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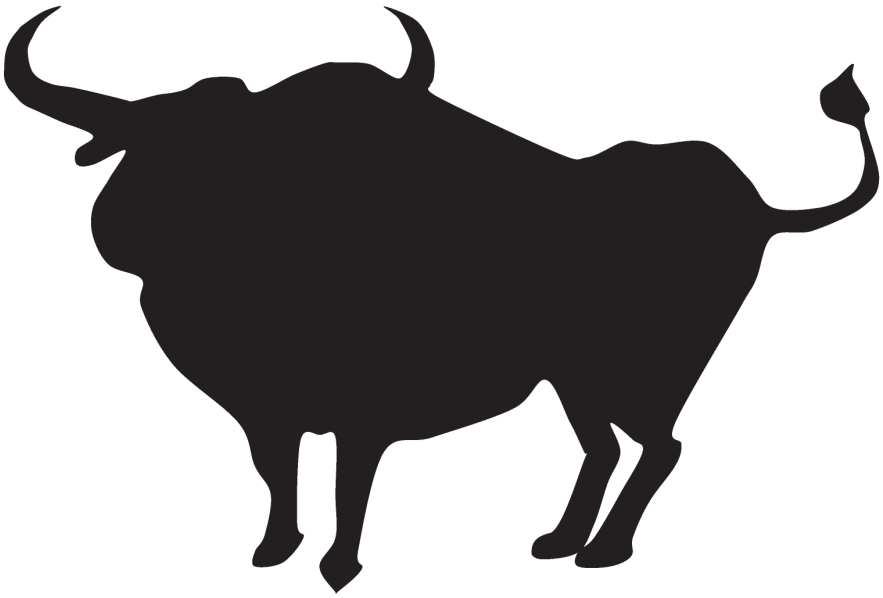

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1

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Matthew Tan | 20S06D**

Why is it that, in spite of international efforts, world peace remains unattainable?

Slavery is not a relic of the past. The inhumane use of biological and chemical weapons is not a relic of the past. Conflict is not a relic of the past. Contrary to the mainstream perception that the world today is a far cry from the barbarism and atrocities committed decades and centuries ago, many of the horrors of humanity we thought we eradicated still continue to haunt our society today. They hide behind a façade of lies and cover-ups, standing between us and world peace: the ideal that every global citizen lives harmoniously together and that no one is mistreated or violated. Counterintuitive as it may sound, it is precisely our international efforts to achieve world peace that have aided in allowing such acts against peace to proliferate in the shadows: the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and more. World peace remains unattainable in spite of international efforts because of weak international organisations that cannot enforce peace, the continued presence of strongman authoritarian leaders who blatantly disregard international efforts, and the hijacking of international efforts to obtain world peace by malicious countries, despite the fact that some may say international organisations have made leaps and bounds in creating peace.

A common (and often over-optimistic) argument for the attainment of world peace is that international coalitions and organisations have registered numerous successes in resolving conflict and ensuring peace. Supporters of this argument cite the fact that numerous countries working together, combining their resources, efforts, and intel to solve global problems is what makes international efforts far superior to other alternatives like unilateral action. They often raise the example of the

global coalition against the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as the hallmark of what international efforts can achieve. In the initial fight against the Daesh, it was only Syria and Iraq that fought back. The lack of international cooperation was what caused them to be largely unsuccessful in their defence; major cities like Raqqa, Mosul and many others throughout Syria fell like dominoes into the hands of ISIS. It was only after countries all around the world chipped in that ISIS was finally suppressed. Countries like U.S.A. and Russia contributed military might in drones and fighter jets, while smaller nations like Myanmar and Singapore contributed intelligence. The cumulative efforts of countries internationally was key in eliminating this critical threat to world peace.

However, it is not accurate to claim that power in numbers necessarily equates to a successful defence of world peace. It is the coordination between different countries that makes or breaks international efforts. Often, because countries may not be directly affected by a conflict happening half-way across the world, they have no incentive to help in international efforts, and waiting for them to attain world peace is not reliable. The coalition against ISIS remains a fringe example because it is a rare case where a huge number of countries were affected. In the majority of smaller but significant conflicts like the current Rohingya or Yemen humanitarian crises, many countries are unwilling to lift a finger because the conflict is localised to a region and does not impact the rest of the world. International efforts there are sorely inadequate at attaining peace.

In fact, on the topic of quantity not necessarily leading to quality, too many countries being involved can even regress our march towards peace. One reason why world peace has not been attained despite immense international efforts is that international organisations are handicapped by a need for consensus between too many countries that prevents enforcement of peace. In international organisations existing today, the United Nations stands out the most. It is supposedly responsible for fostering world peace by acting as a common platform for countries all around the world to engage in dialogue, arrive at a common conclusion, and act on that conclusion. However, the huge number of countries in the

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) means that for any conflict resolution being discussed, there is almost certainly one country that does not agree with the rest. One might think that this is not that significant of a problem, given that the UNGA functions on requiring just a super-majority vote (two-thirds of members agree) to act and intervene in a conflict, rather than an absolute consensus where not a single country dissents. Unfortunately, in a web of global alliances and relationships, if one country refuses to ratify a resolution to foster peace, that country can easily call on its allies to follow its votes. For example, the news organisation CNN uncovered a booming slave trade in Libya in 2017, where slaves from all over the African continent were being sold and trafficked. When the UNGA tabled a resolution to open an investigation into Libya, it was not just Libya that voted against it, but numerous other countries like Ghana, Mali, and Niger that voted against it as well. On top of being close regional allies with Libya, these countries were also where the main supply of slaves in the trade was. Other countries like China and Russia voted against the resolution too, because they were afraid of setting a precedent of having one's sovereignty violated by an investigation on the pretext of checking for human rights abuses, something they are guilty of as well. This saga effectively shut down any hope of salvation for the innocents in Libya who were robbed of their freedom, because the investigation could not be carried out without a successful vote. Although cliché, the saying "Too many cooks spoil the broth" aptly sums up why world peace is unattainable despite international efforts.

Second, world peace remains unattainable despite international efforts because of the presence of strongman rulers who obstruct the enforcement of peace and violate international regulations. These are mostly leaders of large, powerful countries who regularly flout international rules with impunity because no other country is willing or able to stop them. Many such authoritarian rulers abuse the military and economic prowess they have or the political clout they possess to carry out acts that actively harm world peace because it benefits their own country and bolsters their own popularity at home. The slew of political

and social conflicts today illustrate this. Xi Jinping routinely antagonises East and Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea by claiming China's "nine-dash line" that eats into waters of other nations like the Philippines and Malaysia. Despite international efforts to mediate the conflict, China has only worsened in its behaviour. It contravened rulings by the International Court of Justice (ICJ, based in The Hague) when it sent military installations to the Spratly Islands, which was claimed by the Philippines. It continues to conduct navy exercises around the waters of the Senkaku Islands claimed by Japan, despite multiple calls from the UN to avoid conflict. These are just the tip of the iceberg of territorial disputes China is embroiled in. Xi does this to improve his strongman cult of personality back in China, portraying himself to be a defender of Chinese interests and strength by standing up to the evil countries around them "stealing their rightfully owned land". Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was met by intense condemnation from the UN, but the military might and nuclear arsenal commanded by Vladimir Putin meant that no one could punish Russia's actions – not the UN, and not even the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This successful military offensive by Putin only served to boost his popularity in Russia for valiantly protecting Russian countrymen abroad. That is why these international organisations have been labelled "a talk shop" and "No Action, Talk Only" (a mockery of the acronym NATO) respectively. They fail miserably in curbing the actions of rogue and pariah states when they stir conflict and disrupt peace in the world. This is not just limited to economic powerhouses like China or nuclear powers like Russia. Saudi Arabia's meddling in Yemen and its continued use of excessively lethal weapons against the Houthi rebels, ordered by its Crown Price Mohammed bin Salman, has not been stopped by international efforts as Saudi Arabia controls key oil businesses and the global supply chain via the Organisation of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC), which it uses as leverage to deter international intervention. That is why international efforts have failed to attain world peace.

Lastly, the hijacking of international efforts is what prevents them from fostering world peace. Often, in key decision-making panels like the

United Nations Security Council (UNSC), large powers have their own vested interests that they pursue instead of world peace. In the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s, France (a member of the Permanent Five on the UNSC) exercised its veto power on the UNSC when deciding whether to intervene in the Tutsi-Hutu conflict. It was later unveiled that France had been supplying missiles and artillery to the Hutus through unmarked weapon shipments. America's continued refusal to stop Saudi Arabia's supply of weapons to Yemen to kill innocent civilians is precisely because it sold those weapons to Saudi Arabia in the first place, and was able to again profit massively from those sales. Often, international efforts fall flat on their face because powerful countries at the helm of these efforts have selfish ulterior motives, be it political or financial. That is why world peace remains unattainable.

For all the criticisms against international efforts and organisations, they do preserve some basic modicum of order and stability. Without them, the world would stray further away from world peace than we already have. However, such international efforts still have a long way to go if they are to attain world peace. Unless Hobbesian theories of innate human evil are true, in which case "some basic modicum of order and stability" may be all we can ever hope to achieve.

Marker's comments:

A fully relevant discussion addressing the idea of international efforts throughout. Ideas are insightful and a balanced response. A good range of illustrations, most of which are contemporary. Overall an engaging read!

Language-wise, there is a confident personal voice, assured response and it is framed in convincing language. Ideas are well-mapped out except the last paragraph appears hastily executed. Do make sure you qualify the abbreviation at the first instance before using them for the rest of the essay (e.g. UNGA, UNSC).

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2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 Lim Zheng Wei | 20A03A

Why is it that, in spite of international efforts, world peace remains unattainable?

At the very dawn of the new decade, the world quivered with fear upon the sights in Baghdad: multiple armoured vehicles lay destroyed, blown to pieces by an American missile. Inside, amongst other bodies, lay the corpse of top Iranian general Soleimani, who had overseen the rise of Iran in the Middle East, spreading its political and religious influence through the powers of proxy armies and even states. The world's spotlight shone on Donald Trump and Hassan Rouhani, as a conflict on the scale of World War 3 threatened to erupt. Yet, it never did transpire. On the international stage, world peace remains but an ideal for many, as conflicts – armed or ideological alike – continue to break out across the world on a daily basis. Indeed, with the prospect of a peaceful utopia seeming all the more wishful by the day, one thus begs the question: can world peace ever be attained?

Of course, we have come a long way since the mass destruction seen on the world stage from the mid-20th century. The signing of the UN Charter by the Allied Powers in 1945 nurtured a vision or a peaceful world through the establishment of the United Nations. Since then, international co-operation has received a massive boost, with such geopolitical organisations aiding its members to broker deals with one another and even arbitrate in times of unrest. The likes of the European Union and ASEAN are but a few of the numerous organisations seeking to promote regional stability through the alignment of international policy. By fostering closer ties with their geographical neighbours, these groups of countries are less likely to engage in military interventions against one another since disputes can be resolved through peaceful summits. Outside

of these regions, armed interventions on the global stage are becoming increasingly rare due to the threat of NATO and its military prowess; through which most of the Western world will willingly intervene to bring peace to conflict-torn regions should their interests be compromised. Additionally, the rapidly increased rate of globalisation since the Second World War has made countries all the more interdependent, pressuring countries to maintain good political and thus economical terms with other nations. Indeed, Iran's supposed development of nuclear weapons – a threat to world peace – was heavily suppressed through the imposition of significant financial tariffs by the United States, severely crippling its economy and threatening to plunge the nation into a recession. In a global economy increasingly dependent on other nations for imports and exports, cutting yourself off from other nations is simply detrimental. Indeed, the state of North Korea is in financial derelict today with most of its citizens living in absolute poverty due primarily to the autocratic ideology of the Kim family in their strong refusal to open up to a globalised world and constantly threatening to disrupt peace on the Korean peninsula. On the other hand, its neighbour, South Korea, had sought a more amiable avenue of development, fostering close ties with capitalist superpowers and henceforth prospering in the global economy. Seeing as to the disparity between the two nations today, it is no surprise to see why most nations choose to pursue the latter's route, embracing peace and stability in return for prosperity. Consequently, substantial progress toward world peace has been made since the late 20th century, hence sharply reducing the number of armed conflicts today.

