that terrorist networks have gained, global institutions like Interpol and the United Nations need to step in to provide the aid necessary to ensure that terror is wiped out and global security is maintained. Indonesia and Singapore’s close cooperation in the capture of terrorists from the Jemaah Islamiyah cell is evidence of the necessity of multilateral cooperation.

When it comes to global warming too, global cooperation is essential. The planet belongs to everyone, and so naturally, it is every country’s responsibility to save Earth before it is too late. Things like the Kyoto Protocol are manifestations of global cooperation; and without the US’ participation, the work of the Protocol has been made more difficult despite individual governments’ efforts to reduce their impact on Mother Nature.

Government intervention remains, nonetheless, a foundation for the solution of global problems. Less government intervention will only lead to the rise of profit-driven firms that ignore the needs of the citizenry. In fact, one might say that the problems we face today are partly the fault of the lack of intervention. The lack of regulatory oversight in financial systems worldwide, for example, was a huge factor for the financial crisis that is devastating so many countries. Lack of control of pollution-creating companies led to the spurt of carbon dioxide emissions. Less government intervention is hardly a solution; one might even say it is dangerous.

More government intervention, not less, is certainly part of the solution to the various problems that the world faces today, but it is neither the best, nor the unique answer to all the problems, nor should it be treated as a one-size-fits-all. Most of all, government intervention must be with society’s interests at heart and must be in tandem with the work of other governments. In an increasingly globalised world, problems have globalised too; so must the solution. Government intervention is but a precondition, for which a fine line must be drawn between useful and harmful intervention. It is a question of the nature of intervention, not of the extent.

#### Comments:

**Comprehensive, competent, if at times descriptive/repetitive. Last part of essay appears to be an afterthought – do remember to plan your essay fully before writing it.**

**GP****essay 12****"Countries have every right to respond with aggression when provoked."  
Do you agree?**

Lee Di Wei (09A01C)

As generations of rulers, presidents and diplomats can attest, statesmanship is no easy task. As if day-to-day tasks of governance are not enough, national leaders have to steer their countries through threats to their very existence. A provocation may signal a threat to the nation, and it would do statesmen well to consider their response to it carefully. Aggression would entail unleashing hardline tools such as military action, verbal threats or economic embargos, while other moderate approaches entail negotiation and compromise. I feel that states do have the right to respond with aggression when provoked, but it should not be the first and only policy response to any and all forms of provocation.

On the face of it, states seem perfectly justified in using aggression to respond to threats in the name of national security. The use of aggression rather than conciliation and negotiation sends a clear signal to any would-be threats that the nation values its own survival above all else, and will fight for it. National survival, after all, is paramount in any government's value system. Diplomacy, idealism and enlightened opinions can all be entertained, but at the end of the day a state has to safeguard its own welfare and existence. A provocation may signal a threat, and a strong reaction will put the threat in its place. For example, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US government responded by declaring a global war on terror, combating Islamic extremism through military, economic and political pressure. While its final success is still in doubt, it is clear that the Bush doctrine of opposing terrorism sent a clear message to the world that the US would safeguard its own security, and indeed, there have been no major terrorist attacks in the US despite attacks in other western countries like the UK and Spain. An aggressive response to threats serves as a clear signal to any would-be aggressors, seemingly capable of safeguarding national security.

In addition, adopting a passive rather than active approach to threats may only postpone the day of reckoning. It can be argued that any form of 'provocation' has the potential to coalesce into a coherent threat, and in the interests of safety, states would do well to actively and aggressively respond. For example, in the build-up to World War 2, Nazi Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles by rearming its military. Backed by strong Nazi rhetoric, this should have been provocation enough for the other European states, especially England and France. Unfortunately, diplomatic means were sought to defuse the situation, and World War 2 eventually broke out. Sometimes, pre-emptive moves to stop a problem can save a state from future threats.

However, both these arguments fail to stand up. Aggression carries its own sting in the tail. Firstly, while aggression certainly sends a strong signal, it often begets cycles of mutual threats that spiral out of control, worsening the situation. Notably, in the Cuban Missile Crisis, what started as an American discovery of Soviet missile bases in Cuba snowballed out of proportion to a full-scale nuclear stand-off. Both President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev were reluctant to back down, and only careful diplomacy resolved the situation. Active aggression rather than seeking to understand and compromise may instead send out an aggressive provocation in its own turn, inducing other parties to respond in kind and worsening the original situation out of proportion.

Secondly, not every form of 'provocation' constitutes a possible threat. While pre-emptive actions to defuse threats may be desirable to stave off future crises, the nature of the provocation must be clearly assessed. A provocation may be just that: a provocation, with no real threat developing behind it. For example, throughout the Cold War, there were many instances of Soviet military aircraft and ships manoeuvring aggressively near their western counterparts in the hope of provoking a military response to trigger an international incident. Also, more recently, an American survey ship, the USNS Impeccable, was harassed off the Chinese coast by a flotilla of Chinese naval and civilian vessels. Do such acts constitute unwarranted provocation? Perhaps. Do they have a threat to national security behind them? Perhaps not. Responding with further aggression to any and all threats would be counterproductive, ignoring the nuances of international relations.

Rather than proclaiming their inalienable right to self-defence and taking hardline stances on all issues, nations would do well to resolve provocation and perceived threats via other more conciliatory and less extreme means. Hardline aggression with no attempt at negotiation and understanding only invites a response in kind, constituting as it does a threat to others' security; attempting to mediate and resolve conflicts via diplomacy is a more nuanced approach that allows all parties to have their say. When nations discard aggressive principles and talk, the cycle of aggression can come to a halt: Northern Ireland and Bosnia stand as shining examples where negotiation successfully resolved seemingly intractable differences previously only addressed via aggression. Catholics and Protestants, Serbs and Bosnians previously had nothing but bullets for the other; now, these areas have regained peace and stability. In contrast, in nations such as Somalia, aggression begets aggression, with conflict spiralling out of control.

However, negotiation alone cannot solve all the world's ills. A time-honoured principle of diplomacy is that it only works when both parties have something the other wants. States may well come under threat and be provoked by irrational actors, who do really want to cause harm. As mentioned above, actors such as Nazi Germany, hell bent on expansionism, and terrorist groups, hell bent on spreading their ideology, cannot always be negotiated with. Aggression in the name of self-defence may sometimes have to be resorted to in the face of threats, which cannot be defused otherwise. After all, national survival is paramount.

In conclusion, statesmanship is no easy task. Aggression brings with it a whole host of problems, and resorting to a hardline approach every time may just open up a can of worms. Countries do not have every right to respond to aggression when provoked, but they should reserve this right to. As Winston Churchill said, "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war," but "V for victory" was another remark in darker times.

**Comments:**

**Structured, balanced, reasoned, and scope of knowledge demonstrated.**



**GP****essay 13**

In your opinion, is your country doing enough to protect the environment?

Wee Zongwen (09S03E)

With the advent of the global “pandemic” that is global warming, countries all around the world have not been spared the brunt of nature’s angry retaliation to Man’s ill-advised and blind mistreatment of the environment. A small country such as Singapore is no exception. Are we doing enough to protect the environment? Detractors claim that Singapore is still far too reliant on fossil fuels: our use of renewable sources of energy is, to date, lacking. However, the government has introduced measures such as collaboration with China on various environmental projects, while social schemes such as the Bring Your Own Bag Day (BYOBD) have been implemented, together with the preservation of various ecological havens around the country. This writer thus believes that Singapore is doing enough to protect our environment to a large extent, although there are certainly ways and means of improving the current situation.

Critics claim that Singapore’s use of cleaner and greener sources of alternative energy is seemingly inadequate. For example, there are precious few CNG cars on the roads today, while our use of solar power, so often considered the “future of energy”, is close to non-existent, they believe. The International Energy Agency believes that by 2030, close to 30% of the world’s energy would come from renewable sources such as wind, solar and nuclear energy. Backed up by this statistic, critics have bought into the notion that Singapore is not doing enough to protect the environment, based on energy considerations alone.

This author has to admit that indeed, Singapore’s use of alternative sources of energy is limited so far. However, there are reasons to explain this inadequacy. Firstly, Singapore is a tiny island compared to the world, with only 710 square kilometres of land area. It is thus hardly possible to have a wind farm of turbines, like those of the Netherlands and Denmark, or a nuclear power plant, which according to international regulations, requires a safety buffer of 30 km from civilians (Singapore is 40 km from East to West). However, the government has also compensated for this inadequacy in other areas. For example, in the Biopolis, our very own biotechnology hub, there is a facility called “Helios”, which specialises in the study of the sun, and research on how to harness solar energy into an effective energy source, and a cost-efficient one that is available to most if not all Singaporeans. Also, looking at the big picture, protecting the environment depends not just on energy sustainability; it also depends on our general public awareness, as well as various overseas joint collaborations, which will be elaborated on subsequently. Thus, it would be narrow-minded and an over-generalisation to insist that Singapore is not doing enough to protect the environment just because of our lack of use of renewable energy as environmental conservation takes several other aspects into account.

In terms of public awareness, Singapore has done well in advocating the importance of the environment to the man on the street, as well as school children islandwide. On the national level, the government has implemented the “Bring Your Own Bag” Day. This laudable initiative takes place every Wednesday, and encourages grocery shoppers to bring their own grocery bags, or decline the non-biodegradable plastic ones given out when making small purchases. The National Environment Agency’s statistics show that more than 65% of the population takes part in this scheme. For a two-and-a-half year-old scheme, that statistic is indeed commendable. However, we should not rest on our laurels, but should continue striving for more environmental engagement on the part of the larger community. Thus, while Singapore has done well in this respect, there is certainly room for improvement. At the school level, students are often taken on ecological school trips to Chek Jawa, or the Sungei Buloh Nature Reserve, to explore the various flora and fauna that co-exist with us humans on our sunny island. Various other social schemes have been designed to allow youths to act as ambassadors to tourists, by acting as tour guides and showing them around the island. This is a good initiative that should extend its reach to more participants so as to increase the level of environmental awareness of Singaporeans. Thus, I can conclude that Singapore is doing enough to protect the environment as far as public awareness is concerned, yet there are obvious ways in which this can be further advocated given time.

Environmental protection is also practised in the conservation of various ecological landmarks around the island, with Chek Jawa and the Sungei Buloh Nature Reserve being the main areas of interest. Singapore has, all along, placed an emphasis on being a clean and green society, and this substantiates its claim. In 2002, the government declared Sungei Buloh to be an officially protected landmark. Subsequently, various environmental groups sought to improve the landscape by planting more trees, and building more landmarks, so that visitors, tourists and locals alike, can experience the mangrove swamps, enjoy the serene, peaceful environment, and take in the sights of various birds, mudskippers and plants. Chek Jawa has also been preserved in Singapore. However, this was made possible after the intense lobbying of environmental agencies, led by our renowned biologist Dr Geh Min. Initially, the government had plans to reclaim the land from Chek Jawa for economic uses, and in so doing, destroy the natural habitat of the plants and animals. However, this was met with much resistance from “tree huggers”, both environment groups and the public alike. After much deliberation and debate, the government decided to abandon their plan, and instead preserve Chek Jawa. This example shows the power of the people: the determination of the populace can lead to changes. While this was but a small example, it shows the role ordinary citizens like you and I can play in environmental protection. Recycling, reusing and reducing is one way; environmental awareness is another. South African archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, “No single person operating alone can change the world but all can, and must, play their part.” This aptly sums up our need to protect the environment, and has been carried through in Singapore by the various implementations already in place. Therefore, Singapore is doing enough to protect the environment.

On the global level, Singapore has come up with various schemes catered towards the environment in partnerships with our external friends. One example is the China-Singapore collaboration on the Tianjin Eco-City project, which aims to set up an environmentally-friendly town with the latest state-of-the-art “green” buildings as well as water purification and waste systems. This pilot project by the Singapore government and China shows that environmental protection is not to be confined to any one country’s geographical borders: cross-country relations are equally important. This is because without such cooperation, however hard we try, Singapore is after all, a little red dot and its power at protecting the environment is limited, unfortunately. However, that does not mean that we should give up and let our bigger friends in Europe or America do the job. As such, Singapore is also participating in Earth Hour on 28th March, this coming Saturday, organised by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). This author, along with thousands of Singaporean families, will be powering down and switching off all appliances from 8.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. By taking part in such an initiative, Singapore is indirectly protecting the environment. While one hour in a year may not be much, this hour mainly aims to spread environmental awareness, of what we can do and what we cannot do, in our bid to protect the environment. Thus, the Singapore government has done well in protecting the environment due to its policies with various countries.

Having said all that, what else can Singapore do to protect the environment? Firstly, the government should try to find ways to improve the cost-efficiency problems that plague the installation of solar panels. To date, its presence in Singapore has been at best, limited. One notable example is Changi Airport’s Budget terminal, which, in February 2009, announced plans to install solar panels to use solar energy to meet part of its energy demands. This initiative would stand to save the terminal a projected \$60,000 each year. While commendation is deserved for the Civil Aviation Authority’s vision and daring to implement such a scheme, it must be noted that similar initiatives are few and far between. For example, the original plan to install solar panels on the rooftops of Housing Development Board (HDB) flats has been met with several roadblocks, mainly due to the inefficiencies of the solar panels today, as technology is still improving daily. As it is currently, covering the entire roof of one HDB flat only provides just enough energy for one floor of residents daily. This is clearly inadequate if we were to whole-heartedly commit to protecting the environment and renewable energies. However, as technology is not static, constant improvements and modifications are being made to solar panels, both by local and foreign researchers. This writer believes that, some time in the near future, the technology of renewable energy sources such as solar panels would have improved so much that sustainable use can be available to all at affordable prices. Who knows, maybe an entire HDB flat could be powered by the almighty sun.

In conclusion, Singapore (and the world) is in the midst of an environmental revolution: a transition to a greener, more sustainable future. To achieve this, the fundamental actions of protecting the environment must be continued, improved, and acted on. To date, Singapore has done well in protecting the environment.

Is it doing enough? To a large extent, this author fervently believes that to be the case, be it through energy sustainability, environmental awareness of the public or through our overseas collaborations. The onus is on us Singaporeans to continue to contribute to environmental protection, as global warming stands to become much worse, and its effects much more prevalent and pervasive. It is thus not a cliché when this author mentions that the time to act is now. Ex-United States Senator Robert Kennedy once said, “If not us, who? If not now, when?” This quote epitomises the importance of protecting the environment, which every so often defines us to be who we really are. Thus, to conclude, this author believes that while there are certainly ways of improving the current status quo, Singapore is just about doing well enough to protect the environment.

**Comments:**

**Substantial argument with use of good and relevant examples. Though you left it late to explain what you meant by doing “enough”, you nonetheless did address that in the conclusion. If anything, it might be a little unbalanced as an argument in favour of Singapore having done enough.**

**GP****essay 1****“Foreign aid is ineffective and wasteful.” Is this true?**

Mak Shin Yi (09A01A)

All men are equal. That the value of a human life does not diminish across borders is a principle that has achieved universal consensus today. Despite such recognition of the equality of humanity, however, the stark fact remains that none of the world's most developed nations – not one of them which have constitutionally enshrined this principle of equality – meets the clear requirement of the United Nations (UN) on committing at least 0.7% of their Gross National Product (GNP) to foreign aid. As of 2008, one of the most generous of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Norway, only dedicates 0.9% of its national income to foreign relief, while the United States, shining beacon of democracy and the guardian of human freedom, donates a meager 0.1% of its money to the desolate and impoverished lives in the Third World.

Those who seek to justify the status quo point to the problems in delivering foreign aid to the underdeveloped and often politically unstable states in the poorer parts of the world, lamenting the futility of acts of charity on their part, for such aid, they claim, is ‘ineffective’ and ‘wasteful’. While there is some degree of validity in their claims, I believe that 1.4 billion of the global population is mired in poverty today because not enough is being done in the right way to help them, and these claims serve only to obscure the humanitarian cause behind the logic of foreign aid.

A predominant argument against the provision of aid to poor nations is that it seems to do no good, given that more often than not, the resources donated are squandered away by corrupt and ruthless dictators, and nothing, it seems, can be done to prevent the rapacious folly of such regimes due to the politically tricky issue of national sovereignty. Food and financial relief provided to Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia, Zimbabwe and other oppressive regimes scarcely reach the starving and the sick because, firstly, the money frequently ends up lining the dirty pockets of immoral rulers, and secondly, aid may be deliberately withheld from the population as defiant leaders see it as a form of political leverage, as has been the case in North Korea where the military regime has, on repeated occasions, threatened to stop the delivery of aid to its citizens in response to the international diplomatic pressure exerted on it regarding its nuclear programme. The efforts of foreign nations in remedying the state of deprivation of the populations in these totalitarian regimes therefore appear to be futile, when they are met with resistance from such crackpot leaders who spare no concern for the welfare of their own people.

Yet, should this completely deter nations from providing foreign relief, without which the people trapped within such authoritarian states would be utterly helpless in the face of famine, disease and death? Even if an unreasonably huge proportion of all humanitarian aid ends up wasted, some good must have been done in getting food, clothes and other basic necessities to the masses, however much has trickled down to them. Indeed, it is precisely because the pitiless rulers of failed states have evidently decided to neglect their people that it becomes all the more compelling that we do not leave these people to their own damned fates when we are empowered to help them with the wealth that we possess. Such is the belief that drives Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in their determined efforts to gain access to the poverty-inflicted populations in the Third World and to reach the outstretched hands of those on the ground even in the face of political obstacles that inevitably confront them.

Other critics of the notion of giving foreign aid point to the idea that most nations remain severely poor despite decades of financial assistance because foreign aid is merely a short-term measure that ultimately falls flat. Because years of channelling money into the African continent has seen little success in poverty alleviation, foreign aid seems to be ‘ineffectual’ and does not deserve to be continued. Certainly, a pertinent problem facing the world today is that the international community has largely failed in developing a long-term solution to poverty, for most Latin American and African economies remain unsustainable and are likely to collapse should foreign money suddenly be withdrawn from them. The lack of infrastructure in supporting the development of a national healthcare and education system has resulted in Mozambique's

enduring state of impoverishment up till the present, like so many other undeveloped nations, and in war-torn regions like the West Bank and Gaza.