Nonetheless, international efforts to create a global, homogenised world will always be undermined by ideological and cultural differences between both citizens and political citizens. This is ostensibly true with the dominance of nationalism in today's political rhetoric, with many right-wing governments choosing to outwardly prioritise the needs and interests of its own nation even at the expense of a Pareto-optimal outcome. The U.S.' withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord and Brexit are but two of the more prominent examples of nations choosing to retreat from the rest of the world in favour of more ideological and social

freedoms. Indeed, with citizens increasingly choosing to define themselves by their country of origin rather than by our common species, humanist ideals threaten to crumble as the selfish, conflicting interests of nations threaten to spark conflict at any time. Particularly, Russia's recent interferences in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections are but one instance of Russia's attempts to increase their sphere of influence worldwide. With President Vladimir Putin's authoritarian style of rule contrasting greatly with America's belief in free and fair elections, it is no surprise that rifts have once again formed between the two global superpowers as they compete to claim ideological supremacy over the world. Whilst tensions between the two have largely dissipated since the days of the Cold War; the two are in effect still heavily opposed to one another on the international stage, most evidenced by their proxy wars in the Middle East in states such as Syria and Yemen. Furthermore, outright differences in political ideology have caused geopolitical conflicts, with the Western-Centric UN and its member nations seeking to profess their ideals of democracy and capitalism upon the rest of the world. Dissidents to these tenets are, thus, politically ostracised. In Venezuela, world leaders such as Trump and Maduro have publicly applied political pressure upon socialist leader Nicolas Maduro via throwing their support behind the opposition leader Juan Gaido. Gaido's rising popularity in his nation has contributed to increasing civil unrest in Venezuela over the past year, as military forces have sought to unsuccessfully crack down on protestors, inadvertently causing harm to many. In the past, nations have even resorted to military interventions as a means of disapproval, usurping power from authoritarian dictators such as Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein.

Additionally, economic disparity has created tensions between the developed and developing world. Indeed, in a global economy fervently prizing dollar votes, richer countries have amassed more power on the global stage and many poorer nations have been subject to their whims, raising calls for an end to such lopsided balances of power. More pertinently, funds from international aid have largely been channelled in directions accorded by more influential financial backers such as the EU and the US. Detractors have thus accused international organisations of

being unfair in their giving practices through their bias toward resource-rich or politically friendly nations. In the aftermath of the Iraq war, many Western powers left Iraq in a derelict state financially and politically, leading many locals to harbour adverse sentiments against foreign powers. In recent years, the political void created by social turmoil has even led to the ascent of the Islamic State, which was able to harness their profitable oilfields as a means of funding their ideological crusades against the West, establishing an Islamic caliphate whilst committing acts of terrorism overseas. Had the Western world more clearly supported the economic redevelopment of Iraq and furthermore rose its' citizens' standard of living, religious extremism may not be as widespread in today's world. Furthermore, geopolitical conflict can be used as a tool to extract financial windfalls, threatening world peace at the expense of gaining financial stability. This art has been perfected by North Korea, wherein Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un have created the world's most pressing conflict via the destabilisation of the Korean peninsula. Faced with a stark ideological contrast against the rest of the world, the Kims have perilously held on to power by insisting upon the tight suppression of political liberties, at the expense of financial tariffs. Nonetheless, the recent rise in its nuclear capabilities has paradoxically propped up the state financially. According to research, the lifting of trade restrictions as well as the generous provisions of financial aid by the international community during peace summits have greatly funded Kim Jong-un's lavish lifestyle. Accordingly, every nuclear test or show of military might by Kim has successfully extracted even more funds from the West, thus paradoxically mastering the profiteering from conflict.

Economic and ideological diversity has fractured nations worldwide, giving rise to vast instances of refugees and illegal migration from poorer to richer nations which have exacerbated international tensions. For example, outbreaks of violence and financial turmoil in the nations of Venezuela and Syria have caused a mass exodus of its citizens to the 'Global North'. In spite of international efforts, such an influx of refugees has placed considerable strain on infrastructure and social cohesion in the developed world, with the harbouring of hostile sentiments toward

refugees shattering social peace and dividing the public sphere in many countries. Along borders, frequent skirmishes have broken out as refugees become increasingly desperate to gain access to better living conditions, yet facing an increasingly displeased Western world who have begun ceasing to accommodate outsiders. Indeed, anti-migrant, nationalist politicians such as Le Pen and Trump have gained scores of political supporters through their non-conciliatory approach to refugees, which has only served to proliferate conflict along national borders and between nations who are unable to reach a compromise on the handling of such a massive influx of foreigners. Anti-migrant rhetoric has thus been one of the major fuels of nationalism, straining international relationships and increasing the hostility of our political climate, symbolising a large deviation from world peace. Furthermore, the implementation of other divisive nationalistic ideals tends to give rise to the development of larger geopolitical conflicts, further threatening world peace. In the Kashmir region, the rise of India's Hindu nationalist sentiments has incurred the ire of Muslim extremists in Pakistan, hence triggering an armed standoff along their border. With each passing day, Prime Minister Modi's increasingly divisive policies – such as the citizenship ban which outlawed numerous Indian Muslims and effectively rendered them stateless – have exacerbated tensions between India and its other Muslim neighbours of Pakistan and Bangladesh. A mutually reinforcing effect is created as nationalist sentiments (such as those championed by Pakistani Prime Minister Khan) are gradually strengthened in nations, eventually sparking conflicts such as the one in Kashmir.

Lastly, it is almost impossible that peace exists within one's own national borders. With globalisation, many are being increasingly influenced by political ideologies and moral values imported from overseas, placing them at odds with the more conservative and traditional mindsets ingrained in many. Whilst this precarious equilibrium merely manifests itself through political disagreements, armed conflicts and protests such as those observed in Afghanistan and Hong Kong can break out, invoking military use and thus causing an undermining of social stability and disruption of peace. Many of the poorer states in the Middle East such as

Syria have even been wrecked by years of international and national conflict, thus bearing outward resentment and becoming outwardly hostile as a nation and spending disproportionately heavily on their military budgets, thus being antagonistic toward efforts for world peace.

Thus, whilst humanism as an ideal is still prized by many, human beings and nations still fall susceptible to selfish inclinations via the prioritisation of their own needs above others, eliciting unprovoked hostility and increasing artificial delineations along the boundaries of race, religion, class, nationality and beyond. This fatal flaw in humans thus perennially causes divisions on a local, regional, and international scale, creating an endlessly perilous social and physical sphere which can be easily destabilised and spark conflicts for time immemorial. Consequently, whilst peace has now become a societal expectation for many in the developed world, conflicts between and within nations will never cease to exist.

Marker's Comments:

Quite a comprehensive essay replete with abundant and relevant examples. Try not to just discuss the causes of conflicts. Remember to address the condition "Despite international efforts" more explicitly. Highlight the failures of international efforts to address such issues. Overall, still an impressive essay under timed conditions.

3

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 Russell Chee Kar Ho | 20A01B

Is it fair to say that technology has only worsened conflict in society?

"Do no evil." Though Google installed this as its official credo when it was still a nascent company with little inkling of the massive powerhouse it would later become, it nonetheless saw it fit to pursue what it termed Project Dragonfly, or the creation of a related search engine that censored politically sensitive terms, for approval by the Chinese government. Though this ultimately failed, this incident reflected the ethos of most technology firms today – a willingness to sacrifice moral courage and any ethical considerations in exchange for the relentless pursuit of profit and greater innovation. The tide of public opinion, once adulatory and servile towards these innovators, has decisively turned; erstwhile bipartisan support has transformed into vocal opposition from all parts of the political spectrum. Public commentators hasten to decry the overgrowth of technology in our lives, arrestingly indicting them on the charge that they have worsened conflict across the globe – whether violent military conflict or the latent tensions of inequality threatening to tear society apart, they argue that technology, in its present guise, simply has no redeeming characteristics. Yet such a fatalistic view is a fundamental misreading of technology – after all, humans had made little progress from the first Homo sapiens until the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, an indisputable testament to the fundamental importance of technology to human progress. While technology may, in its inchoate birth, give rise to unforeseen outcomes that worsen societal tensions, they ultimately serve the fundamental purpose of bridging these gaps, often bringing together diverse communities; technological development unbridled may

engender and exacerbate conflicts, yet suitable regulatory regimes may channel them to more altruistic uses, in pursuit of a higher ideal – peace.

Naysayers typically decry technology for worsening societal conflicts in two areas – by disrupting international rules of war, technology threatens to ignite a military firestorm; by its empirical nature, technology can only further concretise present inequalities in society. The first of these arguments may indeed appear convincing. International conflict has long been governed by two main principles – the first is that of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) as a means of deterring conflict between established nuclear superpowers; the latter is honourable and humane conduct in the waging of war – sparing civilians and minimising damage to civilian infrastructure, particularly medical. Recent technological advancements threaten to be the undoing of both. The development of hypersonic missiles – capable of travelling at speeds of over Mach 5 – by Russia, capable of carrying nuclear warheads, would concretise what Ronald Reagan's dream of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) once threatened to do: it breaks the notion of a mutual nuclear deterrent, since America can no longer guarantee a sufficiently rapid response in the event of a Russian first-strike. In 1983, Reagan's announcement of the SDI set the bipolar Cold War on knife-edge, culminating in the mobilisation of the Soviet leadership to prepare to fire a nuclear missile, a decision only revoked at the last minute. So too, modern Luddites fear, today's technology threatens to upset the precarious international balance. The danger posed by the second aspect seems even more acute. With the development of increasingly advanced Artificial Intelligence drones, questions have been raised surrounding the ethical issue of conduct in war. Such drones fall into three categories – "in the loop", "on the loop", and "out of the loop" respectively. This latter category raises the most questions, as unlike any technology before, it will operate completely autonomously once deployed, raising the issue of how belligerents will continue to be held accountable for their actions if they did not commit them legally. This raises the possibility of a complete collapse of the laws governing war. What raises the stakes is the rise of rogue states and international terrorist and criminal organisations worldwide, who may not,

in both principles, conform to existing guidelines. In the realm of warfare, then, it seems that technology has succeeded only in worsening existing tensions.

The latter argument is subtler yet far more insidious. Due to the prevalence of AI in modern-day technology, the notion of Big Data as a predictive paradigm has become paramount, with algorithms drawing on vast banks of historical data to prognosticate potential future choices or preferences. While this has streamlined much of modern life and increased everyday convenience, it also threatens to perpetuate and worsen existing inequalities. In California, for example, an algorithm has been developed that seeks to predict the likelihood of recidivism of a given criminal to set an appropriate bail figure. Yet, because this is based on past records of recidivism, it will inevitably reproduce – and worse, legitimise – past prejudices and discrimination that have led to higher recidivism rates among underprivileged minorities like poor Black Americans. In its cold, unflinching assessment of the past, technology threatens to rationalise human prejudices that have led to historical disparities and injustices. As technology becomes become ever more integrated into daily life, this threatens to create an inescapable trap for minorities and underprivileged groups, worsening the already stoked tensions gripping most modern-day societies that are grappling with the inevitable inequality that arises in any minority group.

These individuals who do nothing but direct harsh opprobrium at technology, however, are not Cassandras, accurate in their pessimism yet overlooked by a narrow-minded society. Rather, they are false prophets, rigid Luddites who remain a tiny minority – with good reason. A straightforward assessment of our daily lives exposes not only our utter reliance on technology, but also how powerful technology has been for humankind as a corrective force for progress. While technology may not be able to solve every problem and may not always be an entirely positive development, it would be completely unfair to indict it on the count of having only worsened the conflict-ridden world we live in today. While technological development may have disrupted the 20th-century rules of

war, making the potential severity of impeding war far more threatening, it has created many important benefits that inherently encourage peace, reducing the chance of outright conflict to begin with. Furthermore, while the rigid application of technology may worsen and promulgate existing inequalities, the greatest benefits of technology have often accrued to underprivileged groups, and communications technology has been utterly integral to the empowerment of such groups as well.

Explicitly militarised technology has only ever been a tiny subset of overall technological development. In fact, the bulk of innovation is far more benevolent, not only engendering further safeguards to the escalation of conflict and war but often resulting in consequences that disincentivise, discourage or simply disallow war, guaranteeing greater peace and stability than in a world bereft of such technologies. One of the most significant (but underappreciated) advances in battlefield technology has in fact been the engineering of ever more sophisticated, comprehensive supervisory systems. After the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was signed by all 6 parties in 2015, outlawing the further enrichment of uranium by Iran, a thorough system of supervision was created employing state-of-the-art detectors and navigational systems that were able to ensure that Iran did not violate the terms of the agreement. Used in this way, technology can be a tool for enforcing peace, and ensuring that rogue states are kept in check. Even when less explicit, however, technological development has become utterly integral to disincentivising war and conflict in a world of exponentially increased complexity. Europe, for instance, has become intimately linked due to its collective efforts at developing complex technologies like the Galileo navigational system or the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland. Much as the necessity of international cooperation in the development of 5G networks has led US allies to take more calculated decisions and continue cooperation with Huawei, thus lessening tensions with China, the nature of technological development today suggests that engendering greater international peace and cooperation, it is not only the product that engenders such outcomes but the process of innovation as well.

Similarly, while technology may indeed appear poised to set existing inequalities in stone through the rationalisation of past prejudice, it has also provided such underprivileged communities with precisely the tools needed to combat such systemic inequalities. One might further argue that while minorities have historically, always, and inevitably been underprivileged groups susceptible to the prejudices and discrimination and minorities, with today's technology symbolising merely a continuation or worsening of this effect, the converse is true for their empowerment by newfound technological innovations. These represent an entirely new set of tools with which underprivileged groups can finally effectively contest their marginalisation by society. Social media, in its democratisation of both access to and production of information, has played the most important role in this regard. One of the groups that have been most empowered by this is the youth – due to voting regulations, often regarded as unimportant and peripheral by political decision-makers. The youths of today have been empowered on both the individual and collective levels; in the former, take Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, now an icon of the global climate change movement; in the latter, take the #MarchForOurLives, the first genuinely effective collective mobilisation by American youths standing against gun rights. These effects, however, have impacted almost all other minority groups as well. Whether in #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #TimesUp or #OscarsSoWhite, the unimaginable virality of social media has spawned an entire cottage industry of hashtag movements that, even if failing to directly effect immediate change, have been overwhelmingly significant in bringing minority voices to the fore, legitimising their concerns and warranting greater discussion of the innumerable majority-minority tensions wracking society. It is thus impossible to argue that technology has only worsened intra-societal conflict – while algorithms represent merely a repackaging of the eternal under-privileging of minority groups in society, democratising technology has had a sui generis, never-before-seen impact: it has genuinely widened the conversation, including previously marginalised voices and pointing to a more hopeful possibility of the eradication, rather than the worsening, of societal injustice.

In fact, however, the most significant error critics make in their unqualified rage at technology is not in the nature of the impact it has on society (where they fixate on the negative outcomes and neglect the undeniably beneficial consequences technology can have), but in the nature of the contested subject-matter. Technology only worsens conflict because it is unbridled and unregulated, without a strict ethical code of application and laws to prevent its misuse. So long as technology and innovation are coupled with an effective, extensive and comprehensive set of laws and regulations, its negative impact can be minimised while the myriad of positives it brings are fully explored and enjoyed. Take social media as an example; while it has been important in giving a voice to minority groups in society, it has also laid the grounds for the rise of bigoted, intolerant views held by racists, xenophobes and radicals. Holocaust denialism, for instance, which denies the Jews their fundamental legacy and history of oppression, has become almost commonplace on alternative social media platforms such as 4chan, along with a rabid anti-Semitism. Yet, if the fundamental purpose of technology is to aid human progress and improve our lives, it is imperative that suitable limits are developed by society alongside new technology to prevent excess, misuse and abuse. In what has become infamous as Section 230, an obscure qualification of a US Bill regulating media platforms exempted online forums from the responsibility of ensuring truthfulness and decency on websites, something that social media platforms have used to justify the proliferation of intolerant, intolerable opinions across the Internet. Yet, this regulatory measure is clearly obsolete, having been implemented in the 1990s, when the Internet was still a nascent platform. To ensure that the utility of technology to society is maximised, it is essential that safeguards are developed to ensure and enshrine the ideals of technology in such a way that its application will ultimately benefit society, lessening the conflicts across the globe without their abuse (in the cases of breaking the laws of war) nor unintended misuse (as in the concretisation of injustice through big data).

Ultimately, it is simply overly parochial to take such a revisionist stand against technology. There is no doubt that technological development has

been almost single-handedly responsible for the astonishing improvement in global standards of living as witnessed in the past three centuries. In itself, this has reduced the potential for conflict, because outright war is disincentivised in a time of material comfort that risks ruination were conflict and disruption to arise. While it is true that the latest iteration of unprecedented technological advances may have worsened the severity of potential military conflict and deepened societal tensions by raising the possibility of the long-term normalisation of historical injustices by algorithms, it is arguable that, as it is often wont to do, technology has also provided solutions to these prospective problems. It has rewritten the rules of international engagement and cooperation to such an extent as to make a major war genuinely unthinkable; it has given unprecedented voice to previously disempowered minorities to make their injustices known and seek redress. Both those outcomes demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding – that technological development has been excessive and uncontrolled when it is in fact society and its attendant faults that have failed to keep up. Facebook's motto sums it up – it was once to "Move fast and break things", and it was society's acquiescence in this destruction that enabled its many damaging, tension-exacerbating outcomes witnessed today. Technology is ultimately always something novel to society, yet it is important that, through a robust system of institutional safeguards and a powerful regulatory regime, society is able to keep a lid on this novelty, so that, to paraphrase Joseph Schumpeter, technology may "create" and not "destroy"; so that it may only resolve, and not worsen, the conflicts society is dealing with today.

Marker's comments:

You have packed in so much in 1 ½ hours! Good breadth and depth of content and argumentation.

1. *'worsen' → state clearly its extent/scale, intensity, and frequency*
2. *Just as you discussed the nature of technolgy, see if you can say something about the nature of conflict.*

4

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Brendan Mark | 20S03C**

Is our trust in science misplaced?

Living in an era where it has never been easier to see the works of Man shaping the world around us, we all too often take for granted the universality of one of mankind's greatest collective achievements — science. The empirical study of the world around us, as well as the advancements and applications it has in our modern lives, is a discipline that mankind has indubitably lent much credence to and placed humongous faith in. Yet is there reason to believe that our trust in science is mistakenly placed? While some may argue so because of the ethical problems science has introduced into our already-troubled world today, our trust in the reliability, utility and continuity of scientific study is well-placed, as science has proven itself to be credible and reliable, with real-life applications to solve pressing issues in our world today, and has great potential for future contributions to the human race.

Proponents of the view that our trust in the beneficence of science is gravely misplaced may put forward the assertion that science has introduced an entirely new set of ethical problems into our already-problematic modern world. The study into the universal forces that govern our world, while carried out with the noble aim of improving our lives today, has opened up a Pandora's box of ethical concerns. In the nature of scientific study to push boundaries, studies into artificial intelligence have introduced the fear of machines taking over much of the role humans play, in the workplace or at home, creating the possibility of human redundancy in society, as well as ethical concerns over the recognition of such sentient beings as humans. At the forefront of scientific research, gene editing and cloning technology have given rise to questions as to

the ethicality of "playing God" to create and destroy life, as well as to correct flaws in our molecular composition.

Such fields of science can be polarising and divisive, with the thought of Nazi-esque eugenics giving pause to some people who think our trust in science's ability to solve problems has gone too far, especially in a world already riddled with human rights concerns and moral struggles. While fears like these are not unfounded, they reveal a parochial view of scientific study and fail to realise the many benefits science has brought into our lives, that merit the trust humanity has placed in it today.

Firstly, our trust in the reliability of scientific information is well-placed, as science has proven itself to be a credible discipline. At the crux of scientific investigation is a firm philosophy of evidence-based deduction. The common thread linking all fields of science together is the empirical testing of hypotheses to explain an observation. In the study of chemistry, chemists use a variety of molecular techniques to corroborate theories about the molecules around us. The theory of atoms composed of charged particles revolving around a densely packed nucleus was one of many hypothesised centuries ago to explain the different reactions of elements with one another. Through ages of rigorous testing and corroboration, theories that did not hold water were eliminated, and the model of the atom we know today is one that has withstood the test of time. Scientific theories are only accepted as fact after rigorous experimentation to verify the authenticity of a hypothesis, ensuring the reliability of scientific information. Such studies often involve peer review within the scientific community, where independent teams of researchers put hypotheses to the test to arrive at the veracity of a theory that holds water. The multiple checks and balances in scientific study ensure that new information is reliable beyond doubt before being published, reinforcing a self-regulating system of knowledge discovery constantly refining a database of information that is reliable and credible, and hence worthy of our trust.

Secondly, our trust in the utility of scientific study is well-placed, as it has applications in solving pressing real-world problems. While scientific

research is conducted by and large by a learned few, its applications in human society are deep and far-reaching. Many areas of our lives have been revolutionised by science to such an extent that life without it is unimaginable. The problem of lacking the food supply to feed an exploding global population has been countered by applications of science in mechanised refrigeration and food preservation, giving food supplies much longer shelf lives in packets and cans. This enables the transport and distribution of food en masse to regions in the world that do not produce enough to feed their population. Granted, there are still areas in the world where access to food and nutrition is limited, but science has come a long way in allowing us to keep and store food for extended periods of time. Furthermore, the scourge of disease, once a plague to human life and wellness, has seen a huge reduction in magnitude and severity around the globe, thanks to scientific progress in pharmacology and healthcare standards. What started with the study of Penicillium mould in petri dishes has now led to a plethora of antibiotic treatments, and the continual refinement of surgical procedures based on new information about the anatomy of the human body has allowed countless life-saving surgeries to be performed, most notably in the fields of cardiology and oncology. With decades of science greatly boosting the affordability, accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare, science has vastly diminished the once-major threat physical ailments posed to our health. Similar scientific breakthroughs over the years have indisputably ameliorated many of the problems humans face, heightening our quality of life and life expectancy to unprecedented levels. Therefore, science has proven itself to be extremely impactful in its utility to tackle problems faced by humanity, easily meriting our trust.