However, foreign aid should not simply be dismissed as an 'ineffective' measure with such ease. The next step to take, in the light of these challenges, clearly is to make foreign aid effective. For instance, aid has been instrumental in countries like Kenya and Nigeria where funds have been allocated to fuelling the growth of small-scale cottage industries, such as by providing better heating and cooking stores or installing better systems to harness the energy from rivers, going some way to driving the growth of their domestic economies. Furthermore, it is precisely because the developed nations possess the technical expertise and capital for these 'start-up technologies' that the provision of such aid becomes all the more imperative.

In addition, just because foreign aid has not always helped poor nations in the short run does not immediately imply that short-term aid is useless. Certainly the delivery of food relief to poor populations, especially in times of war or natural disasters, has been crucial in saving human lives, for basic sustenance definitely needs to be met even before we can talk about long-term solutions. Similarly, the provision of medicine in curing gonorrhea, syphilis or even potentially fatal cases of flu has a definite and quantifiable effect in protecting human lives, even if longer-term measures such as education and ensuring sanitation are also necessary in reducing the spread of disease. Every belly filled and every illness cured is a life saved, regardless of the room for improvement in domestic conditions that foreign aid must yet meet. Moreover, it is notable that the provision of medical vaccines goes a very long way in saving lives in the Third World, and the developed nations with the resources to provide them this play a crucial role.

In the wake of humanitarian crises, furthermore, foreign aid becomes the only solution to helping the populations caught in such disasters, whether natural or man-made. A nation devastated by war likely lacks the resources and the political will necessary to relieve the dire state of its people, especially in the case of civil war when the regime itself is consumed by strife, exacting huge human costs that only the intervention of the global community may ameliorate. Countries wrecked by earthquakes or hurricanes, such as Myanmar in the trail of Cyclone Nargis, have nowhere but the outside to turn to for help in providing immediate relief to their people as well as in rebuilding their destroyed infrastructure. In the post-World War II years, too, foreign aid proved key in the reconstruction of the economies of Germany and Japan, the latter having risen to achieve First World status within a decade with extensive aid from the US. Thus, in times when countries are at a loss for reviving their devastated economies and meeting the basic needs of their people, foreign aid may be the only solution.

In the final analysis, then, foreign aid may often fail to achieve its optimum ends due to domestic problems and the absence of long-term plans, yet it cannot so easily be brushed aside as 'ineffective' and 'wasteful', for foreign aid serves absolutely crucial uses in the poverty-stricken half of the world. We ought to keep in mind that just because there are obstacles in the global mission of poverty alleviation does not necessarily mean that we should simply give up on the notion of foreign aid. In fact, the idea of foreign aid being 'wasteful' and 'ineffective' often seems to be a convenient shield for nations who fail to meet the UN's 1% legal requirement of committing funds in aid of other nations, as leaders seek to protect the interests of their own people over those of populations an ocean away. Though it is reasonable to expect a country to help the needy amongst its own people before helping those in other nations, we now live in a world where there have never been such extremes of affluence and deprivation coexisting at the same time, and foreign aid remains a solution that demands the political commitment of nations.

#### Comments:

**You have provided insightful, sensitive observations and a good, balanced discussion on the issue. Some nice examples provided too. You may also like to consider foreign aid rendered to nations by international organisations such as IMF or the World Bank, which often comes with conditions attached, that may actually harm rather than help Third World nations. Overall, it was a pleasure reading your essay!**



**GP****essay 2****“Foreign aid is ineffective and wasteful.” Is this true?**

Teo Ee Nah Vivien (09SO3M)

In the increasingly globalised world we live in today, accelerated by vast improvements in telecommunications, all nations in the world are, in one way or another, interconnected in an all-encompassing web, resulting in a highly interdependent world. While many developed nations and rapidly-developing countries are enjoying immense wealth and a high quality of life, there still exists a large part of humanity, particularly in large swathes of East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, who remain trapped in penury and plagued with domestic problems. Due to our great degree of interdependence and also stemming from moral obligation, there has been a rising sentiment that external bodies, be it the rich developed nations or international organisations, should deliver foreign aid to developing nations to assist them in improving their socio-economic situation. While detractors often dismiss such foreign aid as ineffective and wasteful, I beg to differ. Granted, the current situation of foreign aid provision in the world does prove to be largely ineffective, but it should not be condemned as a wasteful pursuit.

In my opinion, based on the current global outlook, the efficacy of foreign aid is undermined by several factors, largely stemming from the type of aid rendered and how the aid is used (or some say abused) by the governments of the receiving countries. Both the aid-giving and aid-receiving parties have a part to play in rendering the aid ineffective.

First of all, foreign aid is often given in the form of monetary aid, and this makes it extremely susceptible to be misused by venal government officials instead of being channelled towards improving the socio-economic situation of the country. One of the chief factors explaining why many Sub-Saharan African nations are still languishing in poverty is the inept and highly corrupt governments of these countries. A former Nigerian President once estimated that of every dollar in foreign aid given by external bodies to African governments, a whopping eighty cents is siphoned off by corrupt government officials and used to line their pockets, instead of serving its true purpose of helping local communities. Such rife corruption existing in governments receiving aid, as well as the lack of a system of supervision by the foreign bodies providing aid to ensure that the aid is put to justified use, render foreign aid largely ineffective.

In addition, foreign aid can be said to be limited in its efficacy because external bodies providing aid, particularly developed countries, jeopardise the interests of the receiving nations that further exacerbate poverty and intensify their domestic problems, whether directly or indirectly. This notion is best exemplified in the heavy protectionist policies adopted by many Western nations, which are imposed hand-in-hand with the aid that they give the developing countries. For example, the US government and the European Union employ protectionist policies in the form of import tariffs and subsidies for their local farmers, which severely threaten the livelihood of millions in the developing nations. This is because the protectionist policies undercut the prices of agricultural goods and textiles in developing countries, making it difficult for local producers to compete fairly. As a result, many locals in developing countries have lost their jobs and continue to be trapped in poverty. With such unfair terms of trade which undermine the developing nations' poverty-reduction efforts, foreign aid can be said to be largely ineffective in the world today, and will continue to be ineffective unless the developed nations and other external bodies provide the developing nations equitable opportunities to compete fairly in the global market, which can then work hand-in-hand with the foreign aid provided to give these poorer nations a leg-up in their efforts to make poverty history.

Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of foreign aid is also intensified by the type of aid given, which is largely food aid and monetary aid. Through the signing of the Monterrey Treaty, for example, most of the major developed nations in the world have pledged to give 0.7% of their country's GNP to the developing world. While I do not deny the immense impact that such monetary aid can have on the poorer nations, it is definitely not a long-term solution, and will be largely ineffective in improving the socio-economic situation of poorer nations if used on its own. As the age-old maxim goes, “give a man a fish, and he is full for a day; teach a man how to fish, and he is full for life.” Foreign aid is largely ineffective today because it is often

not accompanied by social reform initiatives and economic restructuring guidance, which are in fact more applicable to developing countries in the long-run to provide a sustainable solution to their problems.

The above arguments point to how foreign aid is largely ineffective in the context of the world today, and it often provides critics enough basis to condemn foreign aid to the gallows. However, one must realise that once the factors undermining the effectiveness of foreign aid are solved, foreign aid, in terms of monetary aid, economic advice, social restructuring initiatives and political reforms, actually has immense potential to positively impact the developing world and even lift entire nations out of poverty. It is precisely for this reason that I think foreign aid is not wasteful. When international bodies and developed nations intervene in the plight of developing nations by providing monetary support that is used for furthering the development of these nations, as well as giving sound policy-making advice, its positive effects can be far-reaching. Take Uganda, for example, one of the rising bright spots on an otherwise dark African continent. Using the aid that the country received from foreign bodies, government officials developed the nation's resources and improved the socio-economic situation of their people rather than misused it to line their own pockets. Consequently, poverty in Uganda was reduced by 40% and school enrolments doubled. Under the support of the World Trade Organisation that dispensed sound economic advice, it was also the first African nation to undertake the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and benefitted greatly from it. While the reduction of poverty in Uganda is definitely not solely the result of foreign aid, it is indubitable that foreign aid has provided the basis for this nation to flourish and reap the benefits from the opportunities that foreign aid enables it to undertake. Therefore, given the immense potential of foreign aid to benefit the developing world as long as the right conditions are in place, such as a government committed to serving the interests of its people, foreign aid should not be dismissed as a wasteful pursuit.

To conclude, one must definitely understand that foreign aid cannot be seen as a plague or a panacea. Without a just government, and if aid is not rendered in a suitable manner, the efficacy of foreign aid will definitely be undermined, which is what we see happening in the world today, where foreign aid efforts are often largely ineffective. However, with these conditions met, the effectiveness of foreign aid measures will be boosted and they can then have far-reaching positive effects on the aid-receiving countries. In this vein, foreign aid will then not be wasteful.

**Comments:**

**Generally valid and sound arguments. Well-organised with conviction and balance. Use of examples reveals fair knowledge of issues and critical mind. Insightful and provocative.**

**GP**  
**essay 3**

## What is wrong with organ trading?

Klaxton Kok (09S06T)

With the advent of globalisation in recent years, the level of technology worldwide has advanced by leaps and bounds. Significant advances have also been made in the field of medical science, with the result of improved surgical techniques, which encourage the trade of organs due to the relatively lower risks and less pain involved. While some may contend that the trade of organs may be acceptable in some circumstances, organ trading, due to its inherent nature, is not.

From a purely deontological point of view, the sale and transaction of organs appears to be unethical and immoral, for all the parties involved – namely the seller, the buyer, as well as the doctor or surgeon who carries out the process. The doctor who helps to facilitate this process would appear to be motivated by the profits made from carrying out the operation which would violate the codes of conduct for those practising medicine. In order to divert attention away from this profit motive, the doctor would claim that it is not his responsibility to regulate such acts, but that of the government. However, in so far as “knowledge constitutes power”, doctors with the capability to facilitate the transfer of organs possess an intrinsic authority to regulate the sale of organs if they have any conscience at all. After all, without a doctor acting on the profit motive, organ trading cannot take place.

The conundrum of inequity also comes into play. Just exactly who can be allowed to purchase organs, and how is this fair? Naturally, according to the laws of economics, these organs will not go to those in dire need or those who have been waiting perennially, but instead to those who can afford to fork out huge sums of cash for the organs they need. Tang, the Chief Executive of Tangs departmental store, was recently convicted of organ trading, and was sent to jail for only a day on compassionate grounds given his severe health condition. He had allegedly purchased a kidney from a foreigner in excess of tens of thousands of Singapore dollars to save his ailing health. A storm of questions arose after the publication of this news, with some in support of organ trading and others vehemently opposed to it. The transaction of organs was illegal at that time and the waitlist for a kidney donor was a few years. By purchasing a kidney, Tang had threatened to rip apart the social fabric along wealth lines by exposing the inequity insidiously hidden in the Singapore society.

Furthermore, allowing organ trading to take place without any semblance of a system of checks would inevitably lead to disaster. Once organ trading is allowed, many would go ahead to sell their organs for profit, which would almost certainly expose them to unnecessary risks, since although there has been a significant improvement in the standard of healthcare, it is still far from perfect. The dangers of organ trading are not only limited to those during an operation, where severe haemorrhage is a real risk, but also to those after the operation. Infections may occur to both the buyer and seller, and the buyer may also experience organ rejection and die as a result if the operation was undertaken by a doctor only concerned about the profit motive. In an interview with the Straits Times a few months ago, many organ sellers from Indonesia and the Philippines raised their health problems and stated that they were neglected after the transaction.

However, some may argue that organ trading may be acceptable. From a utilitarian point of view, this may be true. Those in need of organs so severely until they are desperate enough to flout the ban on organ trading are sure to be those who are either close to the end of their lives, or are in intense pain. Receiving a functional organ from a seller may seem to be an appealing alternative to their fate, as it would allow these suffering buyers to live a normal life since an operation would result in a palliative effect. For the organ sellers, many hail from impoverished nations such as Indonesia and the Philippines, and selling their organs in return for cold, hard cash would also be tempting for them to change their way of life, even if only temporarily. Assuming there is always a willing seller and a willing buyer in such private transactions, organ trading may be acceptable from this point of view.

However, it is undeniable that not all organ sellers do it of their own free will. In order to pay off debt, some may sell off their organs under duress and coercion without being informed of the risks beforehand nor given any choice. This may also result in many others resorting to selling off their organs as a first resort and not the last, since they may be encouraged by the existence of many precedents around them.

Due to the nature of Singapore's society where many people suffer from similar diseases, there is always a long waitlist for organs by prospective recipients looking for a way to alleviate their pain and suffering. This further demonstrates the shortage of organs from donors. Allowing organ trading to take place would undoubtedly resolve this shortage successfully, even if it may not always be just to the recipients, since there would be a plethora of organ sellers.

Ultimately, organ trading is unethical and immoral based on its inherent nature since it would take place along wealth lines and breed inequity in society. Even though the trade of organs may be beneficial to both the buyer and the seller since they get their desires, this still does not account for the ethical issues mirroring such a trade, given that there are various viewpoints. An alternative to organ trading is stem cell research and the possible cloning of organs; this would negate the problems associated with organ trading as there would be no need for such a trade. Unfortunately, such research is still in its nascent stage and is clouded by its own ethical issues. Until such cloning is possible, organ trading may be acceptable only in certain circumstances and if there are appropriate checks in place.

**Comments:**

**Overall, you have comprehensively considered the complexities and implications of organ trading in a mature, sensitive manner. Fluent and articulate, with nice use of vocabulary too. Good! Your thesis statement could be refined though, and paragraph 4's argumentation could be improved.**

**GP****essay 4**

What is wrong with organ trading?

Rachel Phoa Huiling (09S03L)

When Singapore business magnate Tang Wee Sung was exposed for engaging in illegal organ trading recently, the scandal rocked the country and ignited a fierce debate on the legalisation of organ trading. Although the benefits of organ trading are obvious – a gift of life to the dying who might not be able to receive it otherwise in exchange for material compensation for the healthy seller in need of money, it is true that there are many problems associated with organ trading, spanning from the ideological issue of putting a price on life to practical problems of how to best protect the rights and health of the sellers. However, in light of the huge benefit that organ trading can bring to all involved, the main problem with organ trading is not, in fact, that organs are being traded but instead the immense difficulty in regulating it and preventing the exploitation of the organ sellers, who mainly comprise the poor.

Firstly, it is undeniable that organ trading can benefit both the buyer and the seller of the organ. For the case of the buyer, it is obvious. The monetary compensation attracts more organ sellers, giving patients on long transplant waiting lists the gift of life, especially in cases of liver failure for which there is no dialysis and a limited prognosis. Hence, the suffering the buyer endures would be greatly diminished, as in the case of kidney patients who would no longer have to endure painful dialysis treatments. With regard to the organ sellers, these are often people in dire need of money. The large amount of money they receive from the sale (it was estimated that the organ seller in Tang's case would have received more than 10 times his annual salary as a rural farmer in compensation) can provide them with the much-needed funds to educate their children, develop their businesses and much more, giving them the chance to escape from the poverty cycle. Thus, it is clear that organ trading can actually benefit both the buyer and seller and can result in a win-win situation.

Some may contend that organ trading puts a price on human life, thereby cheapening the value of it. This may be true as a new "lease of life" may be bought in the form of a new organ, thus putting into contention the original value of it and whether a monetary value can ever be placed on life. Although such concerns are valid, they do not diminish the fact that through offering monetary compensation to organ sellers, more people would be attracted to donate or sell their organs, thus leading to more lives being saved. Proponents of the view that organ trading cheapens human life tend to place a very high value on life; the fact that more lives would be saved should move them to support organ trading instead.

However, despite the benefits of organ trading in theory, in reality, the fact is that it is difficult to execute in practice and is open to abuse. Firstly, in countries where organ trading is not yet legalised and thus cannot be regulated, there is rampant exploitation of the poor. In developing countries like India, cases abound where sellers were either only given a paltry sum as payment or with some even having their organs forcibly robbed from them while under anaesthesia for other procedures. Even if organ trading were to be legalised in such countries, abuse of the poor may not be completely eradicated, only driven underground. The rich or powerful would be in a position to either bribe or threaten the poor who might even be pressured by their own families to give up their organs to provide income. Even if the poor in such cases were compensated adequately, it would hardly be a comfort as they would be forced by circumstances to give up a part of their body and to put their health at risk unnecessarily.

Furthermore, under legalised organ trading systems, there is the problem of the amount of compensation that should be given to sellers. It is difficult to quantify the risk that the seller takes when he or she undergoes the operation, as well as in terms of future health problems. In addition, it is unclear whether the buyer would be responsible for paying for the medical bills in cases where the organ donor were to develop health problems in the future, for example, if a kidney donor developed kidney failure. This is a highly pertinent issue as the sellers are often poor and have no way of paying these medical bills. Thus although in theory, organ trading seems beneficial, in reality, issues such as compensation and regulation to prevent abuse have to be worked out before it can be put in place.



In addition, organ trading may worsen the inequality in the world as well as increase tensions between these two groups. It must be taken into account that in reality, the typical buyer would be wealthy while the typical seller would be mired in poverty. How else would the buyer pay for the organ and why else would someone be willing to give up a part of his body for money? Thus, this may lead to a situation where a significant proportion of the poor may be pressured by economic circumstances to sell their organs to the rich. Ultimately, this could lead to a situation where proportionately more rich people would be able to receive life-saving organ transplants, increasing resentment among the poor who would not have this option. Furthermore, in essence, this would seem to imply that the rich are more deserving of life than the poor, a prospect that is frankly, immoral.

It is proposed by some that a centralised organ trading committee overseen by the government could eliminate the problems of organ trading and make it viable. This central body would be the sole buyer and seller of all organs in a country, thus eliminating problems where the rich pressure the poor to sell their organs. Furthermore, the state would be able to subsidise the poor in need of organ transplants, thus eliminating the problem where only the rich can afford to buy organs. However, significant problems remain, such as the issue of appropriate compensation and unseen persuasion from family members or even personal guilt pressuring the poor to sell their organs.

In conclusion, the basic premise of organ trading of offering monetary compensation in order to increase the number of available organs for transplant is valid as it saves more lives than if organ trading did not exist. The main problems are then due to the difficulties in ensuring that organ trading is so carried out in a fair and egalitarian manner that is free from abuse and exploitation of the poor. In addition, the most feasible proposed solution currently of a centralised, state-controlled organ trading committee does not manage to completely eliminate these implementation problems. Thus, although in theory organ trading is attractive, in reality it is still far from being an appropriate solution to the current problem of long transplant waiting lists.