Furthermore, our trust in the continuity of science is also well-placed, with science showing great potential to sustain itself and contribute to the human race. More scientific breakthroughs have been made in the last 100 years than ever, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "snowball effect" of science. As the database of scientific information continues to expand, new discoveries and advancements are allowed to occur at an exponential rate with the increasing accessibility of scientific information

to the layman. While once thought of as a discipline confined to the ivory towers, it is now easier than ever to make new discoveries in science. The science of today is hence a mighty discipline built up by generations before us, left for us to pass down to the generations to come with an ever-growing bank of information. Science in this regard is not only self-sustaining, but continually expanding in its size, and consequently relevance to our world. The science of tomorrow may hold solutions to hunger and global warming, as breakthroughs are already in the works. Science hence has great potential to sustain the human race too, and is hence deserving of our trust.

Science has long been heralded as one of the greatest achievements of our world, and this is certainly not without grounds. With the credibility, utility and continuity of science, it is a discipline undoubtedly worthy of the great trust humanity has placed in it. The world of infinite possibilities lies well within the expanse of science, and it is up to us humans solely to discover it.

Marker's Comments:

An excellent response, fully relevant with a range of illustrations. This is clearly one of your best essays! I enjoyed reading it, especially the choice of vocab and use of convincing language. Keep up the good work!
While the last point is OK, is there any way to substantiate it so that it doesn't just sound theoretical?

5

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Koh Yi Hui | 20S03H**

Is our trust in science misplaced?

A disease-free population, genetically modified food and humans, or even autonomous self-driving vehicles. These are just some of the promises that science offers in the rapidly advancing world today, whereby the shift in focus to science has catalysed its progress by leaps and bounds. Dubbed the "driving force" of societal progress and a key hallmark of an educated society, science has undoubtedly been placed on a pedestal by many. Each year, notable awards such as the Nobel Prize, or Breakthrough Prizes are given to scientists deemed to have made the most significant contributions to the scientific community, emphasizing the prestigious and vital role science is accorded in our society. Some believe this is rightfully so, with the rational, fact-based, and accurate nature of science leaving little space for argumentation, offering us indisputable explanations that allow us to better understand how the world works. This trust in science has given rise to its formidable power and influence. Yet, I believe that our trust in science may be misplaced with the undermining of the very nature of science which we place our trust in.

Proponents of science within the scientific community such as scientists, argue that our trust in science is not misplaced as science is able to deliver what it promises. They attribute this to the fact-based, objective nature of science, which ensures its universality and applicability in the real world. Citing the vigorous fact checking procedures and scrutiny that the scientific community is subjected to, they posit that science does indeed present accurate, fact-based explanations for the phenomena we observe in our daily lives. For instance, scientists are required to carry out numerous experiments to determine the validity of their hypothesis, repeating the experiments over and over again to increase their sample

size, hence increasing the reliability of the results that they have obtained. When sharing their conclusions and findings with the entire world, they are required to present these experimental data in academic research papers, which are then published in scientific journals. These scientific journals, such as the widely acclaimed Nature, are then subjected to scrutiny by the rest of the scientific community, serving as a means of checks and balances to ensure the reliability and credibility of results observed. Such a process typically takes years in itself, due to its tedious nature that only serves to ensure that science delivers on what it promises, ensuring its reliability and accuracy. Furthermore, the scientific community also holds prestigious scientific conferences throughout the year, acting as an avenue for scientists to share their insights with others, while providing an opportunity for others to examine their work and challenge any assumptions that they have made, further serving as a check and balance to ensure that any scientific knowledge gleaned at the end of the day is trustworthy. Such events include the Singapore Science and Engineering Fair for budding student researchers, or even conferences like the International Science Fair held in other countries. As a result of these rigorous checks and balances present in the scientific community, it is argued that there leaves little avenue for science to be inaccurate or unreliable, and hence science is to be trusted, for it can deliver what it promises.

While I concede that there are indeed rigorous checks and balances to ensure that science is able to maintain its fact-based, accurate nature that we so highly value science for, it is not to say that science is always able to ensure its trustworthiness. There are certain limits as to what these checks and balances can do, undermining its very nature. As a result, our trust in science would be misplaced.

The rigorous checks and balances are insufficient to prevent instances of scientific fraud within the scientific community due to alternative objectives that overpower the need of the scientific community to ensure science's fact based and accurate nature. Such alternative objectives include firms' vested interests or even the personal motivations of their

scientists carrying out the research. In the headlong rush to keep up with the ever-evolving nature of science due to the rapid speed of developments and breakthroughs, the essence of science becomes threatened and diluted. For instance, to secure funding for hefty scientific research projects that at times rack up thousands, if not millions, of dollars, scientific research firms often have to collaborate with other firms which might influence the nature and outcome of such research. This is often difficult to ascertain due to confidential Non-Disclosure Agreements signed between both parties, but it is certain that other profit-maximising firms have at least a say in which scientific results are to be published, or even involved, in the research process. This potentially results in misrepresentation of results, or even scientific fraud. For instance, research firm Global Balance Energy Network once published a scientific report dismissing the link between sugary drinks and obesity. Upon further investigation, it was found to be linked to carbonated drink manufacturer Coke, which funded the entire research project. It is evident that the vested interests of other stakeholders can hence undermine the fact-based and accurate nature of science we trust in. Besides, stakeholders such as the scientist himself can contribute to scientific fraud due to a misalignment of personal vested interests and the aims of the scientific community. Such scientists may be tempted to act in such a manner in pursuit of personal fame and recognition, leading to scientific fraud. For instance, Japanese stem cell scientist Obokata had previously published a scientific paper describing her breakthrough in developing a new method to obtain Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells. This was met with great favour and enthusiasm, but none of those who tried to replicate her work could achieve results similar to what she had reportedly observed. It was only upon further investigation that she was found to have doctored the experimental data, and was hence labelled as a fraudster. Through such instances, it is evident that the checks and balances put in place to ensure the reliability of scientific results are insufficient, and could be easily overpowered by the alternative vested interests of the stakeholders involved. As such, our trust in science is misplaced, for it does not always deliver what it promises.

Additionally, our trust in science is misplaced as science need not be the absolute truth. It merely offers the most logical, plausible explanation or conclusion thought of at that particular point in time, but this does not mean that it is absolutely accurate or reliable. Some may even go as far as to assert that science is merely what we believe until otherwise proven wrong. A common argument for this cites the phenomenon of inductive reasoning, whereby we make conclusions based on our limited sample size, which might in fact, not be representative of the entire world we live in. This is due to the inherent limitation of scientists to observe and experiment on all aspects of the world before drawing any reasonable conclusions, due to the sheer scale of the world we live in. For instance, just because Down Syndrome has been observed to be caused by a third chromosome in the 23rd chromosome pair might not mean that it is a fact for sure - it may simply be a case that the anomaly to this observed trend has not been encountered as of yet (though it still remains the case as of now). Science does not necessarily offer the absolute truth, for there are times when scientific theories have been overturned and replaced with new scientific concepts as well, based on the ever-evolving contributions in the scientific community, characterised by rapid breakthroughs and developments. One such example is the theory of evolution, which was initially merely based on observing similarities in the physical traits shared. Following recent years, with the development of science enabling the sequencing of genomes of various organisms, molecular homology is increasingly used in place of such physical observations to determine inter-species' evolutionary relationships. This has allowed for a more accurate understanding of the world we live in, and has also overturned previous falsehoods that we mistakenly believed in due to the fact that they were presented to us in the name of "science". Evidently, science is nothing more than just hypothesising the best explanation at the point in time to explain the world around us, and might not be the absolute truth. This challenges the fact based and accurate nature of science that we trust in it for, and hence our trust in science is misplaced.

Lastly, science also has its inherent limitations in modeling the complex world we live in, hence undermining the fact based nature and accuracy

that we trust in it for. This is especially so when the world we live in is highly intricate and dynamic, with a number of factors coming into play at any given point in time to possibly give rise to different phenomena we observe. Meanwhile, science only serves to isolate one factor at a time, studying its effect in great detail when we might in fact be missing out on the bigger picture altogether. One such example is the way scientific experiments are designed, with only one independent variable at any given point in time. This is highly unrepresentative of the complex world we live in, falling to account for different factors out there which might influence the end result. Additionally, due to ethical considerations, experimentation regarding human diseases are often carried out on animal models such as lab rats, as compared to directly on humans. While animal models serve as a means to model the way humans will react to certain substances introduced to their bodies, animal models are still fundamentally different from humans, giving rise to differences that we cannot possibly postulate due to the lack of research. What might be successful in an animal model may be unsuccessful when applied to real life. As such, due to the inherent limitations of science to model the complex world we live in, science might not always be able to offer us accurate or reliable results, and hence our trust in science is misplaced.

This is not to say that the concept of science, in itself, is something that we should no longer trust. Rather, it is the way science is executed, along with its inherent limitations, that undermines its reliability and accuracy, compromising on its ability to deliver on what it promises. Nonetheless, science is still placed on a pedestal in today's time and age, with an increasing emphasis on science like never before. It is undeniable that science heralds great promise - the cure to diseases, world hunger, increasing convenience, amongst the many other benefits that science can bring. Yet, before we blindly agree and trust whatever science presents to us, perhaps it is time to stop and consider whether we should even trust whatever is presented in the first place.

Marker's Comments:

+ Good work here, Yi Hui. A very thoughtful response that shows a very thorough understanding of science, its limitations and how other factors like profit impact it.

+ Depth of evaluation is evident by providing insight into the traits of science.

o Examples are consistently developed but some tend to be general trends/standard material. This is one area you can improve in.

+ Overall, your writing is very clear with apt word choice, complex sentence structure and some evidence of personal voice.

6

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 Boo Jin An, Joshua | 20A01B

Do you agree that a university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary today?

A university education has traditionally been held in high regard by most of society. The prestige attached to brand-name institutions like Oxford and Cambridge has generally been seen as a vital factor in marking an individual out for future success, and as higher education became more accessible, what was once perceived as the preserve of the elite gradually evolved into a product seen as necessary for accomplishment in life in more and more societies. However, the notion has recently surfaced that a university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary today. I disagree with this because if anything, a university education is in fact becoming increasingly necessary.

Some individuals, believing themselves enlightened, argue that a university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary as our current era requires members of society to have a more creative, entrepreneurial mindset – something they believe the rigid, institutional education in universities cannot provide. The rapid, ever-accelerating growth of technology and the increasingly unstable world order means that it will be independent, self-sufficient thinkers who will be able to innovate and stay on top of things. The world increasingly needs this type of people to steer it through a global wave of uncertainty and crises, as reflected in the "21st-Century Key Competencies" framework which privileges entrepreneurial thinking above skills like rote-learning and repetitive task-performing. Large employers like Google specifically look for "creative" people to solve increasingly complex modern problems, and in an age of Silicon Valley startups, innovators are gaining increasing prominence in the media,

business and myriad other areas. The key gripe proponents of this argument have with university education is that it fails to prepare students for this increasingly chaotic world that relies on out-of-the-box thinking. They point to the very nature of the university as an institution, arguing that it renders it poorly suited for developing 21st-century mindsets. The fact that the power over every student's education rests in the hands of a cabal of professors means that students are steeped in the mindsets of tradition and the previous era, as not all professors, it is argued, can or will change and develop courses fast enough to keep up with the times. Courses like the classics are increasingly being mocked – in the 21st century, why would the study of Latin be useful in navigating the ever-shifting global climate? Those who believe a university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary point to these factors to illustrate its growing irrelevance – in an era where thinkers need to be dynamic, agile in responding to the rapid changes in modern society, a university education does not develop dynamism. It provides students with a knowledge base that may be rapidly outmoded, rather than focusing on providing them with the skills needed to survive. A university does not teach students to fish; it gives them a fish which will inevitably rot with the increasingly chaotic and fast-paced progress of the rest of the world.