**Comments:**

**Valid and sound reasoning. Certain insight and fair knowledge of issues shown. Well-organised, balanced and fluent. Most key issues addressed.**

**GP**  
essay 5

'Popular culture has destroyed the true meaning of love and marriage.'  
Do you agree?  
Seow Ai Lin (09S06K)

Traditionally, marriage has been seen as the holy matrimony of a loving couple. However, a cursory glance at entertainment magazines or tabloids would suggest that the sanctity of this union has been devalued by the callous attitudes of those in the entertainment industry. Proponents of this view might go further to conclude that popular culture has eroded the true meaning of love and marriage.

At this point, it is essential for one to take a step back and consider the evolution of attitudes towards love and marriage. It is evident from societal trends that one simply cannot put all the blame on popular culture. Indubitably, popular culture has influenced society's, especially the younger generation's, perceptions of love and marriage, but taking into account other factors like modernisation which is coupled with inevitable shifts in mindsets, it would be a hasty generalisation to insist that popular culture single-handedly eroded the true meaning of love and marriage, although it has played a major role in this degradation of matrimonial values.

Firstly, it is necessary for us to evaluate the so-called "true" meaning of love and marriage. A random check on an online dictionary turns up the following definition of marriage: the legal union between a male and a female. Some dictionaries even add on that the purpose of the union is to start a family, thus bridging a close link between marriage and child-bearing. If the true meaning of marriage is to be based on traditional views of this union, this "true meaning" could very well have been "destroyed" by modernisation. The Industrial Revolution, which encompassed rapid urbanisation and displacement of traditional intensive farming methods, has made the notion of a big family with many offspring, a typical agrarian family, unnecessary in today's urbanised society. The typical family today is shrinking in size, with some married couples even deciding not to have children, simply because the need for a family, implied as the purpose of a marriage in traditional perceptions, is no longer present as it was in the past.

The gradual omission of the notion of child-bearing in the traditional meaning of marriage has also been mainly spurred on by women's rights activists and the evolution of lifestyles. In fighting for women's emancipation from chauvinistic branding such as that of "child-bearer", women's rights activists have also, whether intentionally or not, instigated a paradigm shift in the meaning of marriage. Traditionally, marriage was viewed as an institution for the founding of a family, with the man as the breadwinner and the woman as a "child-bearer" and housewife. However, in today's modernised societies, this meaning of marriage is obsolete, although conservative opponents view this as the true meaning of marriage. In fact, the "true" meaning of marriage varies from era to era and what society observes is not necessarily a destruction of the "true meaning", but rather an evolution in the definition of love and marriage to keep up with the demands and changing lifestyles of a rapidly modernising world.

The "true meaning" of love, like marriage, cannot be easily defined. In the past, many marriages were decided by parents and were more of tactical moves for economic or social betterment in the sense of moving up the social hierarchy or to foster business relations. Love was hardly construed as strong affection for each other and it was of little relevance, if not entirely neglected, in decisions of matrimonial union. In fact, it is to the credit of the mass media that love became increasingly valued as a deciding factor in marriage. The passionate feelings and other characteristics of true love such as willingness to sacrifice for a loved one were all made increasingly popular by Hollywood films, soap operas and drama serials. The aspect of undying love in romance or marriage is highly sought after today probably due to its intensive coverage and emphasis in the media. This evolution propagated by the media and popular culture, which brought the notion of true love from obscurity to a highly sought after emotion, can hardly be termed a destruction of the true meaning of love.

On the other hand, one has to acknowledge that the nonchalant attitudes of some celebrities towards love and marriage have tainted the meaning or value of love and marriage. In the popular series "Desperate Housewives", the characters are seen exploiting relationships and undermining the value of love and

marriage by using love and marriage as the means to an end, such as exacting revenge or acquiring wealth. The frequent reports on celebrity divorces have also influenced many young, easily swayed minds, to perceive marriage as an act of impulse, and to confuse love with infatuation.

However, popular culture has also championed the notion of true love more than anything else in literature, films (even ‘chick flicks’) and music. One typical storyline would be that of the princess and the pauper, where love transcends all superficial boundaries such as that of social or financial standing. Most romance novels or films would also end with the protagonist marrying the man or woman he/she truly loves instead of the rival who might be wealthier or of greater social status. These aspects of popular culture encourage the valourisation of love and marriage and enhance or fortify their true meaning.

Some may say that homosexual behaviour commonly depicted in popular culture such as in the film “Brokeback Mountain” erodes the meaning of love and marriage. However, it is not for one to decide if homosexuality defies this true meaning or if the act of homosexuality should be morally condemned. Moreover, the increasing number of cases of homosexual marriages is primarily the result of efforts by homosexual rights activists. In France, the annual marches of the LGBTs (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals) have fuelled the paradigm shifts in the meaning of love and marriage traditionally confined to refer to relationships between a male and a female. National policies or government-funded institutions such as the PACS (‘Pacte Civil de Solidarité’) in France have also aided in broadening the spectrum of the meaning of love and unions of couples, thus changing the meanings of love and marriage.

In conclusion, the so-called “true meaning” of love and marriage is impossible to define as its meaning is constantly being reshaped and moulded according to the blueprint of society’s progress at any one point in time. Meanings founded on traditional perceptions have been modified or “destroyed” as they cannot keep up with and remain applicable to the rapidly modernising world. Popular culture has undeniably depicted behaviours that go against morally accepted perceptions of love and marriage and perhaps undermined the importance of marriage by its intensive coverage on and seemingly callous attitudes towards divorces. However, more often than not, “true love” and happy marriages have taken centrestage in popular culture in the form of countless movie storylines or even real-life celebrity marriages. Thus, it would be a gross generalisation to say that popular culture has destroyed the true meaning of love and marriage since such true meaning is subjective and many other factors play equally important roles.

**Comments:**

**Good attempt. Arguments are confidently and convincingly presented overall.**

**GP**  
essay 6

“The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter” – Winston Churchill. To what extent do you agree?

Jesulyn Lim (09S03F)

In many countries, democracy is increasingly being adopted as the political system of governance, where the electorate votes for the government by vox populi. This inherently implies that the voice of the majority and the average voter is a prudent one that will aid in the social, economic and political progress of a country. Critics of this system argue that it is not judicious to vest power in the hands of the average voter as he is often ill-informed about the state of affairs of the country, and is usually prejudiced by his socio-economic or cultural background, thereby vitiating attempts to create a progressive political system that will advance the country. Nevertheless, history has shown that the rule of the majority and the views of the average voter, especially in mature democracies, are a crucial engine of progress, one that will eventually ensure the lasting progress of a nation.

On the surface, Churchill may be correct that a “five-minute conversation with the average voter” is the “best argument against democracy”. The average voter is often not very educated – certainly not armed with doctorates on strategic governance – and more often than not a member of the humble proletariat, or if more fortunate, the bourgeoisie. Such a member of the country, relative to more informed technocrats, may seem hopelessly ill-informed about governing the country, and hardly poised to navigate the complex waters of foreign affairs or finance. So how are they expected to vote judiciously, amidst the cacophony of election parties and candidates claiming to know best? The recent general election of Indonesia has resulted in the election of a significant number of celebrities, who were voted in by virtue of their popularity with the average voter and their congenial smiles, instead of on the basis of their ability to govern. Analysts from Indonesia’s think tanks have lambasted these young celebrities as they have crowded out more capable political veterans who would be in the position to advance Indonesia’s interests. Hence, ill-informed voters may make democracy dysfunctional, contrary to its original tenet that wisdom is derived from the average voter.

Another criticism is that the average voter may not take into account the long-term interests of the country, as he is often blindly partisan, resulting in an unwillingness to sacrifice partisan interests to reach a consensus. The rowdy politics of Taiwan best exemplifies the fact that voters can place partisan interests before national interests, as evidenced by the numerous showdowns between voters of both sides of the two major parties, that unfortunately result sometimes in violence between crowds wearing shirts of their party colour. Similarly, Thailand has witnessed such a power struggle characterised by partisanship, and to a deeper extent, the underlying social strata that form the basis of these clashes. The senseless occupancy of Bangkok’s international airport and the violent disruption of the recent ASEAN meeting caused much mortification to Thailand, stalling the progress of any real, enlightened consensus amongst the various factions of voters. To the extent that partisanship may take precedence over national interests, the average voter may be ill-suited to possess the power vested by democracy.

In turn, the average voter may be coloured by his socio-economic and cultural background that may result in unenlightened bigotry and intolerance, much to the detriment of the country, especially the minority. In America, various debates about contentious issues have been characterised by prejudice and bigotry amongst the voters. Without the help of leaders who can see past these differences and forge a reasonable consensus, many of these debates have seemed to reach a deadlock. For example, many religious voters resolutely view embryonic stem cell research as a violation of the sanctity of human life, instead of considering the numerous cures to such diseases as Parkinson’s and diabetes it could bring to mankind. The debate about abortion is also stuck in such a deadlock where the pro-life faction cannot reconcile their views with the pro-choice voters. Such a chasm has earned America the epithet that it is constantly engaged in ineffectual “culture wars”, as voters and factions organise themselves among groups that seek conflict and not consensus. Taken to the extreme, bigoted voters have resulted in the rise of Nazi Germany, where many supported Hitler’s anti-Semitic regime, which resulted in the systematic extermination of six million Jews, forever tarnishing the annals of history. Thus, as the average voter may be prejudiced and

bigoted, he seems ill-suited to possess any form of constitutional right to vote for a party or candidate that may similarly represent his narrow-minded and callous views, as granted by democracy.

Nevertheless, the view that the average voter is ill-informed holds little water. In mature democracies, it is often the voter who has served as the guardian against ineffectual parties that have pursued policies contrary to the voters', and to a larger extent, national interests. Critics who argue for a country's leadership to be composed of enlightened technocrats – for example, in communist China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – may benefit from knowing that the average voter is often engaged in active citizenry, directly by participating in nation-building affairs such as grassroots work, or indirectly by searching for information so that the best party representative of his or her interests will be voted. In China, where voting has not been instituted, the Internet has proven to be a place where discontent against the CCP and its politics – such as political repression and censorship – has appeared, fuelled by the discontent among ordinary people. To a greater extent, the existence of Switzerland as a successful mature democracy, where average voters can pass a bill by collecting 50,000 signatures from other members of the electorate, shows that the average voter is capable of making wise decisions and reasonable opinions that enable the country to advance. In an elected democracy where power has the potential to be abused, it is the average voter who has acted as the guardian.

In a similar vein, the argument that the average voter is prejudiced is largely hyperbolised. The election of President Obama, America's first black president, has proven to be a phenomenal example of how voters are increasingly judging candidates based on their abilities, instead of bigoted reasons such as race, religion, or gender. In addition, they have voted for a candidate who has pledged to move beyond partisanship, showing that not all voters are concerned about sticking to their cloistered factions. Similarly, Singaporeans have appeared to transcend racial and religious loyalties by voting for people of other backgrounds such as the Mayor of Central Singapore, Zainudin Nordin, who is Malay. The growing demise of extremist parties, even during hard times such as the recent recession, and the broader shift towards more tolerant, centrist parties, has proven that voters have been judicious enough to put away their personal prejudices to vote for parties that will bring social harmony and economic progress to the country.

As far as arguments against the average voter go, they are partially justified, but with increasing awareness through education and the plethora of views on the mass media, the average voter is sufficiently well-informed and willing to place the interests of the nation above partisan and bigoted prejudices. If the average voter were to be removed from the equation of democracy, democracy will cease to function, and as a logical extension, oligarchies, autocracies, or communist regimes will fill the power vacuum. Without the power vested in the average voter, who will guard these people? There is no guarantee that they will act in the interest of the majority and the country. Thus, at the very least, the average voter serves as the guardian against inept rulers, and at the very best, he guarantees that a diversity of views is heard and such active citizenry will ensure the vital progress and evolution of the nation.

#### Comments:

**Generally valid, insightful ideas raised. However, the examples you cited to highlight bigotry in America are not suitable because it just shows that there are issues that are largely controversial and people can be divided in their views. To label others as bigoted because you don't agree with their views smacks of intolerance, to put it bluntly.**

**Nonetheless a commendable piece of work, overall.**



**GP**  
**essay 7****"The book is dead. Long live the Internet." Discuss.**

Brian Soh (09A01A)

In the Middle Ages, the passing of a king would be followed by a particular ritual in which a herald would proclaim from the castle battlements: "The old king is dead. Long live the king!" The statement, "The book is dead. Long live the Internet." alludes to this practice and suggests that the Internet has succeeded the book. As with all analogies, this comparison is justifiable only to a certain extent. However, it is obvious that while the book has long held great power over the world, this does not mean that it has conferred all power to the Internet. The book is still very much alive today, and will be in the future, even as we herald the rise of the Internet in this digital age of information and technology.

For centuries, the book was the only tangible repository of knowledge in the world. It was the epitome of the writing system, evolved from prehistoric scratches in the sand or paintings on the walls, more advanced than cumbersome clay and stone tablets. Today, it is being challenged by the Internet on these two fronts, the same two fronts on which it proved its mastery over other forms of recording and disseminating information: capacity and accessibility. Just as the thin leafed book trumped tablets and scrolls, the Internet, in binary ones and zeroes, seems to have the upper hand over the book. Likewise, just as the fabled Library of Alexandria contained hundreds of thousands of books, the Internet has billions of websites. The Internet, as a vast network of information, undoubtedly contains more information than a single book or a single library. The readiness and convenience with which this information is accessed is also much greater than thumbing through a book with the advent of search engines such as Google, which only promises to improve, in terms of finding the information one is seeking, in the future. These are indisputably two areas in which the Internet is superior to the book; however, they deserve qualifications – qualifications which will reveal the continuing importance and relevance of the book today.

Firstly, the Internet definitely does not include the entire corpus of the written word. True, books are increasingly finding their way onto the Internet, and thereby the information they contain is being digitised. However, there is still much knowledge residing in books today that have not found their way onto the Internet. This exclusive information is one reason why the book is still very much alive as people will have to refer to them until and unless they are published online. Secondly, the Internet might render information more accessible than the book, but only provided one has access to the Internet to begin with. Previously only computers could connect to the Internet; now, mobile devices such as phones and gaming devices are able to connect to the Internet. This might suggest an increasingly wired world, but for the most part, this is restricted to developed countries, and particularly, those in the middle or upper classes. Much of the world still has no access to the World Wide Web, making its name very much an irony. Africa is arguably the most underdeveloped continent. It follows that many Africans have no access to the Internet. Granted it might be argued that they have relatively infrequent access to books, and even more so that illiteracy in Africa is extremely high, but still, the written word has greater penetration there than broadband. There are campaigns such as the 'One Laptop per Child' programme to give more people in Africa and the world access to a computer and more importantly the Internet, but at this juncture, the book, not the Internet, is living and thriving in most of the world.

Developing naturally from the theme of "haves and have-nots", it is not just underdeveloped countries that demonstrate the importance and continued relevance of the book. Many of the less well-to-do in societies all over the developed world are unable to have access to the Internet. They are simply too poor to afford to establish a dial-up or pre-paid connection to the Internet. The readily available substitute? The book, and by extension, the library. Even in communities where the Internet enjoys pride of place, the book is far from dead.

These issues aside, some also argue that the Internet presents more possibilities than the book. The Internet is multi-media. The farthest a book goes into another dimension is probably in the form of a pop-up book. Tying into this area of contention, the Internet allows for greater range of expression, and gives a voice and virtual page to many would-be writers in the world. The Internet has been home to

revolutionary phenomena such as weblog or “blogging” sites, fan-fiction sites, and video-sharing sites, the most famous of which is YouTube. As a repository of entertainment, at least, the Internet seems to render the book insufficient and in many ways, pathetic. There is no readily available riposte to this; however, there is a counterargument – just as the rise of the television, the cinema and the silver screen did not see the demise of the book, neither will the Internet. The newspaper is very much alive today despite the presence of a civilian journalistic population online, and even news networks online. Likewise, even as artists, good or bad, release their works on the Internet, there will still be authors the like of John Grisham and J. K. Rowling publishing books. Even with the presence of blogs, diaries such as Anne Frank’s will be published.

This last example lends itself to two more arguments in favour of the book’s continued existence. Firstly, significant written works will continue to be published despite their presence on the Internet, in part due to the previous arguments about accessibility, and arguably as long as printing moguls and publishing houses exist. As Say’s Law has it: supply creates its own demand. Great works of literature will continue to be published and translated. The Internet is predominantly English, and foreseeably will be so long as there exists the great Firewall of China. Great literature will only find translation in the medium of the printed word. Furthermore, some great literature can only be read in book-form for the desired effect. One shudders at the thought of reading epic works such as ‘The Canterbury Tales’ online, though it is possible. Firstly, the flickering screen would be extremely uncomfortable for over twenty thousand lines of poetry. Furthermore, there is the feeling that poetry, at least, deserves to be read in a book, frivolous as that may sound.

Secondly, the printed word is reliable and arguably more reliable than the digital word. The entire publication process reduces the possibility of false information, or plagiarised work, an increasingly troublesome trend facing academic institutions with the availability of information on the Internet. Academic journals, just like great literature, will continue to be held in high esteem, and insofar as these journals find themselves made into books, or if “books” may be stretched metaphorically to encapsulate the written word (not too far of course – it would not reach “newspaper”), the book is very much alive today.

Lastly, there are certain books which are unique, and may not be transposed onto the Internet and still retain their potency – picture books, for example, and the avant-garde art forms released as books. The electric screen may not do justice to these unique books, and so in many ways, these books remain exclusive and independent of the Internet. Also, there are books which are solely intended as collectors’ items. They may be bound by hand, embroidered, embossed and embellished for the purpose of serving as trophies. Such items, by nature, may never “die” because they are intended to live forever as memorabilia. This illustrates a niche area where books may go and the Internet may not. It may even be argued that as the Internet gains precedence, the book may become something of an item of status and prestige, even as the rich collect handwritten codices and manuscripts today.

The book is not dead, neither is it dying. It may have been obliged to share its throne with the Internet, and indeed, what is so undesirable about that? The Internet has its advantages, and in certain areas may indeed be preferred to the book. However, the same can be said of the book. This is not a competition, ultimately, such as between Blu-Ray and High-Definition Discs. The book and the Internet may coexist to bring benefit to mankind in their dissemination of information, and so should be respected in their own right. Long live the Internet, but long live the book as well!

#### Comments:

**Original, thoughtful analysis amply evident in this essay! Sensitive, mature observations made, with apposite examples cited. Excellent use of language too, with nice analogies provided.**

**GP****essay 8****"The book is dead. Long live the Internet." Discuss.**

Gan Yu Neng (09A03A)

Information lives to be transmitted, and for centuries, books have served this purpose, archiving, 'locking down' and then passing it on. From journals to religious texts, scientific studies to romantic novels, the book has served to preserve and disseminate information, and to enlighten or educate its readers. Over the past decade, however, the rapid advent of the Internet has shaken the traditional role of the book. With the ability to transmit regularly updated information at the speed of broadband, giving free access to vast resources, and opening avenues for more people to publish their commentaries or creative writing, it is no wonder the Internet has been called the 'information super-highway'. The question is, with the Internet taking over its main functions and doing them faster and better than ever before, is there still then a place for the humble hardcopy? Does the rise of the Internet mark the fall of the book?

One of the chief flaws of the book has always been accessibility. It is not always possible for a reader or researcher to obtain the exact title or edition he is looking for. Novels or scientific journals published in Asia or Eastern Europe take ages to become available in American bookstores. Copies of A-level Literature texts in Singapore have to be specially imported from Britain. The Internet, however, has completely reduced the accessibility problem to the relatively simple one of finding a connection. Not only does the Internet carry information from a variety of sources, it also has websites that specifically archive hard-to-find publications and post them online. The Gutenberg Project transcribes old literary texts from all eras, posting them online for free – a huge boon for readers interested in books no longer being sold at a convenient location. Websites such as Questia and JSTOR store full academic journals, books, newspaper and magazine articles and miscellaneous reports, all easily catalogued for the benefit of any trawling researcher. By storing all this information online in large databases, the Internet has tremendously improved its portability in a way that a book would never have been able to do.

There is also the sheer amount of information available on the Internet, both in breadth and depth, which a book (or even a series of books!) just cannot match up to. Because of limits imposed by the costs of publication, a book by necessity cannot contain everything. In the interests of keeping costs lower, editors of textbooks are sometimes forced to truncate the more minor pieces of information, directing interested readers to more in-depth resources online. Books that do go into depth tend to have a very limited breadth, which causes them to be of highly limited use outside of their subject area. Internet resources easily trounce their counterparts, due to the fact that they cost very little to publish. Websites like Instructables and Wikipedia offer in-depth guides and resources over an incredible range of topics. This presentation of information – broad and varied in subject, yet detailed and meticulous throughout – is one of the factors supporting the rise of the Internet over the book.

Yet another reason the Internet is better is also related to cost; that is, that while books with errors or outdated information have to be reprinted from scratch, articles and websites on the Internet can be quickly and easily edited, costing the writer nothing. Earlier, I mentioned Wikipedia, which is the exact embodiment of this. Wikipedia is an online phenomenon that allows users to freely create and edit information as they see fit. In short, it is a completely dynamic resource, with new updates every minute, constantly evolving, updating, self-correcting, improving. In this way, Wikipedia is the exact opposite of a book which, once published, is static and staid. While Wikipedia is sometimes feared to be inaccurate, the fact that so many users – including experts in their respective fields – frequent and update the website, ensures that it is maintained as factually accurate as possible. Besides, while an edit on Wikipedia takes three clicks, editing an entry in the hardcopy World Encyclopedia would incur a titanic printing cost. In this age of information where what we know is consistently being challenged and changed, a hardcopy book only looks like a clunky, clumsy tool for dissemination when compared to the sleek, ever-changing Internet.

Yet while there are many clear, practical reasons for the ending of the reign of the book, it still remains one of the primary means of storing or publishing information. While there are several possible reasons for this, perhaps the chief one is utility. On the Internet, while you would find all manner of easily-accessible

resources at the click of a mouse, the same can be said of all sorts of even more easily-accessible distractions. Websites like Instructables are incredibly user-friendly in that they hold a wide range of in-depth technical guides. This wide range, however, may serve to become a distraction to the reader, especially if they send him hopping from link to link, picking up all manner of wittily-written guides but ultimately failing to start work on what he had originally been searching for in the first place. Books, on the other hand, come with no such distractions. Be they novels or textbooks, they engage the reader only on the basis of their own value, and the value of their content to the reader. When a student is studying for an important examination, or a researcher is urgently looking up a resource, distractions due to the sheer variety of content and multimedia on the Internet can be both especially tempting and exceptionally deadly. In terms of their practical purpose, books can be a much better tool of study or research than the Internet.

In addition, one thing books have that the Internet will never be able to duplicate is sheer physical authenticity. The cost of publishing a book acts as a barrier to entry against casual writers; publishers want to ensure that their books sell, and thus would only publish books of a certain quality. That sort of quality check is not available on the Internet, especially on websites that champion free publishing. Any hack can put up his dribbling on Fictionpress.net. Any angst-filled teenager can put up his or her macabre, misspelt poetry online. Anyone can masquerade a superstition for scientific truth and create a website to scare similarly weak-minded netizens. But only someone with authentic talent, or with actual factual information, or with a real cause to champion and the funds to support it, can get a book published. Besides, there is a clear psychological difference to reading a novel manuscript off a laptop screen and actually cradling the hardcopy edition in one's hand. Many readers find more satisfaction reading off a physical page as opposed to when one just scrolls down the monitor. Simple sentimentalities? Perhaps. But the physical presence of a book and the difference it can make as compared to an online version is enough reason for many to go for a hardcopy instead of logging onto the Internet.

There are many clear, practical reasons for the Internet to become the storehouse of information of this new age. However, the book's continued survival has behind it a mix of pragmatism and romance, a good deal of practical sense with a touch of sentiment, that ensures that no matter how omnipotent the Internet may become in the future, the book will never truly die.

**Comments:**

**This is beautifully written: I daresay there is poetry in your prose! Though your arguments are not the most original, they are compelling because of your confident command of the language.**



**GP**  
essay 9

“Humanity is acquiring all the right technology for all the wrong reasons.”  
Comment.  
Nicole Thio (09S06W)

The world today is in the midst of a technocratic revolution, whereby new technologies in various areas ranging from biotechnology to info-communications are being developed continually. Technology that could be used for the improvement of humanity's quality of life, and is safe to use, can be considered as the right technology that should be appreciated by society. The motivations for developing such technology are not always morally right, as some people might only be using technology as a means of achieving their own selfish ends, although there do exist purely altruistic reasons for developing technology as well.

Firstly, one of the wrong reasons for developing technology would be for the pursuit of warfare or other hostile reasons. Various countries have been developing nuclear weapons, and other weapons of mass destruction, either to threaten other countries with the possibility of nuclear warfare, or to serve as a form of deterrence against potential aggressors. The development of such a hazardous form of technology is already dangerous and life-threatening in itself, and the intention to use such destructive technology to wage war on fellow humans would clearly be a morally unacceptable one, given that it would lead to unjustified and widespread destruction of humankind. Many innocent lives would be lost, should a nuclear war break out, and the harmful and mutilating effects of nuclear radiation would last for at least a few generations. For example, the explosion of the world's first atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II in 1945 led to the deaths of many innocent Japanese civilians, and also caused some children who were born after the explosion to be physically deformed due to exposure to harmful nuclear radiation when they were still in their mothers' wombs. Therefore, despite the fact that nuclear technology could be useful to mankind in the sense that it would be used to solve the world's energy woes since it is a form of non-polluting clean energy, the development of nuclear technology for the sake of waging extensively destructive wars on other nations for the selfish and inhumane desires of certain nations or governments is morally unacceptable.

Another wrong reason for acquiring technology would be profit-driven motivations. In today's commercialised and capitalist world, there exists a growing number of profit-driven businessmen who tend to exploit the needs and wants of society in order to earn monetary benefits for themselves. These people usually acquire technology in order to develop goods and services that cater to the desires of consumers, usually the richer ones who are able and willing to pay large sums of money to obtain what they want. This could be considered a wrong reason for acquiring technology, since the businessmen are merely using the technology as a means for obtaining greater profits, and not for the sake of improving society's quality of life. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The development of such technology tends to result in benefits for society as well, although not everyone would stand to benefit equally from these forms of technology, given that capitalist societies tend to benefit the rich more than the poor. For example, profit-driven pharmaceutical companies have developed and patented many drugs, and these drugs are then sold to consumers who are willing to pay a higher price for these patented drugs, since these drugs cannot be obtained elsewhere. While these consumers are able to enjoy the benefits of consuming these drugs, the poorer ones who are unable to afford the high prices of patented drugs would have to bear with their ailments and suffering. Hence, the acquisition of technology for profit-driven reasons can be considered to be morally wrong, since the technology is not used to benefit society as a whole, but rather to benefit businessmen and entrepreneurs through the process of meeting consumer demands.

However, there are also altruistic scientists who have developed technology purely with the intention of improving the quality of life of mankind, and not for their own selfish reasons. For example, the smallpox vaccine was created in order to prevent the spread of smallpox, so that people would be less likely to be infected by this disease. Technological advancements in the area of medical surgeries have also led to the development of minimally-invasive surgical procedures such as key-hole surgery, which have been made readily available to patients, so that they would be able to undergo safer surgeries in which scarring is minimised as well. The development in the area of stem cell research has also contributed to the ability of doctors in the treatment of debilitating and degenerative ailments such as cancer, brain tumours and



Parkinson's disease. The Internet, which has proven to be extremely useful in today's information-driven world, was developed by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, who chose not to patent his discovery, so that this useful tool could be made readily available to society. All these examples above show that there are indeed cases where humanity acquires technology for the right reasons – for the betterment of humankind through the treatment of diseases or through improvements in standards of living. These reasons are considered to be morally right reasons, because they stem from a genuine desire to improve society's welfare and to alleviate man's suffering wherever possible.

There have been cases where forms of technology that were developed for the right reasons ended up being used for unethical purposes. For example, the development of the Internet was meant to improve communication amongst distant countries, and to enable the extensive flow of cross-border knowledge and information. However, in recent years, the Internet has been used as a means for spreading pornographic content, as well as terrorism-related ideology. However, the initial motivation for the development of such technology was still a genuinely altruistic one, and hence, these forms of technology can still be considered to have been acquired for the right reasons, although they might have subsequently been used for immoral purposes.

In conclusion, the usage of technology for the amelioration of humanity's quality of life can be considered to be the right motivation for acquiring technology. While there may exist selfish reasons for acquiring technology in today's increasingly capitalist world, the reasons for developing technology usually stem from a desire to improve the lives of mankind, and the usage of such technology does indeed improve society's welfare more often than not, and hence it can be said that humanity does not always acquire all the right technology for all the wrong reasons; sometimes the right technology is developed for the right reasons, and sometimes, technology that is developed for the wrong reasons can still be used to benefit mankind as well. Ultimately, regardless of the motivations for developing technology, it is up to humankind to decide.

**Comments:**

**A delightful read – you cover all the bases required of the question and do so convincingly (via the use of apt examples) and fluently. Good job!**

**GP****essay 10****“Humanity is acquiring all the right technology for all the wrong reasons.”  
Comment.**

Paul Tern (09S03M)

General Omar Bradley, Commander of the US Forces, once ominously declared, “Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.” In a world where technology has vastly increased the destructive capabilities of weapons, such that wars fought now bring greater carnage and wanton destruction, it is not hard to agree with General Bradley’s statement. Indeed, it appears that whilst most of the technology which mankind has developed thus far has potential benefits to society and can thus be termed the “right technology”, some of these inventions have regrettably been attained for unethical or destructive reasons. Yet, it still remains that a large proportion of the technological advancements mankind has seen over the years was achieved for largely positive reasons, and hence, humanity cannot be said to have acquired all the right technology for all the wrong reasons.

A cursory examination of the topic at hand would indubitably draw one’s attention to the argument that many of mankind’s technological advancements have resulted from a race between countries to boost their military might, and hence, have been achieved for the “wrong reasons”. Cognizant of the need to maintain a powerful arsenal of weapons to deter potential aggressors, countries have taken to research and development to build stronger tanks, faster aircraft and more precise missiles – technology which could be applied to other fields for the benefit of mankind, but instead was employed to boost the destructive capabilities of a nation’s military and threatened to lay waste to other civilisations. One has to look no further than the atomic bomb to see how technology may have been perverted to achieve destructive objectives. When Albert Einstein came up with his Nobel Prize-winning formula,  $E=mc^2$ , he expected it to be used for the good of mankind to advance our knowledge in physics, or even for mankind to harness the immense amount of energy released from the splitting of an atom to generate power. Instead, his equation formed the foundation of the Manhattan Project, which ultimately saw the development of nuclear weapons capable of unleashing previously unthinkable amounts of damage. Since then, nuclear weapons have been unleashed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, causing the loss of millions of lives. Today, many countries retain thousands of warheads to sustain this concept of mutually assured destruction, leaving Einstein to proclaim that he would not have formulated his equation, if he had known that it would eventually be used for war. Hence, the use of technology to achieve destructive ends as in the case of war machines stands as a clear testament to how mankind has attained the right technology, but for the wrong reasons.

In addition, humanity may have sought to acquire technology for its own private economic gain. Under such circumstances, then, the advancement of technology would be for selfish personal gain, a motivation which is arguably very parochial and self-centred, and to that end, “wrong”. This trend of developing new technology for private economic gain has increased significantly in recent years, most notably in the pharmaceuticals industry. Drug companies race to find new and better cures, just so that they can be the first to apply for the patent, and reap the full benefits of monopolising a drug line which is licensed exclusively to them. Their selfish actions have caused many drugs to be grossly overpriced, so much so that much of the poor find it hard to gain access to such medication to cure their ailments. Concomitantly, this practice of pursuing research just to secure a patent and reap the corollary economic benefits has extended to the biotechnology sector, where research institutes have begun patenting cell-lines and even parts of the human genome. Ergo, whilst it is foolish to expect scientists to pursue research without any form of economic remuneration and be motivated solely by the altruistic goal of bettering human lives, it is still lamentable that research and the attainment of technology is motivated largely by selfish, economic purposes.

Furthermore, the attainment of certain technology has come fraught with ethical considerations. For example, gene therapy, whilst opening the door to possibly curing many debilitating diseases caused by genetic defects, is still an ethical minefield as it involves changing one’s DNA, and thus paves the way for possible abuse for eugenics. Similarly, the use of genetically modified (GM) food has boosted yields and given rise to more pest-resistant crops, yet has left many critics claiming that we are trying to ‘play God’ and tampering with life itself. Hence, while all the above examples may be the “right technology” in that

they might possibly benefit human lives, there always remains the nagging fear that research conducted into these fields is for unethical reasons, be it for eugenics or otherwise.

However, the situation is not as bad as critics make it out to be. While some aspects of technology may have been perverted and used for the wrong reasons, there remains evidence to show that a large bulk of technology was attained for the purpose of benefitting humanity as a whole. In fact, most of the inventions we see today were in response to human problems, or to overcome human limitations. The Wright Brothers, fascinated with the thought of empowering mankind with the ability to fly, invented the aeroplane. Meanwhile, Mr Hoover, determined to find a better way to clean the home, invented the vacuum cleaner. The Internet, though starting out as a military project, saw its greatest growth when programmers saw its potential in connecting people around the world and contributed to its development. For much of the technology we enjoy now, it appears that they were developed out of a desire to improve human lives and further humanity's understanding of science, rather than for economic or military purposes. Recently, the completion of the particle accelerator in Europe saw the government committing billions of dollars to the project, which was aimed at getting particles to collide at high speeds so that scientists could use these observations to add to our wealth of physics knowledge. In this sense, if technology is attained for the progress of society, it can be said to be developed for the right reasons.

Furthermore, man has shown that he is still willing to pursue research to aid humanity, and not always for other "wrong" objectives. During the outbreak of bird flu, research labs around the world banded together and posted resources to develop a cure. The resultant drug, Tamiflu, was instantly made available to every country to enable them to stave off the pestilence. More recently, the surge in green technology has come as a result of many scientists' and environmentalists' concern for our planet, and their desire to see a more sustainable world.

In conclusion, then, to paraphrase a quote from the book "Disturbing the Universe", Man can never label his toys "good" or "bad". In the same vein, much as we would like to draw a distinction between technology that is attained for the right or wrong reasons, the truth remains that a large majority of technology has been acquired for both beneficial and destructive purposes. Such is the nature of technology as a double-edged sword, that it would be premature to conclude that humanity has acquired all the right technology for all the wrong reasons. While the development of certain technologies may have been for dubious motives, it is undoubted that a large proportion of scientists continue to commit themselves to their research in the hope of building a brighter future for us all. Thus, while it is perhaps safe to repudiate this statement, these few negative examples would forever remain as a trawling shadow against a future of light.

**Comments:**

**Valid and sound reasoning. Good grasp of the language. Well-organised and balanced, with relevant examples. Insightful, revealing fair knowledge and keen intellect.**

**GP****essay 11****“Ours is a nation of immigrants that should continue to welcome immigrants.” Discuss this in relation to Singapore.**

Daniel Chew Wen Chao (09S03M)

Immigration has always been a thorny issue for countries all over the world to navigate. As much as immigration, or the flow of people across borders, has been deemed a part of today's reality that we must accept, it has also been the hot-button topic for much heated debate. The issues of how countries can seek to benefit from the immigration of people, and to what extent this should be allowed, are contentious ones for which there is no easy answer. This applies to Singapore as well, particularly given her status as a nation founded by immigrants in search of a better life. However, my opinion is that although immigration does bring with it certain problems, given Singapore's unique context as an open, multi-racial society with proud ambitions, immigrants do contribute positively to our progress in certain ways and should be welcomed.

The discussion over this issue should always bear in mind Singapore's unique identity, with her early beginnings as a floundering colonial port-of-call that attracted many in the Asian region to traverse the high seas to seek their riches here. Our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society was established through the peaceful co-habitation of early settlers who were from a huge spectrum of countries, and this has remained until this very day. Herein lies the question: if Singapore had progressed from being an immigrant nation, would it not be ironic if we were to close our doors on immigrants now? To take it a step further, some could even proclaim that it is tantamount to rejecting our own heritage, and by extension, our identity.