Such an argument does make a valid point in recognising that society shifts and changes much more rapidly today and it is important to be able to respond to that. However, its error lies in assuming that universities are static. Even institutions must evolve over time, particularly when society around them is evolving quickly. Universities, in fact, have even more of an incentive to adapt to the confusing modern climate: they need to uphold that prestige attached to a university education in order to safeguard their own interests. A university cannot afford to become irrelevant. To sustain itself, it must continually draw in students by proving that they can develop mindsets that are needed in the 21st century. For this reason, many universities are in fact creating such opportunities for students to learn modern key competencies – and precisely because they are institutions, these opportunities tend to be extra-special: they are not open to the general public. Furthermore, universities do not merely

provide knowledge. A university education includes access to networks that are in fact needed to translate dynamic mindsets into actual change in reality. People who believe a university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary fail to make the link that mindsets without means are unactionable – a link that a university education can bridge, and solve.

Thus, one reason why a university education is not becoming increasingly unnecessary – but rather the opposite – today is that modern university education actually does provide opportunities for developing entrepreneurial and creative mindsets that are unavailable elsewhere. Students are a university's lifeblood for many reasons: for the money they provide, for the educational spirit of the institution, and so on. To nurture students prepared for the modern world – and hence attract new ones – universities have thus attempted to innovate themselves. Professors and consultants routinely attempt to plan new courses and experiences that will provide students with the empathy and creative thinking needed to respond to modern crises. In addition, the weight behind universities allows them to partner with other organisations in providing such experiences. Such avenues allow students to gain a deeper insight into the workings of the modern world, and thus develop empathy for the situation which encourages students to find innovative ways to help deal with them, rather than regurgitating information spoon-fed to them in the courses of old. The exclusive nature of these opportunities means that students are able to exercise creative problem-solving in contexts that others would not normally get to experience. This gives them a leg-up when surviving in the ever-changing modern landscape, as they can use their experience to traverse the minefield of modern problems and deal with them more effectively. The College of Alice and Peter Tan (CAPT) at the National University of Singapore provides an example – t allows residents to adopt a hands-on approach in visiting and interacting with members of society who are facing modern problems, like inadequate support for the elderly in aging Singapore. This develops greater levels of empathy and understanding in the college residents, who can then use that insight to develop more innovative, targeted approaches to tackling such issues.

This demonstrates the necessary value of university education in giving students opportunities for developing dynamic mindsets in today's world.

Another reason is that a university education provides a crucial platform for networking between these creative individuals, which is essential in translating 21st-century key competencies and the like into actual, tangible success and results. Mindsets change nothing without action. Even the best ideas are useless if they cannot be put into practice, to do what needs to be done. This is particularly true in the modern world, where transnational and global issues like international trade and climate change are increasingly taking centre stage. By the same token, cooperation between great minds is needed to tackle problems of such scale and severity. One person cannot tackle climate change alone, and creative individuals will need to work together to make the most of their abilities. Two heads are better than one – and university education provides one with a network of many heads. Professors, peers, et cetera: university education gives one a chance to interact with them, to develop and refine one's own thinking by discoursing with them, and to potentially cooperate with them to deal with ever-growing problems in the modern world. This undeniably enhances the efficacy of change enacted by these individuals. If people with entrepreneurial thinking are best suited to survive and lead us in the increasingly complicated modern era, then teamwork and co-optation between them can only enhance those qualities. The power of networking is evident, for example, in university alumni associations. Their influence, pooled from several individuals, is so large that in America some of them are accused of having outsized political influence in today's climate. This provides us with a glimpse of the power of networking in causing actual change and influencing real-world events. Since universities give students the opportunity to network with peers and mentors, it provides them with an avenue for translating innovative mindsets into actionable solutions, something sorely needed in this modern world more than ever.

In conclusion, a university education is not becoming increasingly irrelevant. Rather it could well be increasingly relevant in today's context

because it provides students with the mindsets needed to survive and the opportunities needed to put such mindsets into substantial action. Amidst the shifting climate of today, the necessity of university education can only, if ever, shift in one direction: the positive.

Marker's Comments:

Good, Joshua! You have addressed the requirements of the question well. Good quality of ideas and arguments.
There are two areas on which you could work:

1. *Examples: Without examples your claims will remain as such.*
2. *You may want to consider comparing a university education to alternatives and examine why these alternatives pale in comparison.*

7

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Elliot Han | 20S06F**

Do you agree that a university education is becoming increasingly irrelevant today?

Eat, study, sleep, repeat. That is the life of Junior College students across Singapore nearing the A-Level Examinations, all to pass with flying colours. Why all this effort? Such drive comes from the widely held belief that good grades allow students to pursue a university education at prestigious universities, which in turn lays the foundation for a successful career. Indeed, there is societal pressure to study hard and pursue a degree due to benefits such as higher potential wages and greater career opportunities. Nevertheless, with soaring university costs, rapidly evolving demands of the job market as well as alternative online learning platforms, university education is becoming increasingly unnecessary in this day and age in fulfilling the aspirations of students.

Other than providing a gateway to future opportunities, universities are essential for broadening an individual's knowledge and experience. Proponents of a university education argue that such an education allows students to delve deeper into the subject matter they are studying, developing an understanding that goes beyond the superficial level. Other than building depth in their knowledge, students also widen their body of knowledge through various compulsory courses beyond their immediate field of specialisation, such as critical thinking and the humanities. By drawing parallels between different fields, students can offer more innovative solutions to existing problems. A comprehensive education obtained from attending a university not only serves to benefit students in their personal lives but also their professional lives, making them more attractive job applicants to employees. In such a case, a university degree

acts as a marker of having gone through rigorous education and offers a degree holder an advantage over non-degree holders.

However, to assert that a university education is a necessity because of the above reasons, while holding some merit, is unfortunately not reflective of the ever-evolving demands of our contemporary work landscape. It is increasingly apparent that what is valued by employees today is not a university degree, but rather the practical skills that individuals possess and the contributions that they can make to the company. Contrary to popular belief, such skills can be developed outside of a university education. In such a case, theoretical knowledge gained from a university education is less of a necessity but rather a complement to real-life expertise. This is reflected by the increasing number of top companies that no longer require a university degree, including Apple and Google. Furthermore, certain occupations like software engineers prize relevant experience and skills needed to excel at such a job over a degree. Software engineers must be intimately familiar with the inner workings of real-life software development projects and the tips and tricks required to work efficiently in such a developmental environment. Other professions like architects and engineers likewise make use of productivity-enhancing tools that are covered in brief in university courses. The preferences of top companies for individuals with real-life working experience and a cohesive portfolio serve to highlight how a university education, though ideal, is not necessary in today's job market.

Furthermore, with the proliferation of online learning courses, individuals can pick and choose an education best suited to their circumstances and interests, thus nullifying an advantage previously held by traditional universities. Online learning platforms, through means like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), allow every individual with an internet connection, regardless of finances or background, to pursue knowledge in a way that will further their careers as well as strengthen their knowledge base. Platforms such as edX and Coursera allow students to pick and choose from a variety of courses from well-known universities like Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). These

platforms give the general population a taste of a university education that is varied and relevant to the individual, whether the courses chosen are famed computer science courses or more esoteric liberal arts courses. The efficacy of such courses has been proven, with a survey done on MOOCs participants finding that about 70% reported career benefits like finding a new job and job promotions. Other than MOOCs, certain online platforms provide an opportunity to obtain a degree from a respected institution at a lower cost and at greater convenience. For example, Georgia Institute of Technology offers an online Master of Science in Computer Science that enables students from a wide variety of paths, whether they may be current computer science students or working professionals with some background in the field, to obtain a Masters degree that is equivalent to one obtained on campus, while at the same time allowing them to go about their daily lives. Courses cover an extensive scope of topics, including Artificial Learning, Cybersecurity and Robotics. All of this comes at a relatively economical cost of about 10,000 SGD while an equivalent education on campus would be 10 times more expensive due to tuition and school fees. Ultimately, these online platforms offer a means through which one can develop his or her portfolio, the key to landing a job in today's competitive and volatile job market. With the proliferation of online learning platforms in the past decade providing focused, applicable and accessible knowledge to students or today, a traditional university education that takes up years of one's life may no longer be as necessary as before.

In addition, skyrocketing school fees place a university education increasingly out of reach of students, especially those from less privileged backgrounds. Looking abroad, tuition fees in countries like the United States have risen exponentially in the past few years, with what used to be affordable by the masses now becoming a hefty financial burden for those who decide to pursue a college education. The student loan situation in the United States speaks for itself, with student loan debt above US 1.5 trillion dollars. This situation is not exclusive to the United States, with school fees rising approximately 40% since 2007 in Singapore. The question of worth then arises: in this day and age, what value does a

university education provide to justify the costs of attending one? The value of such an education will continue to be questioned, with local university costs soaring into the six digits range, more students will pursue alternative pathways that are cheaper and offer better value for money.

Lastly, a university education may be increasingly unnecessary because of the rapid pace of innovation today, potentially rendering the degree useless. Technology and business trends come and go quickly, and a degree chosen four years prior may become irrelevant upon graduation. Spending time and money on a degree which may bear no significance to one's career is a weak value proposition. Artificial Intelligence and automation are quickly replacing many tasks previously held by humans and significant job disruption will occur with many employees developing skill gaps. In such a situation, lifelong learning will become increasingly important, with people continually needing to adapt and improve their practical knowledge during short breaks from employment. A 4-year university education does not offer the same robustness and may not adequately prepare students for an evolving job market, at the same time burdening them with loans which they will struggle to repay for years. Thus, a university education may be increasingly unnecessary and less appealing than before.

In conclusion, adaptability and suitability is the name of the game when it comes to the modern job market. By possessing the latest practical knowledge that is highly demanded by employers, individuals increase the chance of getting employed. A traditional university education, one that places a tremendous financial burden on students for getting a degree that may become irrelevant rapidly, can be considered archaic. While traditional universities do provide value, especially when it comes to academic and research endeavours, this is of peripheral concern to many who pursue a university education solely for the degree. For universities to be relevant to the masses, they will have to utilise their wealth of knowledge and come up with novel ways to make their education and presence relevant today. Such examples include online degrees that offer exceptional value in comparison to degrees obtained from in-person

traditional universities. Otherwise, a university education will be unnecessary now and even more so in the future.

Marker's Comments:

1. *This is a well-written essay exemplifying an insightful understanding of the reasons why a university education is fast becoming irrelevant to the needs of employers and employees alike. You've managed to offer quality examples to substantiate your argument in your 3rd content paragraph in particular; keep this up.*
2. *Nevertheless, you might wish to consider why opponents of your view would continue to staunchly defend the continued relevance of a university education today. One reason is because universities are still very much at the forefront of knowledge, particular in fields such as medical science, among others. The research to be gleaned from faculty-led research and university funded projects continues to hold immense value for real-world sectors, such as healthcare. Also, consider how many universities have been effectively adapting higher education to meet the ever evolving demands of a volatile world and economy.*
3. *Content-wise, there appears to be a bias towards IT-related knowledge and jobs in terms of the examples you've cited in this essay.*

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2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Nellie Toh | 20A01A**

Consider the value of having routines in today's world.