However, it has to be conceded that there are reasons why some may feel that immigrants should not be welcomed anymore. One of the most common refrains must surely be the oft-heard lament that foreigners steal job opportunities from Singaporeans, or that competition from foreigners results in the driving down of wages. If the influx of immigrants threatens the ability of locals to remain gainfully employed, and even decreases their standards of living due to a loss of income, it is no surprise that the knee-jerk reaction would be to denounce these immigrants and to seek to drive them out. For example, when news leaked that Las Vegas Sands, the company behind the construction of the integrated resort (IR) at Marina Bay, had promised the Philippines President job vacancies for Filipinos, the Singaporean public was in an uproar, with many expressing resentment and even anger, since it was expected that the IR would provide locals with much needed employment in a time of financial crisis. This episode reflects what is happening in every sector of the economy today, as professionals from other nations displace locals from their jobs when they migrate to Singapore in search of work.

In addition, the incompatibility of cultures makes it difficult for immigrants to assimilate into local society, with the result being that these immigrants end up being the focus of much discontent. Due to cultural differences, conflicts may arise when some of the practices of immigrants, such as spitting in public, are viewed with distaste by locals. This is especially so when immigrants are from backward nations and are accustomed to rural life, and do not comprehend the unspoken rules of living in dense neighbourhoods in Singapore. The loitering of immigrants at void decks, with radios blasting Hindi music, or even beer-drinking, has raised the ire of many residents. This resurfaced most prominently when residents of Serangoon Gardens signed a petition some months ago protesting against the siting of a dormitory for foreign workers there, and among the reasons given were those aforementioned.

In spite of such issues, however, it is my belief that with time and education of the local residents, these problems are not insurmountable; furthermore, it is in our long-term interests to continue to welcome immigrants.

Embracing immigrants is important as they help to expand the local talent base, bringing in skills and expertise, and thus expediting our economic advancement. In fact, we are no strangers to this, as we have been welcoming Indian IT professionals to join our ranks for many years. Many positions in our local universities are also helmed by ex-China nationals and Indian nationals, as they impart their knowledge and experiences to our youth, thus helping to build up our workforce of tomorrow. Furthermore, with

immigrants coming from diverse backgrounds, they have the potential to add to the marketplace of ideas and spark further innovation, thus bringing our country forward.

In addition, the differences in cultural backgrounds also bring about the opportunity for immigrants to add colour to our social fabric. The influx of immigrants from neighbouring Asian countries, such as from Myanmar, Bangladesh, India and Thailand has contributed towards the exciting diversity in Singapore's society, and has reinforced our international reputation as an accommodating nation that offers visitors a chance to immerse themselves in a myriad of cultural experiences. No doubt, Indian immigrants, as they head to the local ethnic quarters that is Little India, have spiced up the area, and the gathering of Thai and Myanmar immigrant workers at Golden Mile Complex on weekends has led to it being informally termed "Little Thailand", with shops springing up to cater to their needs. This is precisely the basis behind Singapore Tourism Board's "Uniquely Singapore" slogan – the mix and match of the kaleidoscope of cultures into a unique heritage enjoyed by all.

At this juncture, it is also timely to note that welcoming immigrants is an important first step in realising our government's vision of Singapore being a hub with regional connections and offering the Asian perspective. Singapore's small size makes it imperative for us to look beyond our borders and capitalise on opportunities in the region, and our leaders have demonstrated this keen awareness in the promotion of an ASEAN identity so that Singapore, as part of this regional bloc, has an enhanced international standing. Furthermore, the government has rolled out the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) programme to attract exhibitions to Singapore by positioning itself as a gateway to the region. The hosting of the upcoming Asian Youth Games (AYG) is another such prime example. By embracing immigrants from the region and shaping a harmonious society with the combined efforts of both residents and immigrants, Singapore can demonstrate its commitment towards being a true representative of the Asian region.

Nevertheless, although the principle for accepting and welcoming immigrants has been established, we still need to be judicious in terms of who we allow to enter our borders. In this era where the weight of terrorism rests heavily on the world's shoulders, Singapore should also be on the alert for unsavoury characters with malicious intent. At the same time as we allow those who can make positive contributions to enter, screening is also needed to weed out those who might rend our society asunder. The regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is a cause for concern, as its operatives have plotted an attack on local targets before, and they are continually probing at Singapore's defenses, looking for a loophole to exploit. The recaptured JI fugitive Mas Selamat is a case in point, as he had initially entered Singapore from Indonesia with intent to carry out a terrorist attack. If there are immigrants such as these, then it is in our interests to deny their entry. This is also applicable to those intending to take part in illegal activities, such as drug peddling or smuggling of illegal goods.

In conclusion, I do agree that Singapore is a nation of immigrants that should continue to welcome immigrants, as it offers the potential for the amalgamation of skills, talents and experiences that would benefit Singapore socially, politically and economically, adding an extra dimension to our society. It is unwise to be parochial and reject all contact with immigrants just because of a few unpleasant experiences. After all, looking to history as a guide, Singapore's road to development was not without teething problems, as the 1960s' racial riots showed; but in the end it was the conscious effort by all parties to resolve differences and live together peaceably that has allowed us to attain the prosperity we enjoy today. The present should be no different.

#### **Comments:**

**Excellent commentary of issue at hand. Certainly revealing fair knowledge of subject, showing insight and fresh perspective.**



**GP**  
essay 12

“If you’ve got it, flaunt it.” How far is this statement a reflection of societal attitudes today?  
Lin Tong (09A03A)

As the quote suggests, the prevalence of boastful display is seemingly prevalent in society today. The proliferation of autobiographies and online journals has perhaps promoted a longstanding human tendency for display, especially when in possession of wealth, power and status. Yet what may appear as a global trend towards public preening and boastfulness might overshadow other important movements in societal attitudes.

The proliferation and popularity of reality shows such as “My Sweet Sixteen”, a show that records the ostentatious, extravagant expenses rich families spend on the birthday celebrations of their pampered offspring, may point towards a desire to boast of one’s wealth. The recent scandal of the French Minister of Justice’s constant appearance in fashion editorials and magazines, often in fancy, expensive designer gowns, might also suggest a modern tendency for display, in flaunting her beauty and enjoying the publicity. However, the fact that public displeasure arose as a result of those editorials, may instead indicate that a significant portion of society remains disapproving of such showing off.

While articles such as the recent reports in the Straits Times of the Indian billionaire Bhupendra Kumar Modi’s lavish penthouse alongside photos of gold and crystal encrusted mirrors may be claimed as examples of human boastfulness, made even more prominent by the speed of news reporting today, the extent to which public display may be construed as boastful depends on its purpose. The idea of “flaunting” connotes a negative morality, in which such behaviour may be denounced by others as an expression of sinful pride alongside other wrongs such as adultery or incestuous practices. Yet, our perceptions of public display as pride in one’s possessions or achievements, may instead be misinterpretations of actions meant for alternative purposes. In the 21st Century, movements promoting environmentalism and anti-poverty campaigns have gained and continued to operate on high-visibility campaigns, demanding the attention of many. Motorola’s (Red) Campaign, which features actors and famous personalities promoting the ownership of a flashy red Motorola phone, has indeed gained the attention of many. However, the purpose of such attention was to rouse awareness for a noble cause, in funding anti-AIDS programmes, rather than the flaunting of material possessions.

Furthermore, display is arguably not a modern invention, and the tendency to flaunt like peacocks has been part and parcel of human nature since time immemorial. The ancient rulers and pharaohs built monuments and temples in celebration of their power and empires, such as the innumerable statues Hatshepsut built of herself in Ancient Egypt to celebrate her position as supposed King. Such practices were common in the past and current occurrence does not necessarily indicate any definite shift in societal attitudes towards display.

It might be possible to argue that instead, modern life has brought about reasons for public display other than self-glorification. The recent lavish extravagances put up by China in the 2008 Olympics of awe-inspiring displays and attention-grabbing fireworks are a testament not only to China’s pride in its newfound status as an emerging super-power, but also serve as an important confidence-booster to many in the country still struggling towards better lives. The purpose of seemingly showy actions may be multi-pronged.

Beyond the antics of celebrities displaying their lavish Beverly Hills mansions in editorials and magazines across the world, many other projects have been undertaken in secrecy. Community Chest, one of the largest charity organisations in Singapore, has regularly received large donations, amounting to tens of thousands, from anonymous benefactors. The practice of such quiet philanthropy, even in this financial crisis, is evidence of members of society possessing civic-mindedness and a concern for the less fortunate without any desire for recognition. Donors to charity, by and large tend to be wealthy individuals. While this sector of society has been, in recent times, accused of showing off by purchasing expensive luxury cars and bags, the truth is that donations and the number of charitable foundations have risen, both locally and

in other parts of the world. This may prove that quiet contribution remains treasured in today's society and may merely be overlooked due to its very nature of anonymity.

A shift towards greater transparency and awareness may be a more accurate observation to make about society today. The openness of local ministers and CEOs of major companies in revealing their monthly income should more likely be lauded as a movement towards increased transparency and accountability to their constituencies and stakeholders, rather than boasting on their part. Voters would more likely prefer that ministries publish the salaries of their top directors rather than wait for further scandal to erupt, such as the British MPs' fiasco over their covert abuse of their benefits and rampant corruption. One cannot accuse all declarations of personal wealth or achievement as intending to incite envy, and many such actions may be attributed instead to a greater desire on society's part for accountability and responsibility from people in power.

Even as a number of high-profile celebrities and billionaires may stand rightly accused of self-glorification, a large swathe of society today, including individuals with wealth and influence not any less than the abovementioned, continue to lead their lives in quiet anonymity. Showy displays of wealth are uncommon and will likely further decrease in the future years of projected slow economic growth and recession. Many middle class professionals who may have been tempted to purchase flashy automobiles and designer goods in the past are now unlikely or unable to do so.

A few personalities who indulge in public display should not lead to the whole of modern society being tainted by such claims. A majority of people today place more importance and devote more of their effort and energies towards their work or in contributing towards positive changes in the way organisations are run.

**Comments:**

**This piece had a hesitant stand but had a number of good insights in the second half. The arguments in the first half could do with greater clarity.**

**GP**  
**essay 13**

“A study of history will only make us more pessimistic about the future of the human race.” Discuss.

Ho Jiayun (09A01A)

Fukayama's "The End of History" postulates that Man's story on Earth had come to a closure with the end of the Cold War and the triumph of liberalism, a claim explored by several earlier philosophers such as Hegel. Yet the world has continued to spin, and Man has continued to make his mark on it, albeit in remarkably different ways compared to decades or centuries ago. A glimpse into history offers us an account of a world shaped by mankind's aggression, power and moral decay – all suggestive of a bleak future entailing more conflict and strife. However, mankind's capacity to develop and espouse ideals that respect and uphold the worth of life lend some optimism to the picture. Thus, it would be all too absolute to say that a study of history will only induce pessimism, for there are bright spots too.

A compelling reason to be sceptical about the fate of Man is to consider the numerous conflicts in our world since history began record. People say change is the only constant in human life, but history suggests that contention is just as worthy of being branded a constant, or at least consistent, feature. From the time of ancient Greece, military might was deemed central to the empire, which warred against other states to build up its empire. Likewise, the Chinese empire was ultimately unified under Emperor Qin only via numerous wars with other states. Our current generation holds two world wars within the span of the past century alone. Bloodshed and destruction – and most poignantly futile aggression, as bemoaned by numerous war poets of the First World War like Owen and Sassoon – seem to attest to the Hobbesian idea that humans are innately aggressive creatures, prone to conflict and the infliction of harm. This cannot bode well for the future of the human race. The persistence of conflict – arguably the accumulation of more conflict in recent decades as well – suggests humans see almost an impossibility of greater peace in the world, and are more likely to continue finding areas of contention to extrapolate into long-drawn conflicts at the expense of human life. The ascension of religious fundamentalist groups such as Hamas attests to this trend, since the lens of uncompromising Jihad only evolved over the past half a century. Hence, the prospects for peace and cohesion indeed look bleak.

Moreover, history reveals that a salient characteristic of mankind is a will to power. However, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Hitler's Third Reich had commanded the elimination of the Jewish race, killing millions of them in gas chambers or under military tanks. In a similar fashion, Stalin's rule was characterised by the repeated purging of dissenters so as to entrench his totalitarian rule. These events point towards a willingness of men in power to exercise violence on fellow men, or even to order a complete annihilation of them. In the face of such acts of cruelty that seem to speak strongly against an innately moral human fabric, how can we expect a future free of such corruption, particularly since regimes like North Korea and Myanmar are currently similarly intransigent in their brutality?

Furthermore, the prospects for Mankind look far from promising given that history attests to the fundamental self-interested behaviour of humans, which contradicts the imperative for humans to act in a more moral and altruistic manner if the world's interests, at large, are to be advanced. To see self-interest at play, one needs only look to the history of foreign policy, which remain to this day, guided by national interests – though rationally speaking, it is fundamentally difficult to act in accordance with any other overarching principle. The Cold War between the US and the USSR is a rich collection of engagement with states for strategic interests in their respective spheres of influence, but what is morally revolting is the irresponsible disengagement after no strategic needs are served any longer. The US, after training militants like the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, promptly disengaged after the Cold War had ended, leaving the Afghans to contend with a budding terrorist group on their sands, a recipe for civil – and indeed, global – strife. In addition, economic history also speaks of countries subjugating others to their own interests, as with the colonisation of Africa and the import of African slaves to build Western empires. Time and again, the tendency for mankind to compromise on the well-being, natural rights and peace enjoyed by a fellow member of humanity has shown itself, and speaks volumes about the continuation of similar actions that defy our sense of what is honourable and just, especially if self-interest is accepted to be an underlying feature of humans.

In this sense, it is difficult to foresee a bright future for humanity. In fact, the current economic crisis plays out how the selfish nature of humans has carved out a pessimistic outlook for itself. The betrayal of trust by financial advisors that irresponsibly packaged sub-prime loans as promising investments has undermined the moral fabric of the financial system, if it indeed had existed. Thus, the world's economies are fumbling because financial officers wished to reap huge commissions. This is surely evidence of history at work again, and further evidence to suggest that Man will only continue to undermine Man in the future.

However, it might be simplistic to assume that mankind is bound to a world of destruction and moral corruption whilst overlooking events and trends in history that may point towards greater, more promising human development. Slavery was abolished after a long-drawn battle that advocated the equalisation of rights between the Whites and the African-Americans in the US. The promulgation of Wilson's 14 Points likewise marked a progression towards freedom and equality, particularly as this liberalism was exported to the world in the 20th century. Gender bias has also been dramatically eradicated or reduced in most parts of the world that recognise women in the workplace, or accord them voting rights after the women's suffrage movement. History, therefore, can be testament to Man's ability to exert pressure for change, change that makes our world more inclusive, open-minded and free. In this light, looking to history can show that humans are capable of making productive change in our world, and can continue to do so in fights against discrimination or oppression.

Also, a study of history may reflect the growth in global cohesion over the years, a trend that seems to point towards a future of more consensus-building and cooperation. Compared to the pre-20th century years when an air of limited understanding characterised relations between the great powers, the formation of the League of Nations and then the United Nations were crucial events in history that are strong symbols of a cooperative world order. These have been significant insofar as humans have not waged a war of global magnitude since. Thus, when there is a will for man to do so, peace is possible to enforce. Hence, mankind may not actually see a bleak world of global contention.

In conclusion, a study of history can reveal both events and trends that illuminate human traits that have withstood the test of time as well as point toward a likely path of progression. Our expectations of mankind's future cannot be purely pessimistic because humans, in history, have not always been a force for evil and evil alone. As to optimism or pessimism, what matters is which characteristics of mankind are allowed to dominate in the future. If the spirit of altruism and acceptance that fought for the natural rights of Men can be given freedom to rule over the desire for power and self-gratification, then humans can put their intellect shown in a history of scientific advancements to honourable causes, fighting poverty, discrimination and health threats, rather than being won over by the destructive powers that have so bred the nuclear arsenal of today. Then, will the human race embrace a future of promise, not pessimism.

**Comments:**

**Mature and sensitive insights provided, and your essay is replete with germane examples from history. A pleasure reading your essay! Just ensure your ideas are fully elaborated upon so that your arguments are presented with full clarity.**

**GP**

essay 1

“Religion divides rather than unites.” Discuss.

Gerald Sng (10S03P)

While it is true beyond any doubt that religion, or rather, differences over religion can have a divisive effect on societies, cultures and even civilisations, we have to recognise that this does not by any means mean that it does not provide a powerful uniting force to the world today. In fact, it might very well be fallacious to argue that subscribing to a certain set of common beliefs (and by extension, a moral code) would prove to divide at the expense of creating unity. Rather, it would be beneficial to recognise that while religion, forever an issue of contention, does create differences amongst people, it also brings together groups of people for positive ends, and that these two effects are actually independent of each other. Does religion divide rather than unite? I would say no – it does divide, and it does unite, but not at the expense of each other, and in the end, would definitely be a greater positive influence to the world than otherwise reckoned.

Most believers across the globe belong to one of a few major religions. We have 1.3 billion Muslims, roughly a billion each of Christians and Catholics, hundreds of millions of Hindus and Buddhists, and a significant number of people who belong to offshoots of these last two. These people are spread all over the world's surface: from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, one is sure to find people of all these religions. Although most of them will never meet, they still share a common credo, a common way of doing things, and a common set of customs associated with their religions. They are arguably one people in mind, if not in body. Religion does, therefore, provide a linking force between peoples of the world, perhaps giving the world a greater cohesion and identity. This tenuous point can be rendered firm by hard evidence. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent, for example, are quasi-religious aid organisations that are responsible for much of the humanitarian relief efforts in the world today. These organisations are in part funded by governments, but a large proportion of their support, both financially and in manpower, comes from their parent Christian and Muslim populations respectively. Having such a wide religious diaspora allows organisations like these to call upon a diverse pool of resources, and all for the good of humanity. The Catholic Church often relies on donations from worshippers worldwide to provide funds for its various missions, and recent publication of their finances shows that this support has indeed been substantial.