Human lives revolve around fixed structures. The vast majority of us depend on a certain routine to live out our daily lives - students go to school and working adults go to work every Monday morning just as certainly as the sun rises in the East at dawn. Routines and structures may seem dull and mundane, but they are necessary for the average person to form a sense of discipline and stability in their lives. However, while we blindly cling to this sense of security that our daily routines lend us, the rest of the world might not. Arguably, it seems that the global trends of today are moving further and further away from stability and structure - with threats of wars, the uncontrollable effects of climate change, and uncertain political futures looming over humanity like a dark cloud, it seems foolish to rely on routines to stabilise our lives. While these uncertainties are indeed undeniable, however, it is because our world is ever-changing that we must retain routine and structure - whether it be for an individual's, society's, or even the world's wellbeing.

As mentioned above, the world we live in today is a volatile one. Thus, as many world leaders and figures of authority have advised, it is necessary for individuals, groups, and companies to be flexible and able to adapt to changes that seem to take place every day. The recent situation with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus is one such example - in today's globalised and increasingly interconnected world, things spread quickly, and one country's problem can soon become a global issue. In the case of the COVID-19 threat, this particular global issue has quickly become deadly. It was inevitable that the virus would spread, and with it came a suspension of our daily norms. In countries like South Korea, Italy and Iran, the rapid spread caused various institutions such as churches and schools to

suspend activities temporarily. People's daily lives were massively disrupted - citizens whose lives once revolved around the routines of school and work became confined to their homes, whether by law or by choice. This suspension of daily norms for hundreds of thousands of people globally is a clear example of the ever-changing conditions of our world today. This event has made it terrifyingly clear to countries and people across the world that, in the cases of major global issues or events, continuously carrying out the routines that we depend on so dearly are made useless and, to an extent, even illogical. Hence, having routines in today's volatile and unstable world could be considered entirely devoid of value.

There are however, several flaws to this argument. While it is no doubt true that today's world often changes too rapidly for our routines to catch up, it is precisely this unstable nature of our world that necessitates the establishment of routines in our lives to ensure that order and social structures in communities around the world remain intact. The COVID-19 threat saw the sudden suspension of our daily norms, but it also brought about the installation of new routines. This sudden threat of a global pandemic quickly brought to attention the importance of maintaining good hygiene and practicing social responsibility. In countries where religious institutions, schools, and workplaces were not closed, various temperature taking routines were set in place to confirm that every individual involved in an activity was healthy, thus reducing the risk of spreading the virus further. Medical healthcare workers, in particular, had to follow even stricter routines to ensure that any possible germs that they might have come into contact with were gotten rid of before they had left their stations. Other threats that come along with our increasingly interconnected world - say for instance, threats to cyber-security - are similarly contained by precautionary routines, such as the setting and regular usage of unique passwords and security systems when accessing personal information. While routines like these may seem mundane and repetitive, they are absolutely necessary to combat the threats and challenges that today's volatile world presents us with on a daily basis, and therefore prove themselves more than valuable today.

Routines play a key role not only in ensuring social stability, but in maintaining one's personal wellbeing and sense of security as well. While human beings are innately capable of learning to improvise and adapt when necessary, we are also, by nature, very much reliant on structures to keep ourselves sane and give us a sense of security. Constant changes to our daily routines are often perceived as a sort of disruption that may throw us off-kilter, and if such disruptions are severe or shocking enough, they can take a serious toll on our mental and emotional health. The bringing up of children makes this very clear - many childcare experts repeatedly emphasise the importance of keeping a sense of routine in a child's life. Children whose parents are frequently absent or inconsistent in their caretaking feel keenly the lack of routine and structure in their lives, and this may evolve further to become mental and emotional obstacles as they grow up. It is why children seem to enjoy rewatching the same cartoon movie over and over again, or demand the same bedtime story every single night. In a world where children are increasingly exposed to other influences online or changing global perspectives, the importance of imposing a sense of regularity and structure in their lives becomes even more pronounced. Routine and regularity is not just for children, of course - mental health studies have shown that by adopting healthy, regular routines in our lives, the mental and emotional health of individuals improves to a great extent. These routines need not be drastic - for instance, simply waking up at a fixed time - say, 8am - everyday, and having a healthy breakfast, helps ensure a sense of regularity for an individual, hence improving their sense of self and security. In today's world, many societies are seeing spiralling mental health levels, from a combination of factors such as overexposure to unhealthy media or increasing numbers of lonely elderly. These conditions therefore make the imposition of regular, healthy routines completely necessary for the sake of personal wellbeing.

On a larger scale, routines are also important in, ironically, bringing about change. Routines seem to be defined by mundane repetitions of the same thing, over and over again. However, in the bigger scheme of things, only routines, where one can commit to faithfully carrying out the same action

over and over again over a long period of time, can truly create sustained and concrete changes. Greta Thunberg, for instance, is well-acquainted with routines. Young Greta began the 'School Strike for Climate' campaign by carrying out her own weekly routine - namely, skipping classes every Friday to protest for more to be done to combat climate change. If she had done this only once or twice, it could easily have been dismissed as an excuse to play truant. But the regularity of her protests over months, now years, was what caught the public's attention. Over time, more students began to join her, and today, a teenage girl leads the largest climate change movement in the entire world, spanning over more than a hundred countries, and drawing support from thousands of celebrities and hundreds of politicians - all because a teenage girl was able to set an example by simply repeating her weekly routine, and in doing so, call for change. On the topic of climate change, routines are also indispensable when it comes to making a positive change. As Greta Thunberg has proven, it takes regular, faithful repetition - not a one-off interest - to make a change. Climate activists have encouraged people across the world to incorporate simple routines into our daily lives to combat climate change. For instance, regular recycling, though simple, can make a big difference if enough people do it together.

Routines are, at first glance, boring and mundane, and to some, increasingly unimportant in our ever-changing world. However, it is precisely the volatility of our world that necessitates routine.

Marker's Comments:

Content: This response shows good depth and maturity of thought, though the second half was not as convincing as the first (see in-essay comments). Still, you have handled an awkward question very well, referring to ***context*** *quite successfully (though there are gaps) and consistently,* ***expanding*** *your discussion to cover good breadth.*

Language: Excellent ***control/organisation*** *of points, with potentially disparate points coherently connected. Sentence variation is evident. Vocabulary tends to be fairly standard, but nonetheless there is hardly a word out of place.*

9

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Angeline Lai | 20S03H**

'We can never rely on social media to convey the truth.' Do you agree?

In 2016, a man stormed into a pizzeria in Washington DC, armed with a rifle and ready to correct the incorrigible and wretched wrongs of society. After seeing the lurid yet seemingly true accusations of then-Democratic Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton running a clandestine sex ring in the basement of the pizzeria, he drove hundreds of miles to the capital, fuelled by outrage, disgust and anger. However, this accusation turned out to be fake news propagated by Clinton's detractors on social media. Indeed, the emergence of the post-truth era is often associated with the rise of social media due to its low barriers to entry and lack of gatekeeping. Yet, in this post-truth era, it is too nihilistic to declare social media incapable of reflecting the truth. Despite its shortfalls, social media is still able to facilitate the transmission of societal truths and reliable information, especially with reliable news outlets now taking to social media to connect with its readers. Furthermore, these limitations of social media can also be mitigated by government legislation, curbing the spread of fake news and encouraging more accurate information to be shared on social media. Therefore, it is presumptuous to generalise that social media can never be relied on to convey the truth as it is very much able to deliver verified information to its audience.

Proponents of social media's unreliability posit that social media's inherent qualities dictate its inability to convey the truth. Characterised by its low barriers to entry, social media enables all members of society to express their views on the platform, engendering the democratization of media. However, social media users are often insufficiently aware about the veracity of the information they are sharing, thus end up

unintentionally propagating falsehoods. For instance, in 2017, reports of 2 secondary school girls being kidnapped along River Valley Road were virally spread on social media, rendering social media platforms pregnant with anxiety and rife with insecurity over local safety. This was later dispelled by the Singapore Police Force following investigations into the reports. Ostensibly, the present-day attraction to and propensity to believe lurid and hyperbolic fare, coupled with the rapid transmission of information enabled by social media, has allowed for these falsehoods to be spread and not eliminated. In turn, users of social media are more likely to come across fake news, further exacerbating the unreliability of fake news.

The rising ubiquity of falsehoods – powered by the architecture of social media – has attracted the eye of naysayers who wish to use social media as a platform to foment social and political unrest. In other words, the unreliability of social media is exacerbated by the type of users it attracts and the appallingly unreliable information they feed into these platforms. The aforementioned example of the Pizzagate scandal is a case in point. In fact, its belligerent accusations against Hillary Clinton, alongside a plethora of other posts lambasting and disparaging her by citing false claims of her misdeeds in her stints as First Lady and Secretary of State, have been found to have taken a toll on hsenter popularity at the polls. In turn, this has benefitted Trump and his supporters, eventually accounting for part of his success in the 2016 elections. This points towards the potential use of social media as an avenue for misinformation and manipulation of the public for one's own hegemonic ambitions. Considering social media's hitherto success in helping these individuals achieve their goods, social media is likely to continue attracting such evildoers who flood social media with such falsehoods, rendering social media an unreliable source of information.

Indeed, social media seems to facilitate and itself perpetuate the viral propagation of falsehoods and their abysmal reliability. However, the rise of these falsehoods and the abuse of social media, as well as the gravity of its ramifications, have caught the eye of governments worldwide who

now deem it a cause for concern. In order to curb the spread of falsehoods on social media, governments have pledged to take action to ensure the veracity of information on these platforms. The most direct way to do it is through legislation empowering the government to flag out falsehoods and censor them to prevent irreversible damage. For instance, the Singaporean government recently established the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), which enables them to verify or falsify information being spread on social media; when necessary, they can demand the misinformation be taken down and even charge the social media user if he was found to have borne malicious intent in spreading the news. Having the whip of the law serves as a psychological deterrent, reminding media users to be more careful and judicious when spreading information. In the long run, this ensures that news on social media is distilled down to its most accurate, raising the reliability of information on social media. Furthermore, concerted government efforts to educate the public on how to ensure the veracity of information and impart greater discretion has enabled the public to be more discerning when they come across information online. In addition to POFMA, the Infocommunications Media Development Authority (IMDA) also formulated a slew of policies and initiatives to raise public awareness about fake news, posting numerous advertisements online about the characteristics of fake news as well as examples and advice on how citizens should respond to fake news. In doing so, governments are training citizens on the ground to become gatekeepers of social media as they are now able to vet through the swathes of information to prevent the spread of and even highlight falsehoods to fellow netizens, plugging the government's gaps in enforcing the policy. On the whole, these government measures have improved the reliability of social media and reinforced its role as a vital source of truths to the public, having been vetted by the educated public and the government.

Beyond just governmental measures that dampen the unreliability of social media, the reliability of social media is further enhanced by the presence of established news outlets on the various platforms. Considering the increasing digitization and ubiquity of social media, many

traditional news outlets have also taken to social media to ensure continued reception and survival in the long run. Thus, they often share headline news on their social media pages in real time. For instance, during the recent political turmoil in Malaysia following the resignation of then-Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, The Straits Times and Channel News Asia gave live updates on the twists and turns on the event on their Instagram and Facebook pages, giving social media users a reliable source of current affairs. Furthermore, these established news outlets have the financial clout to maintain the quality of the news they report. The New York Times, one of the most popular news outlets worldwide, has over a hundred foreign correspondents in 67 countries globally. Coupled with a massive and well-trained editorial team, it is able to deliver accurate and reliable information on social media platforms. Given the ubiquity of such international news outlets on social media, social media users have access to reliable and certified sources of information; they are also able to fact-check suspicious pieces of information they come across online, further enhancing the accuracy of information that social media can convey to its users. Thus, it is myopic to conclude that social media can never be relied on to convey the truth.