Religion also creates bonds within societies themselves. This would happen not only in a homogeneous society, but surprisingly enough, also in multi-religious societies. The past few years have seen an increase in inter-faith dialogues and exchanges, both in Singapore and around the world. Singapore saw the establishment of an Inter-Religion Organisation, in which leaders of various religious communities came together to promote understanding and, as the title suggests, dialogue and exchange between communities. These have been mirrored on a global stage, where we saw the Vatican host a conference of the world's religious leaders in 2007. The effectiveness of these measures was commented upon recently by Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim, in a speech where he noted (if I may quote loosely), “Singapore is perhaps one of the only countries in which relations between the Muslim community and the rest of society did not worsen after 911 (the date of the Muslim extremists' terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City), in no small part due to the excellent inter-faith dialogue that we have instituted.”

Some might argue at this point that this is precisely due to religion's divisive nature, that such a platform for dialogue is even necessary. After all, does the 911 attack not prove that religion, while uniting people, unites them for the wrong purpose? I would again say no to this. Firstly, we should recognise that religion is not the sole focus of most people's beliefs. In addition to subscribing to a religion, most people will also be part of other societal groups, such as cultures, ethnic groups, differing nationalities and such. Some people champion democracy and human rights; others believe in the inalienable powers of their monarch or state. True, these beliefs are often intrinsically linked to their religious ones, in that religion does help shape their moral guidelines. However, if we were to completely remove religion from the world, to make everyone an agnostic, these divides will still remain. More importantly though, it is exactly because religion polarises people to these extents that they allow for reconciliation of these differences. We know that differences will always exist, and what religion does is to group them together into easily recognisable general groups. For example, in the recent AWARE saga in Singapore, much of the debate was centred on the issue of



homosexuality, in which the objectors to its acceptance largely belonged to the Christian religion. The presence of inter-faith dialogue can thus bring these viewpoints together in a conciliatory manner, in the end leading to benefit for all.

It is worth noting at this point that most, if not all, religions have a simple moral code. From the Christian precepts of “loving your neighbour as yourself”, to the Quranic verses that “if a man were to enter your home, you would share your salt with him” (again, loosely quoted), these would mostly promote friendship, harmony, cooperation and love, all of which are values universally recognised as good and just. Religious leaders often become voices for justice and morality, like Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa’s fight against apartheid (and later crime), or the Dalai Lama, who preaches understanding and is a noted recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. The presence of religion is undoubtedly beneficial to any society. As believers espouse the moral codes and precepts dictated by their religions, they will contribute to the prevalence of those views in society as a whole, and this can only be a good thing.

Of course, we will always have the extremists, the Islamic terrorists or Hindu fundamentalists that use religion as an excuse to wage a perceived Righteous War against the ‘Evils of the World’. As mentioned earlier, their attacks serve to highlight the argument that their religion has united them for a false purpose. Terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda count among their number men from the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, and even our very own South East Asia. Their coming together as a group was facilitated by the use of religion. Without them all believing in Islam, I doubt that they would have had much opportunity to interact, let alone plan such attacks. This is, unfortunately, one of the results of religion: that it can, for a minority of people, divide and set them apart from the world. These people are a minority, but a minority active enough to highlight that yes, religion can divide civilisations too.

The oft-referenced Samuel Huntington’s prediction of a world defined by a clash between the Judeo-Christian West and the Islamic world may yet come to pass, backed as it is by a history of Crusades, Jihads and the like. We see such divides having a detrimental effect on people’s lives, from the beheading of Christian converts in Iraq to the Ku Klux Klan lynchings in the Southern United States (albeit in the 1960s). The world in the future may very well have religion, rather than nationality, as a marker by which civilisations are set apart.

However, I believe that this will not happen. Thanks to the forces of globalisation and modern progress, we have come to realise the importance, as any Singaporean schoolboy will know, of “Unity in Diversity”. As cultures around the world become less homogeneous and more of a melting-pot, differences in religion look to be cast aside. A recent survey by the German government concluded that more than 70% of its Muslim population were German first, and Muslim second. This is but an indicator of the way the tide is shifting, that religion need no longer be something that defines people to a full stop, but rather, serves to supplement existing cultures and national identities. As we become more receptive to external influences, more able to accept other inputs, we should find that religion will start to lose its divisive effect, as there is no longer a need for “us against the world” mentality, or the feeling of differentiation, as religion becomes just one difference in a world of similarities.

The uniting effects of religion, though, are what will not be lost. Today’s world is much more receptive towards cooperation between these groups. We must understand that while the religious divides between civilisations disappear, the uniting effects on individuals, groups and communities will remain the same. Both are on a different scale, and thus, will see differing outcomes. As it is today, though, religion still does divide the world. However, as we have discussed, this divisive effect is by and large offset by the positives of unity provided. It is fair to say therefore that religion’s effects are positive.

#### Comments:

**What an insightful and mature discussion! Bravo! For once, I was left wanting to read more! The depth of thought is equally matched by your breadth of examples – this is a delight beyond compare. Thank you!**

**GP**

**essay 2**

Religion divides rather than unites. Discuss.

Nigel Fong (10S03O)

'God might not be dead, but God sure leaves a lot of people dead.' That was one social science professor's response to Nietzsche's famous proclamation that 'God is dead'. Indeed, it might seem, at face value, that the world would be a much more peaceful and united place without religion. Perhaps the Crusades might not have happened. Perhaps six million Jews might not have been gassed to death by Hitler. Perhaps the Israel-Palestinian conflict would have been resolved in 1967 – or better, Israel would not even need to be carved out of Palestine and artificially instituted as a state. Perhaps. And yet, I believe that while religion has been the cause of much conflict, it does not necessarily divide societies, nations, and the world; instead, religion has been in many ways an unsung hero that united and civilised the world.

It is true that by its very nature, religion can make people disagree. Since the quintessence of religion is faith in something that can neither be seen nor proven, and hence cannot be debunked as well, there is often no plausible way for people of different religions to see eye-to-eye. When one's religious beliefs constitute the meaning of one's life, and is a tremendous source of strength, coupled with the natural tendency for members of a particular faith to identify with each other, a stray attack on one member of a particular religion is easily interpreted as a challenge to all who share that faith, by all who share another faith. This was the case when a muddle-headed Danish newspaper published cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad in a rather unflattering light – shockwaves of disgust and resentment against Western Civilisation reverberated through Muslim communities in Europe and the world. In the absence of mutual common sense, a Hobbesian nightmare of a 'war of all against all' does not seem far away. Not that this nightmare is merely a hypothetical one – the Holocaust and the Crusades exemplify how desensitising feelings of hatred can hypnotise individuals and blind them to common sense, and even the tenets of their own faith. When one religion commits genocide against another, religion more than divides.

Furthermore, religion drives a wedge between people in such a way as to engender the nation/state conflict. The terms 'nation' and 'state' are hardly synonymous, contrary to common belief. A nation is a group of people who identify with each other, for instance, the members of a particular religion, while a state is the political entity that seeks to represent the people of one country. A state often includes multiple nations that do not necessarily identify with each other; this is exacerbated by religion, such that the duty of a state – to further the welfare of its people, that is, the various nations within it – is often hijacked by the selfish interests of a nation within it. This presents itself, often, in a classic tale of the tyranny of the majority, where a minority religious group is excluded from society and marginalised. For instance, because Muslim minorities in Europe have little political power, their interests are seldom represented, and to this day, they tend to live in inner-city ghettos and receive an unequal share of socioeconomic opportunities. This nation/state conflict also manifests itself in the sectarian violence hampering the rebuilding of Iraq, as Sunni, Shiite, and the Kurdish denominations in Iraq (each of which holds a slightly different interpretation of Islam) never seem to be able to forge a political consensus. In this, religion divides.

And yet, in many such cases, it is not religion which divides, but the misinterpretation of religion. No reasonable reading of the Christian Bible will ever give you the slightest hint that the Christian God might condone the senseless killings sanctioned during the Crusades. No reasonable reading of the Q'uran will ever tell a Muslim to commit 'jihad', or holy war – much less against fellow Muslims in an Islamic country. Far from it! In this, religion cannot be our scapegoat for the conflicts of the world, and much less a banner under which those who choose to misinterpret religion can justify their actions. It is not religion that divides; it is our ever-reliable human nature.

Secondly, religion is often politicised, and often divides because it is politicised. Iran's president (or 'supreme ruler', by his rightful name), together with many politicians in the Middle East engage in vicious Israel-bashing arguably not for the sake of representing their peoples, but rather to distract voters from domestic problems and incompetencies of governance by 'uniting' them against the mirage of a common

enemy. The same goes for Olmert and his gang of merciless Israeli hardliners. In this light, it is not religion that divides, but merely selfish political interests.

Religion, in fact, has never been incompatible with unity. While the different religions are intrinsically so divergent that it becomes hard to see eye-to-eye, we, first as individuals, then as a nation, and finally as a world, can always agree to disagree. Every religion preaches tolerance and respect of those who do not share the same faith. This is best encapsulated in the Golden Rule- 'Do to others what you would like done to you', which is found (in some variant or another) within the religious texts of all major world religions. Nations are divided, in peace and in conflict, if and only if this message of common sense is somehow forgotten, often in the face of politics. Hatred, too, has never been further from doctrines of 'love thy neighbour' and 'love thy enemy'. But even if societies must harbour hate, it is one thing to hate the individual for what he has done (say, create cartoons of Prophet Muhammad), and another thing to hate the religion and all members of that religion. Religion tells us to do at most the former. Multi-religious societies are not necessarily a recipe for hatred and division – Singapore, in which many religions coexist harmoniously, is a good case in point. Religion can unite.

In addition, religion gives societies a common morality. While this morality can sometimes divide - especially on issues of homosexuality – we have to acknowledge that the plethora of religions we have today share an amazingly similar set of moral values. These are universal values, preventing citizens from inflicting mutual harm, and encouraging love and kindness, that nearly everyone shares. We have even secularised and codified these values as a formal constitution – religion is the basis for law, and the basis by which individuals may feel morally compelled to uphold the law, and by extension, their own religion. Religion can also unite nations against a common injustice. It was one factor that made the whites in the United States realise that discrimination against blacks was an insult to their own faith. Today, religion, transcending race, still holds these blacks and whites together. The saffron revolution, in which Burmese monks protested against their tyrannical government, in the process representing the members of their faith, also gained extra moral force thanks to religion. Religion unites.

At the end of the day, we see how religion intrinsically unites society in tolerance and in morality. And yet, when misinterpreted or hijacked for political interests, religion also holds the danger of dividing societies, in peace and in violence, and undermining the states that further our welfare. Given that religion is so intrinsic to human life and human calculus of meaning and value, religion is here to stay, and it is crucial that we allow religion to unite, rather than divide. For united nations stand, and a divided world falls. Religion can be both the light of the world and a scourge of this planet – it is up to us. I choose optimism.

#### **Comments:**

**Fluent and a very readable style. Assertions are nicely backed up by relevant and concrete evidence. Balanced view and a well-argued stand.**

**GP**  
essay 3

“New forms of the media have made mainstream media redundant”.  
Discuss.  
Yong Zhiyi (10AO1E)

The advent of the Internet has brought about a radical change in the media industry. No longer are people confined to reading the newspapers for news, or watching the television for entertainment. Nowadays, with just one click of the mouse, people can access instantaneous information and news online, and the proliferation of online blogs and social networking sites such as Twitter threaten to make mainstream media such as the aforementioned newspapers and television a thing of the past. However, even as newer forms of media such as blogs continue to sprout and grow, I feel that mainstream media will not become increasingly redundant. This is due to the fact that mainstream media are adapting to suit the taste of consumers and that they are still an integral part of their lives, despite the introduction of new media.

Admittedly, the Internet has caused mainstream media to seem comparatively slower in its dissemination of news. For example, the Chicago Tribune has an official website, [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com), where it posts instant news coverage before the newspapers hit the newsstands with the same information the following morning. The relatively faster speed of new media has caused many newspaper readers to instead rely on new media for the latest news. Thus, mainstream media could become redundant if the criterion for redundancy was solely based on speed.

However, that is not the case. New media rely heavily on citizen journalism for “on-the-ground” reports; mainstream media, on the other hand, use professional journalists, reporters tasked with the sole purpose of uncovering each and every piece of information related to the news article they are writing. Herein lies the advantage: that mainstream media have a wider and deeper coverage than those of new media. In addition, mainstream media have connections to a wider spectrum of professionals that can give greater insight into the issue at hand, rather than just posting a factual account of the events that transpired. For example, during the 2008 U.S. Presidential Elections, many bloggers only provided their personal opinions of both candidates, and their opinion on who was likely to win the election. In contrast, the New York Times invited experts to do a state-by-state analysis of the entire election, presenting the results in a full-page spread of the U.S. elections, culminating in a detailed map of the United States of America, showing which states the Democrats were likely to win, and which the Republicans were likely to win. Such an in-depth and broad coverage cannot be found in new media, which shows that while mainstream media might be slower in terms of the speed of reporting news, when they do, they offer a much wider scope and a more detailed analysis of the event, instead of merely a factual recount. This definitely shows that mainstream media are still relevant today.

Another point to consider is that new media have a rather limited scope in terms of the information reported. For example, bloggers tend to report more on celebrity gossip and sports, which led to the setting up of sites such as [perezhilton.com](http://perezhilton.com), Perez Hilton being a blogger who only focused on reporting entertainment-based news. In comparison, mainstream media offer coverage on a wide area of fields, ranging from political, economic and scientific news, to entertainment news, sports news and even the quirky. In this respect, mainstream media have an inherent advantage over new media in the sense that they cover news on every conceivable area of interest, rather than just focusing on one specific field, like new media tend to do.

Also, mainstream media are adapting to take advantage of the Internet. In some cases, mainstream media are actually integrating themselves with new media to make them more relevant in today’s context. One example of this is the citizen journalism site STOMP, in which newspaper readers are invited to post news and pictures that they have uncovered. Every week, myPaper has a column specifically dedicated to STOMP, in which the column lists the top 10 newsworthy stories posted on the site. This shows that, rather than becoming redundant, mainstream media are actually embracing the Internet as an alternative platform for them to share news reports with their readers. The introduction of TODAYonline and Newslink shows that mainstream media have not become redundant; they have just changed to suit the growing

importance of the Internet to people worldwide. Thus, mainstream media actually cater to both newspaper readers and people who prefer online content.

This integration of mainstream and new media does not only apply to news coverage, but also to the entertainment aspect of the media. Shows that are currently showing on the television are frequently uploaded onto video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Hulu, showing that there is still a surging demand for mainstream shows shown on television. In fact, mainstream television shows still garner a high number of viewers, despite the growing surge of new media. The recent Nielson index shows that the just-concluded finale of “American Idol” was watched by over 50 million viewers in the U.S. alone. In fact, during the regular broadcasts of “American Idol”, Ryan Seacrest, the host of the show, frequently urged viewers to log on to fox.americanidol.com, the official site of the show, for “never-before-seen exclusive content, including behind-the-scenes coverage of the contestants”. This shows that new media can be a supplement to mainstream media, and that mainstream media are actually bolstered by the introduction of new media, not hindered. In fact, American Idol even has a Twitter and YouTube account, posting updates and key performances of each episode of the show. This clearly shows that mainstream media have not become redundant by the introduction of new media, but rather, are using the new forms of media to generate attention and interest for the television shows shown and covered by mainstream media themselves. If mainstream media are made redundant, why are people all across the globe still interested in whether Kris Allen or Adam Lambert becomes the new American Idol, a supposed “mainstream television show”? Why do people still discuss the death of Edie Britt, a main character on the hit ABC television show “Desperate Housewives” on blogs, Internet forums and Twitter? The reason is simple: mainstream media are still very much an integral component of their lives, and while they might embrace the relatively newer forms of media such as blogs, they are still accessing the content of mainstream media and posting their thoughts online.

In conclusion, mainstream media and new media actually coexist in the world today, and with the growing content of new media, mainstream media are actually capitalising on this growing trend to their advantage by collaborating and integrating themselves with new media to make them still relevant in this increasingly virtual-based world. Hence, new forms of the media have not made mainstream media redundant; they have just caused mainstream media to adapt to the rising trend of Internet usage, and use this trend to their advantage.

**Comments:**

**Very good! Insightful discussion with a broad range of arguments and examples.**



**GP**

**essay 4**

To what extent does technology enhance the arts?

Yeo Tze Qing (10A01A)

Many, if not all, of the areas of the arts, such as visual art, music, film, dance and literature, have a rich, long history of traditional mediums and practices, and layers of carefully honed and gradually accepted customs. Throw in the technology of today, from television to Google, from efficient video editing software to electric guitars, and people begin to question the new forms of the arts that arise. Can something so man-made and technical like the technology we possess today go hand-in-hand with, and even enhance, the emotive, passionate world of the arts? I believe it can, and it is even necessary for the survival of the arts for the next generation.

The main reason why many people find the arts enhanced by technology distasteful is probably due to the fact that it is unnatural and so far removed from the raw materials usually involved in the creation of the arts. By “raw”, I am referring to our instinctive emotions, opinions and responses to our surroundings, coupled with materials that are close at hand and intuitively used to convey the above, like musical instruments created from wood, the paper with which books are published, the mixing of paint with water, and so on. Digital art, electronica music, and other forms of the arts reliant on technology supposedly lack the “feel” that the arts left “untainted” by technology can provide. Furthermore, because the use of technology to improve the arts is very new and unfamiliar to most people who have grown up knowing only the more traditionalist forms of the arts, these older generations are less inclined to accept such forms of the arts. This lack of acceptance in turn narrows the scope of the audience that artists can reach out to, thus affecting the accessibility of their art. One can say this is where technology ‘fails’ to enhance the arts.

Another reason why the arts may be diminished by the use of technology is the idea that the arts are exclusive to the more aristocratic, sophisticated swathes of society that can appreciate the arts. Now that the Internet is present, one no longer has to visit the Louvre or buy art history books to view and appreciate a painting of Mona Lisa, for they can simply ‘google’ high quality images of the painting. The exclusivity that has historically come attached to the appreciation of the arts is rapidly being phased out, and this is deemed a loss by some members of the society.

Finally, the advent of technology can also be seen to be detrimental to the arts because the increased accessibility to the various forms of the arts is intruding on the artist’s rights to his intellectual property. Ask any teenager and he or she can probably rattle off a list of illegal websites from which one can download one’s favourite music or movies for free, never mind the copyright issues involved. This undermines the artists’ efforts in the creation of their art, and this fading respect for the hard work that goes into each flippantly downloaded music clip can be said to be harmful to the arts, instead of helping it.

However, despite all these rather valid reasons given about the negative impact created when technology is used in the arts, I believe that, as with anything else, technology has its boons and banes in the creation of the arts, and in this case, its pros outweigh the cons.

With regard to the blatant disregard for copyright issues, I feel that artists of today have to decide for themselves, and weigh up the benefits of technology against the disadvantages. Are the wider audience and worldwide exposure provided by the Internet more or less valuable than the monetary acknowledgement of their efforts? If the artists are truly making art to reach out to and move as many audiences as possible, then technology is very much more a stepping stone in their artistic journey than a stumbling block. I feel that musician Sandi Thom exemplifies this very well when she spread her music for free with the help of MySpace, all the while recording her music by herself in her basement. She obviously touched many people with her music, as seen from the million-strong audience across the globe that “attended” her ‘live’ concert, held over a webcam. Her widespread influence would have been non-existent without technology, which not only brought the artist closer to the audience, but also, made it more convenient for the audience to better appreciate the arts. Also, times are changing, and the idea of the exclusivity of the arts is fast losing its relevance.

To the argument that technologically-enhanced forms of the arts are unnatural and incapable of expressing emotions as well as the arts of the past, I say that it is simply a matter of taste, as well as the quality of the manipulation of the arts. Technology has simply created a new medium through which the arts can be channelled, and as with all forms of the arts, everyone has his or her own preferences in appreciating the arts. One might appreciate an ink painting more than an oil painting the same way acoustic music is more pleasing to the ear to some people than technopop.

Also, the ability of technologically-enhanced forms of the arts to convey thoughts, emotions and opinions effectively all lies in the challenge of being able to manipulate technology successfully, which is ironic when one considers how technology is meant to ease the process of art-making. How does one push the boundaries of creativity, or make use of the boundless opportunities available to create an original and refreshing work of art? Clearly, artists have been successful in their use of technology to create works of art that moved audiences greatly and gained wide acclaim. Those who say technology leaves the arts cold and unfeeling must have never watched the animated film, “The Lion King”, which is a tear-jerker, and a stellar example of maximising the potential of technology to enhance one’s art.

Finally, I feel that technology does not only improve the arts, but is also necessary for the arts to survive over time. Imagine if we were unable to record classical ballets that were difficult to choreograph or replicate, or the unique vocals of many vintage songs of the past in high quality. Without technology, the voice of Elvis may never be known to later generations. Furthermore, the wear and tear that is bound to affect any piece of work in any area of the arts can thankfully be assuaged by the use of technology. Paintings that are falling apart and cannot be restored can be photographed, and perhaps in future, replicated to the minutest detail with whatever technology that is available then. As such, technology is crucial to the prevalence of the arts over time.

Therefore, I believe that with the rapidly changing times, although the use of technology may regrettably cause us to lose, in part, certain outcomes like the authenticity of the arts and the acknowledgement of an artist’s efforts, it still ultimately brings with it qualities that are more greatly treasured such as exposure, accessibility, creativity and preservation. Without technology, the arts cannot improve, or even, survive.

**Comments:**

**A good, sensitive and nuanced discussion - keep it up, Tze Qing! I have enjoyed reading this. Your response reflects a good understanding of the concepts and the different and varied approaches to the creation and appreciation of products of passion as well as discipline. Well done!**

**KI****paper 2**

Explain the author's claims and conclusions about psychology. Evaluate his reasoning and challenge or support it with arguments of your own.

Sharon Tan (09S06Y)

**Read the passage and answer the question that follows. Your response should be in structured prose and should be between 400-600 words.**

At this point it must be clear to the intelligent reader that clinical psychology can make virtually any claim and offer any kind of therapy, because there is no practical likelihood of refutation – no clear criteria to invalidate a claim. This, in turn, is because human psychology is not a science, it is very largely a belief system similar to religion.

Like religion, human psychology has a dark secret at its core – it contains within it a model for correct behavior, although that model is never directly acknowledged. Buried within psychology is a nebulous concept that, if it were to be addressed at all, would be called “normal behavior.” But do try to avoid inquiring directly into this normal behavior among psychologists – nothing is so certain to get you diagnosed as having an obsessive disorder.

In the same way that everyone is a sinner in religion's metaphysical playground, everyone is mentally ill in psychology's long, dark hallway – no one is truly “normal.” This means everyone needs psychological treatment. This means psychologists and psychiatrists are guaranteed lifetime employment, although that must surely be a coincidence rather than a dark motive.

But this avoids a more basic problem with the concept of “normal behavior.” The problem with establishing such a standard, whether one does this directly as religion does, or indirectly as psychology does, is that the activity confronts, and attempts to contradict, something that really is a scientific theory – evolution. In evolution, through the mechanism of natural selection, organisms adapt to the conditions of their environment, and, because the environment keeps changing, there is no particular genotype that can remain viable in the long term.

The scientific evidence for evolution is very strong, and evolution's message is that only flexible and adaptable organisms survive in a world of constant change. Reduced to everyday, individual terms, it means no single behavioral pattern can for all time be branded “correct” or “normal.” This is the core reason religion fails to provide for real human needs (which wasn't its original purpose anyway), and this failing is shared by psychology – they both put forth a fixed behavioral model in a constantly changing world.

In the final analysis, the present state of psychology is the best answer to the original inquiry about whether it is scientific, because if human psychology were as grounded in science as many people believe, many of its historical and contemporary assertions would have been falsified by its own theoretical and clinical failures, and it would be either replaced by something more scientifically rigorous, or simply cast aside for now.

But this is all hypothetical, because psychology and psychiatry have never been based in science, and therefore are free of the constraints placed on scientific theories. This means these fields will prevail far beyond their last shred of credibility, just as religions do, and they will be propelled by the same energy source — belief. That pure, old-fashioned fervent variety of belief, unsullied by reason or evidence.

Paul Lutus

The author's conclusion is that psychology is not a science, it is only a belief system. In working up to this conclusion, Lutus' main arguments are that an underlying assumption of

psychology contradicts a fundamental tenet of science, and psychology is hence not science, and also that psychology is not practically falsifiable.

The first argument that Lutus makes is that psychology is contradicted by evolution. He states that “normal behavior” is a model contained within psychology, and that it contradicts evolution by positing a fixed behavioural model. First, it may very well be a straw man argument, because psychology need not necessarily rest so fundamentally on this ‘normal behaviour’ concept that its contradiction necessitates the failure of the entire discipline. Second, the straw man could be in terms of Lutus attributing a specific behavior to ‘normal behaviour’ when in reality psychology is more likely to accept a wide variety of behavior as ‘normal’ as opposed to ‘abnormal’.

The author flippantly implies that the ‘normal behaviour’ concept is similar to a conspiracy such that stating it would warrant defensive action via a mistaken diagnosis. When alluding to the ‘guaranteed lifetime employment’ of psychologists and psychiatrists, the author is being unreasonably biased and mocking, having already decided that clinical psychology is not a science. This does nothing for his argument’s persuasive power.

Or  
accusation  
of obsession  
if one asks  
what norms  
are

The analogy drawn between religion and psychology is another straw man and a false analogy. While monotheist religions like Christianity attribute the ideal mode of behavior to that of one God, psychology does nothing of the sort, and there does not seem to be an ‘ideal man’ whose behavior is taken as the definition of ‘normal behaviour’. While everyone is a sinner, since only God is perfect, it hence does not follow that everyone is mentally ill. The author’s preconceived notion of ‘normal behaviour’ creates many problems for his argument.

So your  
point is there  
is a norm  
in religion  
but not in  
psychology.  
Ok

The author then declares that at a basic level, ‘normal behaviour’ is untenable as it contradicts evolution. The author holds that evolution is strongly supported by evidence, but this is itself a debatable premise. Archaeological studies have, as yet, not yielded any fossils of species ‘in-between’ stages of evolution, and what is taken to be ‘scientifically proven’ may not necessarily be right. This is because scientists are fallible, and may have confirmation bias, in which their pre-conceived beliefs cause them to see what they hope to see, just as scientists in the 1800s saw men with beards when looking at sperm under the microscope, believing them to be tiny replicas of the human. However, evolution is indeed widely accepted as true, and by the principle of charity it shall be assumed to be true here as well.

The author, in explaining evolution, then equivocates ‘constant change’. In evolution, ‘constant change’ is meant in a very large macro scale of time periods that span millions of years long. However, in his usage, Lutus takes ‘constant change’ and applies it to the short term, suggesting that since nothing is ever constant, the fixed ‘normal behaviour’ concept is deeply flawed. This equivocation is unacceptable because psychology does not posit a fixed ‘normal behaviour’ that is taken to apply for all time. This criticism is hence unfair to psychology since, like the interpretive social science (ISS) that it seems to be, psychology’s definition of ‘normal behaviour’ is likely to be fluid, context-based and dependent on socio-cultural factors. Instead, the author neglects the personal nature of the psychologist-patient relationship and attributes a positivist social science (PSS) position to psychology, accusing it of creating dogmatic rules in an eternally unchanging structure. This can also be rejected.

Lutus then sneaks in another comparison with religion that proves to be a false analogy. He attributes religion’s failings to the fixed behavioural model posited – the reader is then led to believe that psychology fails too. However, the contradiction between religion and evolution does not centre on the idea of ‘God’ – instead, it focuses on intelligent design to oppose the idea that the world could have been so designed by natural factors alone. By showing a contradiction between religion and science, supported by other reasons besides those mentioned, and finally drawing an analogy between religion and psychology, Lutus seems to be intellectually dishonest by implying a similar contradiction between psychology and evolution.

Very well  
explained

Excellent  
point

The author then makes a bizarre jump to psychology and religion failing to provide for 'real human needs', defining these needs as pertinent to science only and hence purely material. While it is undeniable that science does have great instrumental value, this is not the only value there can be. For instance, faith or hope (from religion) and mental health (from psychology) are other important needs that Lutus completely neglects. This main argument then makes another logically invalid jump – just because 'normal behaviour' fails to provide for real human needs, it is not a science. Such an argument makes no sense.

Also, the contradiction (if accepted) between 'normal behaviour' and evolution does not mean that since evolution is a science, psychology must (by a false dilemma) not be. There can be contrasting theories acceptable within science, and contradiction is wholly insufficient in declaring psychology a non-science. Methodology, and not content, is what defines science. As defined by Sir Francis Bacon, science is taken to refer to the verificationist inductive scientific method of empirical observation, hypothesizing, theorizing and testing of these hypothesis and theories. Also, with regard to the false dilemma, the definition of science is debatable – originating from the Latin word 'scire', meaning to know, Science cannot be said to be the only form of obtaining knowledge. With due credit to Lutus, this is not what he says.

Lutus' second point on falsifiability hits a little closer and is more effective. Like Alder's theories on inferiority complex and Freudian psychoanalysis, it seems true that psychology cannot be falsified since any event can be explained. It is, however, unfair to group all psychiatrists and psychologists along with Freud and Alder. Psychiatrists in particular do have shared standards of diagnosis and objective criteria, such as symptoms of depression, kleptomania, obsessive-compulsive disorder, etc. Again this proves that Lutus is mistaken in accusing psychology and psychiatry of having no practical likelihood of refutation.

Falsifiability, though accepted as a measure of science, also comes with its problems. Popper, its main proponent, was accused of being idealistic in expecting scientists to try their best to refute their own theories, and falsification was criticized by Duhem and Quine as being able to accommodate contradictory observations through auxiliary hypothesis, and being reliant on further assumed theories.

Lutus' argument about psychology not being a science involves him pointing at its lack of falsifying itself in the past. While this may be true for extreme branches of psychology (Freud and Adler) the daily practice of psychology does involve rigorous techniques and criteria for diagnosis. Thus Lutus has not been fair to psychology.

Lutus' final paragraph states that psychology and psychiatry are mere belief. Although the justification for psychological theories may not be wholly certain, it does not mean psychology may be reduced to just belief. Thus, in conclusion, invalid arguments and untrue premises as well as a mocking tone make Lutus' argument unacceptable.

#### Comments:

**Excellent argument that is thoroughly supported by relevant examples.**



**KI**

paper 1

Discuss the point of view that, in scientific research, it is not ever possible to isolate the hypothesis being tested from the influence of the theory in which the observations are grounded.

Yap E-lynn (09A01B)

Until recent times, a positivist view of the natural sciences persisted among influential practitioners such as The Vienna Circle. They espoused an approach to science that revolved around Verificationism, which proposes that we support hypotheses with verifying instances in the experiments that scientists conduct. This, however, faced an objection when Karl Popper judged it to be less preferable than an opposing view of falsificationism, which states that all our knowledge is only conjectural and hypothetical, and experimental results which support our hypothesis will only serve to corroborate, not verify. The only thing we can be conclusive about is the deductive certainty produced when we find falsifying instances. Revolutionary at the time it was proposed, this in turn was challenged by the ideas of Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. While his theory of paradigm shifts spans many topics, only a key one – one which very significantly challenges the ‘certainty’ of falsificationism – will be discussed here: the idea of theory-ladenness. This is not only true for many reasons but has multiple implications for the field of the natural sciences as well, very much questioning its long-held image of being an ‘objective’ discipline.

The idea of theory-ladenness rests on the premise that all science is characterised by a series of paradigms, each of which comprises a set of theoretical assumptions and ‘exemplars’; influential problems which have been prominently solved through reference to the aforementioned assumptions. As a result, all our observations in science are necessarily shaped by the backdrop of this paradigm. The justifications for believing in this theory of paradigm shifts are multifarious – its ability to explain revolutions such as those by Copernicus and Darwin being a prominent example – but in this essay the focus will be on the implication that, due to the all-encompassing nature of paradigms, it is impossible to isolate the hypothesis being tested from the influence of the theory in which the observations are grounded. The implications of this, in turn, will be discussed later, after reasons to support it have been presented.

The Duhem-Quine problem states that Popper’s proposed attempts to falsify scientific hypotheses is fundamentally flawed, as the observations which purport to do so are themselves founded on some other theory. As such, there is no such thing as a neutral observational fact. For instance, it was shown that the various attempts which tried to prove Mendel’s laws of segregation and assortment were dependent on the theoretical knowledge of what was going on in certain crosses. This corresponds with Kuhn’s idea that all observations are theory-laden, and necessarily involve the presuppositions of the theory that the hypothesis – in this case, Mendel’s law – is grounded in.

Good

Any given hypothesis is dependent on the theory – and on a larger scale, paradigm – which it is located in, and one way to prove this is through reference to how these hypotheses are formulated in the first place. Le Verrier and Adams provided an apt illustration: attempting to explain the discrepancies in the motion of the planet Uranus – which did not move according to the path predicted by Newton – they hypothesised that there was another planet, Neptune, and mathematically calculated its location based on the assumptions of the Newtonian theory of mechanics and gravitation. While it turned out then that Neptune did exist after all, a similar attempt involving Mercury and its ostensible accompanying planet Vulcan backfired later. This is a clear manifestation of the idea that our hypotheses are not isolable from the theories they are grounded in, for if they were then Popper’s falsification would have come to the fore and scientists would not have posited such a hypothesis, instead taking the wrong motions as evidence that falsified Newton’s theory. This suggests some sort of underlying psychological need to “save the appearances”, which would explain why scientists allow their hypotheses to be so influenced by the overarching theory; as Kuhn suggests, we are mostly in periods

of “normal science” when the limits of the paradigm are not being questioned, and instead regarded as the boundaries that hypotheses should not cross.

Finally, another aspect of “the theory” in which a hypothesis’s observations are “grounded” that renders the hypothesis non-isolable is the social component. All theories – and paradigms – are influenced by particular social constraints and these in turn affect how the hypotheses are tested. For example, the Cartesian distinction between mind and matter, observer and observed, is blurred in atomic physics, such that the hypothesis being tested cannot be said to lie in some objective realm. Furthermore, every theory restricts the resultant hypotheses because of the scientists’ backgrounds, which inevitably influence scientific tests. There are ingrained “visual glitches” that make observations less objective – for example, when we look at the Devil’s pitchfork, it appears to be the blueprint of a pitchfork that can be physically constructed, but in theory cannot as our senses deceive us. Then there is also the case for bias in selecting our hypotheses. After all, if we interpret the word “theory” less literally and allow it to include the considerations of social context – as Kuhn proposes we should – we can see how hypotheses are pursued based on particular conditions in society. For instance, jet streams in the northern hemisphere are far more extensively researched than those in the southern hemisphere, for the former affect the more economically developed countries.

Seeing as there are multiple reasons to believe that Kuhn is justified in saying that all hypotheses and observations are theory-laden, what are the implications for natural science? The first implication is that opposing scientific theories which do not share a common paradigm cannot be judged on an impartial basis. Since hypotheses cannot be separated from their overlying theory, to compare two different ones is impossible – as Kuhn says, paradigms are incommensurable. The hypotheses are couched in language specific to the theory. For instance, “mass” in Newtonian and Einsteinian theories means a completely different thing in each: the former is conserved and the latter is convertible with energy. And incommensurability is not just present in a linguistic sense, for when the same thing is observed, the scientist in each paradigm perceives something different. Again using the Newtonian-Einsteinian example, one contains unrestrained bodies that fall slowly while the other has pendulums which repeat their motions. Ultimately, the theory-ladenness of hypotheses and observations render them incommensurable with opponents, such that truth and falsity can no longer be conclusively determined, as there is no common basis for comparison. Falsificationism and its concomitant view that disputes can be resolved by an appeal to observational facts thus come under attack, since fact is no longer neutral but dependent on the theory. A situation of underdetermination may then be said to result; there is more than one theory to explain the same set of data, and one cannot be prioritised over the other because they are all consistent with what is observed – just not with each other.

Good para  
but long

The second implication is that once a new paradigm arrives in science, prior hypotheses that were held to be true must now be revised as their observations had depended on another theory, which has now faded into obscurity (note: this does not mean it has been ‘proven wrong’, instead as Kuhn suggests the peer pressure of scientists has simply relegated it to the sidelines). An example is the discovery of X-rays – once this new theory had appeared (and been adopted by the fraternity of scientists), previous experiments using cathode ray tubes had to be repeated, since scientists had failed to acknowledge and account for one more variable. If hypotheses lay in some objective realm where observations were not theory-laden this non-linear revision of prior science would not have been necessary, but if they have assumed not to be this is a necessary implication for scientific knowledge.