Moreover, the high accessibility of social media has also allowed for truths that run counter to the national narrative and history to be brought to light, exposing the delicately weaved narratives that societies have come to believe. The low barrier of entry to social media means that it is a free-for-all and equips users with a large potential audience that spans nations worldwide. Hence, users are able to bypass the highly regulated traditional media outlets to highlight truths that are censored by the government. Most recently, before the acknowledgement of the Covid-19 virus by the Chinese government, Wuhan health officials were trying to bury the emergence of the seeming reincarnation of SARS by suppressing reports about it and not informing the Chinese public. However, Dr Li Wenliang took to social media to share that he was under quarantine for a potentially deadly virus that had begun to spread and threatened to consume the city. In doing so, he brought to light the truth about the situation, raising awareness of the actual situation and circumventing the

efforts to cover up by the Chinese government. Evidently, the plurality of views enabled by social media allows individuals to escape government censorship to highlight the truths being suppressed by governments. This was particularly salient in the case of the Hong Kong Protests against the amendments to the Fugitive Offenders Bill: despite the Chinese government's efforts to cover up the widespread protests and deny their alleged attempts to insidiously undermine Hong Kong's sovereignty, the rampant accounts of protests about the reality of the situation – like the police brutality they faced – foiled the Chinese government's efforts to portray them as troublemakers, instead highlighting their plight to the international community. The sheer collective power of the ordinary masses to express themselves through social media dampens the ability of the government to engage in censorship in order to cement their legitimacy and fulfil their oligarchic political ambitions, thus enabling social media to convey truths that the government may seek to suppress.

The post-truth era seems to suggest that social media has been reduced to an unreliable source of information that is rife with falsehoods and therefore unreliable. However, it is myopic to assume so simply because it has facilitated the spread of fake news in the past. As illustrated above, social media does have reliable sources of information like news outlets as well as multiple gatekeepers installed officially and unofficially by government legislations. Furthermore, it also empowers the public with the ability to deny the national narratives that the government may attempt to propagate in a bid to consolidate their own power, allowing them to highlight living truths and flag up lies crafted by the government. Nonetheless, this does not mean that societies are inoculated against fake news on social media. Especially in view of the upcoming elections – be it in USA, Australia or Singapore – as well as the looming Covid-19 threat, it is imperative that governments continue tightening their grip on misinformation that threatens the social fabric and stability of the country while citizens work in tandem with governments and exercise their discretion when they share information on social media platforms. Only then can societies capitalise on social media and fulfil its fullest potential of becoming a widely accessible, fast and reliable source of information.

Marker's Comments:

A fully relevant and thoughtful response. Good work here. You raise a range of points and examples from a range of societies and there is consistent effort to engage with social media and truth. To improve, focus on depth of evaluation by considering social traits more consistently. When you raise them, the analysis is done well, but such treatment is missing in the balance. Overall, a well-structured, organised essay with apt vocabulary.

10

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Regan Ng | 20S03O**

'We can never rely on social media to convey the truth.'
Do you agree?

Today, virtually anyone with access to the Internet can share thoughts, opinions or anything that they find interesting. The advent of social media like Facebook and Twitter resulted in a flurry of posts, and content varying from cat videos to serious investigative journalism floods every user's feed daily. With diverse and even conflicting information being seen by the average user every day, it raises the question: can we truly be able to find the objective, unbridled and unbiased truth on their social media pages, or are they merely a distorted reflection of reality? When fake news spreads like wildfire in this age of virality, and when nearly every post (that is not a cat video) is charged with emotions and bias in this adversarial political climate, it is a sad truth that social media cannot be relied on to convey reality through an untinted lens.

The unreliability of social media is most blatantly exemplified by the prevalence of fake news across all social media sites. When users come across convincing articles that mimic real newspaper coverage, it is easy for them to simply buy into the story and share the shocking "news" to anyone who follows them. As social media was designed to allow for convenient, no-frills browsing, many people do not go through the trouble of verifying the validity of an article they come across before sharing it. Because of this phenomenon, fake news pieces written by people with malicious intent and even well-known satire sites such as The Onion can go viral on social media. Unfortunately, this evidently affects the reliability of social media to convey the truth; how can we trust anything we read when there is a possibility that it is fake? This is evidenced by an article posted by the satirical news site WTOE 5 news in

2016, which claimed that US presidential candidate Donald Trump was endorsed by the Pope. Although there were no credible sources to back this claim, and it contradicted the long-standing tradition of Popes abstaining from backing any political candidates, the article was still shared by ignorant users a whopping million times. With fake news like this becoming so popular and overshadowing credible reporting (in comparison, an investigative piece by The New York Times on Trump's tax returns was only viewed 200 thousand times), it is clear that as long as there are irresponsible and negligent users online, social media will always be used as a tool for falsehoods to spread. When Facebook is more likely to show us a lie about Trump being endorsed by the Pope than the truth behind his tax returns, it simply cannot be said with confidence that social media is a reliable conveyor of the truth.

Furthermore, even if what we see on these sites is somewhat grounded in reality, it is almost never free from bias, especially with an adversarial political climate and algorithms in place promoting the existence of echo chambers within these sites. Considering how fiercely critical people are of opposing stances online, nowadays, most of the news posted online is very politically charged and in favour of the author's viewpoint. However, this poses a serious problem: because of the political nature of such articles, the precious "truth" being reported is often distorted or at least presented with a partisan slant. Take for example news media outlets such as Breitbart; even if an event that they report on did take place, with their extreme right-wing stance they tend to word their articles in a manner that manipulates the truth into something that supports their stance. Due to the commonplace existence of such dishonest reporting, what is seen on social media cannot be trusted. This is further worsened by the existence of algorithms on sites like Facebook or Reddit, which identify content that you are most likely to click on and recommend it to you. As a result, users who view more conservative content are more likely to be directed to r/The_Donald (a community consisting of Trump's diehard fans) on Reddit, and pages like Turning Point USA (a conservative account which solely posts right-wing views) on Facebook. The consequences are rather dire, as users slowly start to only consume one-sided, biased content and are

oblivious to opposing views on the same issue, and are only introduced to communities that support their views. This places users in echo chambers, where they only see content that feeds into their uninformed version of reality. As social media has the tendency to place users and only show them biased and distorted versions of what actually transpires in the real world, it can hardly be considered a reliable beacon of truth.

Detractors to this claim, however, disagree, as there still exist traditional news outlets with credible sources and fact-checked reporting which publicise their accurate stories on social media. With such articles online, it is still considered possible to come across true stories on social media. For example, publishers like The New York Times, Washington Post and The Straits Times which are widely regarded as "purveyors of truth" and subject to strict journalism standards all own social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter and frequently post their articles there. With the existence of such accounts and posts, it is indeed plausible that social media can convey the truth by showing such articles.

However, these publishers are not free of guilt either. With the incentive of advertisement revenue, publishers like these succumb to sensationalism, where they post articles with misleading and dramatic headlines to generate clicks. This practice, of course, hinders users from seeking the truth, especially because of their reputation as reliable. For example, in the book entitled "Factfulness" by Hans Rosling, it is said that in the United States, the number of violent crimes a year decreased drastically from 14.5 million a year in 1990 to only 9.5 million in 2012. Yet, reputable newspapers still cited the 9.5 million statistic and dubbed it troubling, with some even going to the extent of calling it a "crisis". With even the most reputable companies being prompted to post more attention-grabbing headlines that distort the truth, it cannot be said that their posts in social media are reliable. Furthermore, even if they were, it is precisely their emphasis on factual and unbiased reporting that ironically makes them drowned out in the sea of information on social media. If headlines were not sensationalised, the articles by these companies (such as the aforementioned New York Times scoop on

Trump's tax returns) will not be shared as frequently as fake news articles that go viral. Thus, even with the existence of publishers regarded as credible, social media still cannot be relied on to seek the truth.

In conclusion, because of the prevalence of stories that are either falsified or distorted by bias, what we see on social media is never truly an accurate representation of reality. Even reliable publishers are guilty of manipulating the truth for views, and those that do not are often ignored and do not have their articles surface on people's feeds. However, as depressing as it may be to see such a potentially useful tool go to waste, all is not lost. It is our responsibility as users to distinguish fact from fiction; to do cross-referencing and fact-checking, as well as to identify the provenance of articles and their biases. Thus, even if what we see on social media is not the truth, it is still up to us to sieve out any relevant details and arrive at a reasonable conclusion of what we find in the swamp of lies and falsehoods.

Marker's Comments:

Content: This is an excellent response! A few gaps here and there, but overall, it is pithy, to-the-point, nuanced, mature with examples that are apt and aptly used to underpin convincing arguments and thoughtful evaluation.

Language: This is a superbly controlled response in terms of organisation and flow - the concession sits in an unusual place, but you knew exactly what you were doing, so it works very well. Your phrasing, sentence variation and vocab range are also very good. Intro and conclusion are well presented too.

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 **Alvan Ng | 20A03A**

'Support for the arts should mainly come from the government.' Discuss.

Whether or not one agrees that the arts are important, it is hard to not acknowledge that in many nations, the arts and cultural sectors play very large roles. In Singapore, the arts and cultural sector was estimated by the National Arts Council (NAC) in 2015 to have an approximate economic value of 1.7 billion dollars. And in this burgeoning and active sector, support (at least, financial support) has mainly come from the government's pockets, with the NAC estimating that approximately 85% of the arts sector funding was from the government. But this does - and already has - raised the question: should support for the arts (perhaps not just financially but also in endorsement) come mainly from the government? Today I will be arguing that yes, the support for the arts should come mainly from the government - however, support for the arts should come mainly from the government - however, that should still be maintained through this support is the creative liberty of the artists; and support is still vital from other aspects (like the population of a given nation).

But firstly, what simply has to be acknowledged and recognised is that from an economic perspective, without government support the art scene of a given country would be unable to flourish. The arts are very expensive to house, maintain and showcase; and government funding is crucial to covering those expenses. For example, the government in Singapore spent over 929 million dollars in funding the arts in 2015. This includes holding exhibitions, providing grants to artists, staging events and the setting up of two museums (The National Gallery, Indian Heritage Centre) dedicated to Singaporean and South-East Asian art. And as profitable as ticket sales

from independent and concert events ($121.8 million in 2015) and museums are, relying entirely on the private sector (sales, donations, patrons) would not only be inadequate to match a minor portion of government funding; it would also be highly unstable and in flux as donations and sales change in quantity from year-to-year, sometimes decreasing sharply. Thus, to ensure a stable, flourishing arts scene, support for the arts (at least, economic support) should come mainly from the government.

In addition, support from the arts should mainly come from the government as art is a valuable tool to preserve (and educate individuals about) a nation's culture and history. As art emphasises and is influenced by the society around it and the cultural zeitgeists of the time, it is an important, insightful and deeply personal way to gain insight into the history and culture of our past. Since history and culture unify individuals as a nation and create a sense of belonging, it is important for the government to support and protect these arts by erecting institutions dedicated to showing these works, or advocating for events that showcase and perform cultural art. Conversely, if the government does not mainly support the arts, it is more likely that these art pieces and art forms that defined their nation would be erased with time, creating what has been termed a "cultural desert". For example, in Singapore, the government has attempted to preserve history and culture in art through the National Gallery, which holds the largest collection of Singaporean and South-East Asian art worldwide, as well as the Peranakan Museum which, in addition to housing many articles of crafts and art pieces that elucidate and illuminate the customs and traditions of the Peranakan individuals in Singapore's history, also has a branch at Changi Airport's Terminal 4 that functions almost as cultural advocacy to those that fly in from countries worldwide. In particular, the government has also funded NUS Museum's Ng Eng Teng Collection, a collection and curation of over 1200 works from pivotal and pioneering Singaporean Artist Ng Eng Teng, spanning over 4 decades. Had the government not been the primary funder and supporter of these galleries, it is more likely that these works would have been forgotten, abandoned and lost to the sands of time; not placed in a tailor-

made space that allows Singaporeans to appreciate the rich cultural and historical background of our nation. Art is an integral part of not just Singapore but every nation in reminding the citizens of their culture and history, and it should primarily be the government's prerogative to support that.