Nice

Finally, the third implication is that Popper’s strict distinction between the context of discovery (the historical process by which the scientist formulates his hypothesis) and the context of justification (what he actually does to prove the hypothesis by relying on experiments and observation) is now blurred. This is because the dichotomy would only hold true if there were some common criteria that all ‘contexts of justification’ fulfilled, but since they have been shown to be theory-laden, and not objective by reference to some standard external to

the mind, we must accept that both are relevant in understanding a paradigm. For instance, scientists would now be interested in how Kekule formulated his hypothesis of the benzene molecule having a hexagonal structure, due to the daydream of seeing a snake trying to bite its own tail.

Ultimately, the most important implication for the field of science, if we were to believe that the hypothesis being tested cannot be isolated from the theory in which its observations are grounded in, is that science loses much of its ostensible objectivity. No longer are we able to say that science gets “more correct” – as the Newton-Einstein example has shown, it is impossible to judge which hypothesis is better, or which paradigm is superior. Instead we can only say that one is more inclusive than the other – Newton’s theory applies when the velocities are below the speed of light, but when examining things like the gravitational field near a black hole, Einstein’s theory of relativity must be used. No longer can Popper prescribe Falsificationism – any observation which attempts to prove a hypothesis wrong is itself dependent on yet another theory. No longer can science be said to pursue objective truth – radical skepticism is attenuated due to the influence of the dominant paradigm, which determines what problems are the most worthy of being pursued.

Ok

However, an optimistic view of science can still persist. Granted, hypotheses may be theory-laden but one only judges this to be a bad thing if it is assured that science ‘should’ evolve toward some ideal. As Kuhn argued, an evolutionary view of the field can be taken – it simply responds to a new set of challenges with a different theory, so the prior hypotheses are not rendered worthless, merely obscure in the new context that time has brought us.

**Comments:**

**A highly impressive essay. The analysis is spot-on, the discussion directly addresses the question, and the language is clear. The use of examples is also excellent, with a particularly apt use of Newton and Einstein. Well done.**

**KI****paper 2**

Explain the author's claims and conclusions about art. Evaluate his reasoning and challenge or support it with arguments of your own.

Yap E-lynn (09A01B)

**Read the passage and answer the question that follows. Your response should be in structured prose and should be between 400-600 words.**

Morris Weitz has argued that traditional definitions of art all fail in that they include too many things as art, and, at the same time exclude things that are regularly and correctly reckoned to be art. Thus, the logical question that arises is: is this or that particular thing or event a work of art, or not? His response to the question is not to propose yet another definition or basis to define what art is or is not; rather, he suggests that our definition should remain 'open' so as to allow for creative novelties. The real issue, however, is not about shaping definitions at all, open or otherwise. The question rather is, should creativity be conceived of as relating to the limits of a concept identifying a practice?

To accept an 'open' definition would lead to a situation analogous to that of the guild of carpenters producing tables with ever sillier forms, so as to test the concept of 'table'. We are not such philistines with regard to the concept of 'table', even though this, too, is hard to resolve. What is the difference, conceptually speaking between a table and a chair; what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be a table, as opposed to a chair? Why do we rest our semantic case with tables, but keep wrestling endlessly over the limit of what separates art from non-art? It seems this is due to the fact that nobody in the business of making, buying or using tables cares much for those definitions, as long as the thing does what it is supposed to do. Stephen Davies analysed this need for specificity of the concept of art arguing that it is rooted in the fact that the procedures with which we produce the things in question have loosened from these things' original functionality. But that seems only part of the problem.

The crucial part is that philosophers and art critics go beyond mere discourse about 'art' that has been produced, and instead appear to advocate the direction in which they think art should be headed. Art critics do not merely judge occurrent cases of art – works, oeuvres, styles and exhibitions – they also show artists the way to go; and philosophers, too, in reality set the agenda for art. Artists look at critics and philosophy for inspiration. Conforming to the centrifugal move implied in Weitz's argument, and subsequent debates, artists have gone on to concentrate on producing ever trickier cases, the exercise of which is not intended even to settle the question of what separates art from non-art, but to see how these lines might be redrawn.

In the first half of the twentieth century the concept of Avant-Garde determined artists' approaches, and the way they were picked up by critics and philosophers. In the second half of the century, it is the very thought of art's limits which determines artists' approaches: let us make non-art, and make it according to some procedure, and let us then see whether art succeeds in incorporating it, only to make works yet further removed from the core business of art. And philosophy too, complies, encouraging this movement. We must, instead, get back to art's core business, but how?

My thesis: the definition of 'art' is not our problem, much like the definition of 'table' isn't. There is no essence to describe. Rather, when we speak of art, we are engaged in a discourse. This discourse, in turn, has been influenced and shaped by specific art works. Art practice is a domain in (Western) culture with a particular history, and which is morally autonomous. Jerrold Levinson best captures the historical nature of art. For him, something is a work of art if someone with the right proprietary rights intends it to be regarded as we standardly (and correctly) regard certain objects or events as art, based on our prior experience of art. If we



have no sense of how we are to aesthetically appreciate something it cannot possibly be a work of art. It must somehow or other partake in some artistic procedure which has proven, in the past, to be artistically fruitful.

The author argues in this passage that the nature of art is historical. As a result, the determinant of an object's artistic quality lies in its employment of "some artistic procedure which has proven, in the past, to be artistically fruitful". The author argues for this through two arguments, each of which points out a problem with the opposing concept of art as being "open". The first problem is that by repeatedly testing the limits of the concept of "art", artists drift further from its "original functionality". The second problem is that, not only is the discourse about art which has already been produced fundamentally leading in the wrong direction, philosophers and critics have set a mistaken agenda for artists, pushing them towards the direction of "producing even trickier cases", simply to test how they can redraw the boundaries of "art" as a concept. The author finds all these efforts misguided because there simply is no "essence" of art to describe; instead, discourse about art is of prime importance, and we ought to look to the "specific art works" in history to make this discourse meaningful.

Excellent!

The first argument that the author makes draws an analogy between artists and carpenters. His argument is that because carpentry is simply about producing "thing[s] [which do] what they are supposed to do", it would be "silly" for carpenters to wrestle over the semantics of tables. Analogously, artists should just concentrate on what the "original functionality" of their product is, and rest the "semantic case". Here he is arguably committing a fallacy of false analogy because the two disciplines do not share such similar properties and purposes to be compared at all. Granted, a utilitarian view of carpentry might be quite appropriate since the business of table-making has not quite the cultural weight to stimulate such grappling over linguistic meaning. Art, on the other hand, has a far less objective "original functionality". It is tenuous for anyone to suggest that art arose out of one single purpose and yet the author here suggests that the field is simply a means to generate the "discourse" about art's historical nature. Art is different from carpentry because it is not necessarily a means to an end. Instead, it is possibly an end in itself. Philosophers have argued that the creation of art promotes certain qualities in people, and serves to refine them. Through the appreciation of beauty, we rebuke our natural recourse to appetite, and question our own assumptions. This can be achieved through the creation of provocative pieces which push the boundaries of art – Tracy Emin's "My Bed" is a good example to illustrate this. By presenting her bed in its messy form after she stayed in it for several days trying to deal with a personal crisis, she forces the viewer to re-evaluate typical assumptions of everyday items by seeing how they can actually represent deep emotional significance – or at least, this is one interpretation of it. Wittgenstein's view of definitions being a "loose cluster" of properties also easily refutes the author's argument as it shows that in a given field, not all objects share the same definition and to the same degree, and hence it is mistaken to propose that it should. The author's argument is therefore not a strong inductive argument since it rests on the premise of a false analogy.

The second argument focuses on the idea that the testing of art's limits leads artists in the wrong direction. To the author, Weitz's definition of art as being "open" is flawed as this makes artists believe that their approach should be driven by the testing of limits. Instead he advocates a return to "concepts". This sort of deductive argument rests on an idea that there are some general principles of art that we can refer to while engaging in discourse about aesthetics. Such deductivism, while in line with similar theories such as Plato's Theory of Forms (which suggests that, like the author suggests, there is an objective ideal to art), is refutable by reference to the empiricist positions of Hume and Kant. When the author states that there is some "core" or "concept" in art that we can refer to, he faces objection by Kant's view that all experiences of aesthetics should be framed by "disinterestedness". This means that we should not look at an object and let our prior notions of certain concepts – such as the Avant Garde which the author uses as an example – stifle our imagination, for it is when



His reference to art's lack of essence was his means of showing how the attempt to pin down a definition of art as necessary and sufficient was going to be fruitless. Not wrong, but perhaps some charity here would not be out of place.

our imaginative and cognitive faculties are in free, harmonious play that we can be said to be having an aesthetic experience. Similarly, Hume gives the example of Milton – we enjoy his work not because it fits particular rules of poetical construction, but because it produces an experience that invokes pleasure. Therefore, the author's assigning of primacy to reason (an implicit premise) is not necessarily true. It is also not true that "nobody cares" about definitions, for as instances such as the fights caused by Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring", provocative art is potent indeed.

Finally, the author seems to contradict himself by saying first that "there is no essence to describe", and then supporting Levinson's view that art has a "historical nature". He is referring us to the historical nature of art, which is to define art as anything that is consistent with well-established prior art. This then seems to be another way of describing art's essence, and to say that the goal of art to stimulate 'discourse' is distinct from it having an 'essence' is a fallacy of equivocation, since means and ends are not necessarily distinct from each other.

The argument that art has a historical nature seems to rely on flawed reasoning on two counts: firstly, if art is dependent on previous artistic procedure, then what was the very first instance of art reliant on having no precursor? Secondly, who "proves" that an artistic procedure is "artistically fruitful"? Ironically, this can be questioned the same way that Hume's idea of the 'Ideal Critic' can be refuted – to identify the true judges – who can then confer the status of an object as being a candidate of art – we must use a limited number of works and their responses to it; yet these are the 'masterpieces' that were judged to be so by the very same critics. In other words, it is a circular argument.

One may give the author some credit for his opposition to Weitz's argument, which is indeed too ambiguous a definition and allows far too many "creative novelties" that would otherwise have not been regarded as aesthetic objects if not for the lax definitions of postmodernism. An example is Tao Lin, a contemporary poet who writes unfathomably titled novels such as "Eeeee Eee Eeee", and has been described by critics as "the singular most irritating person" in the poetry scene, but still receives his fair share of defence from people sharing the views of Weitz. This, while tragic, is however not a good enough reason to say that the only other alternative is a historical definition. Such an argument commits the fallacy of a false dilemma because it ignores other plausible theories such as Plato's and Aristotle's theory of mimesis, while presenting itself as the only other option.

#### Comments:

**Excellent! Enjoyable read.**

**KI**

paper 2

“Since eternal and necessary truths can only be acquired via reason, knowledge should only be founded on reason, not experience.” Discuss.

Hou Shihang (10A01A)

The claiming of eternal and necessary truths to be reason's sole domain was an argument first made by Plato in his analogy of the divided line. In one of the arguments in the analogy, Plato asserted that true knowledge must be eternal and necessary. The sensible realm, which he termed the realm of confidence, was ever-changing, so knowledge of the sensible realm was also ever-changing. As such, following the modus tollens argument form, Plato rejects knowledge of the sensible realm as true knowledge. To extend on that argument, Plato asserts that experience can only give us knowledge of the sensible realm; it follows that Plato considers experience to be incapable of granting true knowledge.

Need for an introduction.

Rationalist arguments throughout history have also claimed that sensation is but part of the manifestation of the concept. A similar argument, the argument of the wax put forth by Descartes, similarly claims that sensation of an object does not give an all comprehensive coverage of the concept. If sensation was indeed the main source of knowledge, one who has only experienced wax in its solid form should not be able to identify wax in its liquid form. But conceivably, one is able to identify liquid wax as mental intuitions are able to intuit knowledge of the wax that sensation cannot cover comprehensively. If sensation is such a gappy and incomplete source of knowledge, would it not be better to scrap the use of sensation altogether and employ reason as a main source of knowledge instead? (disjunctive syllogism)

While this is an elegant argument for the rationalist account of knowledge, it suffers a few practical limitations. Firstly, while sensation alone cannot give us true knowledge, neither can reason, as it is similarly limited. Secondly, we need to address the argument that only eternal and necessary truths can be counted as knowledge.

Good

While empiricist accounts of knowledge have a simpler task of accounting for the original bedrock of knowledge (incorrigible sense data, as Locke claims), rationalists struggle to put forth a convincing foundation of knowledge. Two brave attempts are innate ideas and Descartes' clear and distinct ideas. Innate ideas as originally used by Plato referred to his belief that all Forms were embedded within a person and education was merely an attempt to uncover such knowledge. Subsequent rationalist philosophers claim identity and self to be examples of innate ideas.

However, Locke attacks this point saliently by arguing that knowledge should be conscious. Although we may concede that we may not harness the full extent of the knowledge immediately, we should at least be aware of its presence. One analogy is to music. While we may not recognise a song when it first starts playing, we should at least be aware we have heard it before. If we are not even aware of knowing a proposition, the distinction between learning and uncovering is a very arbitrary one.

Locke's criticism does not imperil innate ideas immediately, nor is his tabula rasa immediately acceptable. Philosophers find it difficult to conclusively prove both the existence of innate ideas and the lack thereof. However, we may be prepared to accept that the mind has some innate inclinations. Drawing upon the analogy of the empty room, we cannot prove whether it is indeed empty at first, but we can accept that there may be shelves or directions for the ordering of knowledge.

The second method rationalists propose is the intuition/deduction thesis. Descartes argues for intuition as a valid source of knowledge, claiming some truths "clearly intuited by the attentive mind" cannot be doubted reasonably. He gives the example of geometric proofs, arguing that only a madman can coherently argue against the fact that a triangle has three

Explain the Cartesian circle

sides. Clear and distinct ideas form the background of our knowledge, and we may plausibly raise a whole citadel of knowledge from such a foundation.

The problem of course is with the scope and universality of clear and distinct ideas. While Descartes claims clear and distinct ideas to be universal, we notice that some claims he identifies to be universal are not so, most problematic of which is the idea of God. To the extent that Descartes cannot prove the existence of God, his clear and distinct ideas are still prone to the pestilence of skepticism. While Descartes claims the idea of God to be clear and distinct, we have noticed that the idea is at least not universally acknowledged to be so. That raises the second blow, which is just how big the base of clear and distinct ideas can be. Would it not be limited by what we can agree to intuit?

The final nail on the rationalist coffin is Hume's fork, when Hume (brilliantly) points out that reason can only give us analytic knowledge, that is, knowledge which cannot be negated without contradiction. Analytic knowledge, which he calls the relation of ideas, can only clarify, as it cannot go beyond what is implied in the predicate. Knowledge of the world is however synthetic, that is, it can be negated without fundamental contradiction. For example, we can claim that chimpanzees do not exist without contradicting ourselves. We cannot, however, claim that vixens are male foxes, without contradiction, as a vixen is defined as a female fox. Synthetic knowledge, or matters of fact as Hume calls them, constitute much of worldly knowledge; as such reason seems to be limited to just a small portion of the entire pie. Its usefulness is limited.

Before we can continue, we have to address the second point I have raised earlier, about the criteria of knowledge having to be eternal and necessary. Hume contradicts Plato by claiming knowledge, far from being necessary, is in fact contingent. On this point, I have to argue against the implicit premise that knowledge has to be eternal and necessary.

Good

Kant argues that knowledge is to the perceiver, that is, the perceiver constitutes knowledge, not to the object he perceives. For example, when we see a guitar, while there is conceivably more to it than what we can perceive, it is what we perceive that constitutes knowledge. The implication is that if eternal and necessary truths are beyond what we can perceive, it may be pointless to try and attain them.

Rationalists may see this as an argument for rationalism, as while senses are obviously limited, reason is apparently not. Kant argues that such an assumption may be hubris, as human reason is similarly subject to its limitations in that we can only have mental processes which are innate to us. Anything beyond the boundaries of reason (Kant identifies 12 processes which constitute the faculty of reason) is beyond the reach of human reason. Similarly, anything beyond the limits of space and time sensibility is beyond the faculty of experience.

Great section on Kant

Kant calls the world within our faculties the phenomenal world and the world beyond, the noumenal world. Since eternal and necessary knowledge seems to be beyond the phenomenal world, the pursuit of such can only result in pointless metaphysical speculation. The quest for knowledge should stop at what the phenomenal world would allow us.

Having defeated the Platonic argument identified in an earlier section by defeating one of its premises, we seem to return to the beginning. Although our previous conclusion seems to validate Hume's fork, we cannot claim experience to be the sole source of knowledge either, as it still suffers the criticism that it is limited. Empiricism finds it difficult to move beyond incorrigible sense data, as it is prone to the skeptical artillery of solipsism, that is, the claim that any leap to crediting a sense experience to an object or event is conceivably mistaken. It seems that experience cannot achieve knowledge either.

Discerning readers may have noticed that I have skewed the portrayal of rationalism's and empiricism's weaknesses to be complementary. While rationalism is successful at identifying

relations of ideas, reason without correspondence to the real world is empty. While empiricism has the necessary content for knowledge, it lacks the ability to be comprehensive and to move beyond the starting bedrock. This deadlock seems to recall Kant's argument that "intuition without concepts is blind, concepts without intuition is empty."

The next logical step is of course a synthesis of the two. As Kant argues, knowledge is the synthesis of reason and experience. Relations of ideas applied to matters of fact would conceivably extend our knowledge. Using Hume's missing shade of blue, a counter-example to his own theory Hume himself identified, to demonstrate this synthesis, experience gives us knowledge of the colour of blue, or as Hume puts it the idea of blue. Having seen all shades of blue save one, a person can conceivably identify that lost shade without experiencing it. That is because the person has imposed his faculty of logic upon his experience of blue. He notices that all shades differ from each other by a hue, and from those experiences of blue and such reflections he realises that he can derive the last shade of blue by changing the hue of one shade. That is how the relationship of how shades are connected is applied to a given shade to understand a new shade of blue and extend one's knowledge beyond his experience.

Thus, it is mistaken to claim that knowledge is founded on reason alone via the Platonic argument given, as we have proven knowledge need not be eternal or necessary. Also it is clear that to have knowledge, both reason and experience are needed in the process. Reason cannot exist in a vacuum devoid of experience.

**Comments:**

**Excellent. The analysis is mature, focused and goes beyond what is expected at this stage of your academic life. The use of Kant towards the end of the essay is particularly impressive.**

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