Furthermore, support from the arts should come mainly from the government as the arts are integral in building national identity and a sense of belonging, and identity building or a sense of national identity is something the government should be supporting. Extending from the previous paragraph, the remainder of a common history and culture to the citizens that art can bring can also act as a unifier, giving individuals something that they can see themselves in and relate themselves to, nurturing a sense of belonging. With advocacy and encouragement on the government's part, a sense of national identity can be found through the arts - and since national identity can be found through the arts - and since national identity concerns the whole nation, an individualistic, bottom-up approach to supporting art would be less efficient than top-down, governmental support at building a communal sense of belonging. The best example locally is the way the government supports and funds National Day celebrations. In each national day celebration or parade, there are art pieces like choreographed dance and videos that emphasise the history of Singapore and Singapore's journey to reinforce a sense of national pride. And even in the government-supported and approved National Day Songs, we can see exhortations to action (Stand Up For Singapore), the encouragement of social cohesion (One People, One Nation, One Singapore), and the reinforcement of Singapore as home (Home) - all of which foster communal cohesion and pride in our identity. If events like these were not primarily supported by the government, their reach and impact would be severely limited in comparison, and the cultivation of a sense of belonging and national identity would be less effective. Thus, support from the arts should come mainly from the government for the purpose of constructing national identity, as they are the best equipped to do it to the extent needed to have effective results.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that sometimes, support for the arts should not come from the government in excess. Firstly, the support for the arts mainly coming from the government could lead to an increased potential for censorship. Since the government has such a large role in supporting art forms and artists, both financially and in advocacy, they have a vested interest in the artworks produced and might want the artistic content to reflect with or be aligned with their values; or not to be overly critical of the ruling body. Thus, censorship could occur. Singapore, being a fairly conservative country with many out-of-bound markers, has had many instances of funding and support being cut in response to artists not wanting to self-censor their own work. For example, in 2015, The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye, a historical revisionist graphic novel written by Sonny Liew had its funding withdrawn by the National Arts Council as he refused to censor or remove content that the NAC determined as "having the potential to de-legitimise the government." The same situation happened in 2018 to Jeremy Tiang's book "State of Emergency - a fictional account addressing the repression of leftist movements in Singapore. In the realm of theatre, theatre production company W!LD RICE had their funding cut by the government for refusing to censor events in their plays that incited distrust in the government, instead continuing to show the plays to Singaporeans. From these examples, it can be seen that significant government funding of the arts and freedom of expression are at diametric opposites. Notable Singaporean playwright Tan Tarn How even wrote a play about this phenomenon and the fierce government intervention and censoring in Singaporean art called "Fear of Writing". Thus, we can see a potential danger in having support for the arts coming mainly from the government.

Another point is that the government should not have to bear the brunt when supporting the arts - other parties are responsible for keeping the arts scene in a given nation flourishing. And it could be very easily argued that the population of a nation, as consumers of art, have just as much of an important role in supporting the arts as governments do. For what is the point in pouring money and advocacy into the arts if people simply do not go and see it? Support as patronage is still a form of support, and

if the purpose of art is to elicit an aesthetic reaction from the viewer, support as patronage is the main factor that helps fully realise the whole purpose of the arts in the first place. Fundamentally, it is the consumer's demand for goods and services that encourages the increase in production and supply - similarly, it is the support for art by individuals of a given nation that results in the support for art by individuals of a given nation that results in the primary support of art by the government. If there weren't over 2 million tickets sold for art-related concerts, the government would not have supported and organised over a thousand concerts in 2015. If there wasn't such a high demand for museums and galleries, the SG government would not have built so many in the past 5 years. Thus from this perspective, it is the consumers who should primarily be supporting the arts; as their support begets more support for the arts from the government.

In conclusion, if support for the arts comes mainly from the government, there are both pros (national identity construction, preservation of culture and history on a large scale) and financial necessity) and cons (censorship). However, I feel that the pros outweigh the cons.

Marker's Comments:

This essay was well done. Good points and plenty of pertinent examples. Do be careful in making snappy claims or being too dismissive.

12

2020 | Y6 | GP Timed Practice 1 Siddarth Venkateswaran | 20S03Q

'Support for the arts should mainly come from the government.' Discuss.

"It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance," commented 19th century British-American linguist Henry James. Henry's exuberance for the arts and his strong passion about its pertinence is something not limited to pursuers of the arts but rather that radiates throughout mankind's history. From aboriginal cave paintings in Australia to portraits of French Monarchs by neoclassical French painter Anton Raphael Mengs, the arts have served not only as pivotal milestones to the evolution of human civilization but also as epitomes of the melting pot of cultures present in our world. However, as the reverence for arts in contemporary society has significantly dwindled giving way to the pursuit of more practical disciplines, the question has now arisen of who should play this fundamental and noble role of supporting and safeguarding the arts. While some argue that this role should primarily fall on governments, others advocating for radical contemporary reforms argue that government involvement is obsolete, encouraging the public and the ever-omnipresent titans of the private sector to take the initiative instead. Despite the fact that these modernists' apprehension stems from their fear of possible government influence in the arts, this essay argues that support for the arts should still primarily come from the government due to its lack of profit motive and its undisputed ability to stimulate the much needed interest in the arts sector.

Dissidents in this discourse point out the pernicious influence that large government support may yield in the arts sector. Indubitably there ought to be some element of truth to this perspective. An arts sector which receives most of its support, be it fiscal or not, from the government is

also inadvertently subject to the latter's interests and influences. Take for example Communist China. Though the arts scene in China is vibrant and dynamic, international studies by the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts has revealed that support for the arts community in China is concentrated in the hands of the state government and the ruling party. In fact, an estimated 83% of all funding for the arts is done so using public money supplied by the government. The effect of this extreme influence in the arts scene in China is no doubt omnipresent. From the prosecution and denial of funds for popular novelist Ai Weiwei to the ever growing eradication of the cultural art of its native Uyghur Muslim population, the Chinese government has used the support it provides for the arts scene as a double-edged sword to stifle artworks that undermine its interests and ambitions, in turn shaping the arts scene to be one that favors itself. Taking it home to Singapore, the government based National Arts Council (NAC) has also used its overwhelming financial support for the arts through schemes such as the creation grant to influence the art produced such that it is in line with state interests. For example, the NAC immediately revoked its funding for local artist Sonny Liew when his comic book "The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye" depicted alternative, so-called "unfavorable" representations of Singapore's history. Hence by allowing the support of arts to come mainly from the government, creativity and freedom in the arts scene could be severely hampered, instead becoming subject to a political conformity set by the government.

However, in today's world, such influence by the government can be mitigated, allowing for support for the arts to still come mainly from the government. There is no doubt that the advent of the internet and its associated social media has allowed for social commentary to go beyond the walls of an individual's abode to the national or perhaps even international stage. Simultaneously, this has allowed the general public to function as a check and balance against acts of discrimination and injustice in sectors such as the arts industry. In fact, when news of the withdrawal of funds for Sonny and the suspension of his artwork broke rampant on social media in Singapore, there was an overwhelming response by netizens for the government's National Arts Council to reverse its ruling,

citing the intolerable nature of creative suppression in a state proclaimed to be liberal. The NAC has since continued to fund Sonny Liew for other works of art, congratulating him on his Eisner award in 2017 in the face of public pressure. Hence in an age where the common individual and thus the public can serve as checks and balances to government rulings, governments can still be allowed to support the arts to a large extent given any unjust attempts to influence the arts sector can be rightfully called into question.

On the other hand, there are more tangible benefits to allowing the support for the arts to come mainly from the government as opposed to, for example, private corporations. One such benefit is the ability of the government to stimulate much-needed interest in the arts. It is indisputable that governments of nations throughout the world have large spheres of influence which not only affect the overall functioning of the country but also the very way that individuals lead their lives. Indeed, it is this large sphere of influence that gives weight to the decisions the government makes amongst its society. Hence, allowing support for the arts to come mainly from the government sends a strong message to its society about the pertinence of the arts. The very fact that the government is allowed to spend hundreds of millions of public money on supporting artists and constructing infrastructure to house the arts shows that the function of the arts in society is beyond the superficial need for entertainment - that it is integral to the functioning of the nation. Take for example Finland. When faced with an arts scene that was becoming increasingly dull, the Finnish government stepped in, contributing large amounts of support to the arts both in terms of financial support and legislation. In fact, when the Finish government injected a substantial $220 million into the country's arts sector in 2014 it was able to generate and reignite interest in the arts amongst its society. From more art pieces by state-funded local artists to the set-up of numerous arts production companies, the Finnish government through its large support for the arts was able to substantially rejuvenate the once ailing arts sector - an effect that corporations and individuals of our society can only imagine mimicking. Hence, in a world where reverence for the arts is slowly

diminishing into nothingness, large government support is quintessential to show the importance of arts to society and consequently generate interest and passion amongst society to adopt it.

Secondly, the non-profit-oriented nature of government means receiving main support from the government will guarantee that this support is sustainable. Opposers of large government support for the arts such as liberal media pundits like Susan Hans point to the availability of a large pool of private corporations to lend the main support to the arts sector in our society. Yet such individuals fail to understand that the underlying motive of such corporations is far from altruistic: rather, it is one that is significantly influenced by the need to turn a profit. Instead of recognizing the need to preserve the arts and its unique features, such corporations and individuals essentially view their support as just another coveted investment. Ultimately, this gives rise to a circumstance where support for the arts is largely determined by the ability of the arts sector to return the investment made to their supporters, with failure to do so resulting in the withdrawal of funds and hence support. Take for example the Pinacotheque de Paris private museum in Singapore. Originally an avid supporter of the local arts scene in Singapore, the museum eventually closed its doors in 2017 when the artists it provided financial support and funding for failed to bring the much-needed revenue, let alone profits. However, transferring the role of mainly supporting the arts sector to the government ameliorates this worrying concern as the need to turn a profit is eliminated. Indeed, this provides a more sustainable and reliable source of support for the arts industry which does not have to constantly worry about the need for funding or support. Instead, the ensuing confidence will help to stimulate the growth of the arts industry, fueling creative expression devoid of the stresses brought about by the economic system. Hence, receiving support for the arts mainly from the government is essential to ensure that this support continues to remain intact and sustainable, allowing for the development of a more robust arts sector.

Hence, the pivotal need for governments to mainly support the arts stems from its ability to stimulate interest as well as ensure the sustainability and

stability for the support provided. Nevertheless, it still remains crucial that other aspects of society, such as the public and private sectors, offer their contribution to sustaining and supporting the arts. Indeed, the preservation of the arts has always depended on collaboration and moving forward continues the need to do so.

Marker's Comments:

Very good points raised with a wealth of examples from around the world. Structure of the essay is also very sound. However, there are a few instances where a more comprehensive explanation to bridge the gap between illustration and evaluation (such as in your last two content paragraphs) could have been provided.

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