



KALEIDOSCOPE

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Politics & Governance

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“Between being loved and being feared, I have always believed Machiavelli was right. If nobody is afraid of me, I’m meaningless.”
Lee Kuan Yew

“Politicians and diapers must be changed often, and for the same reason.”

Mark Twain



“Cross the river by feeling for stones.”
Deng Xiaoping

”

“Assess if small countries will always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries?”

By Lim Jia Rong (16A11)

It is a common misconception in the field of geopolitics that “small nations”, sovereign states lacking in territorial and population size, are doomed to be at a disadvantage when conducting trade or diplomacy with larger countries. Indeed, I wholeheartedly disagree with this premise. From Niccolo Machiavelli’s “The Prince” to late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s “From Third World to First”, multiple case studies and treatises on the esoteric topic of statecraft have demonstrated that small nations are not only able to thrive and safeguard their sovereignty in dealing with larger and possibly belligerent states, some are even able to project influence and advance national interest more effectively than larger nations bequeathed larger manpower or resources. By cultivating blocs with similarly small states, forging strategic alliances with great powers, harnessing and developing economic strength and participating actively in the international forum, small nations are able to overcome these limitations, and perhaps even turn them to their advantage.

Firstly, small countries are able to exponentially increase their strategic and economic disposition relative to larger nations by cultivating blocs with other small states, thus eroding the natural advantage of size which these larger nations have. From the Hanseatic League of a bygone era to the union state of the Flemish and Walloons known as “Belgium” which survives to this day, small nations have long recognised the value of pooling resources, conducting foreign affairs in tandem and coordinating economic decisions, all of which strengthens the individual countries’ defence, diplomatic standing and economic condition. Instead of dealing with multiple small countries with varied objectives and comparative weaknesses, such as a reliance on energy imports, that could be manipulated as pressure points by the negotiators and diplomats of larger nations, these aforementioned larger nations would have to contend with a political or economic bloc that wields greatly increased clout. An example of this would be the bloc of small states in the United Nations General Assembly, primarily composed of Afro-Asian states which gained independence after successive waves of decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s. Comprising over 120 member states, any attempt by great powers to pass a resolution in the General Assembly is contingent upon this bloc’s approval; General Assembly resolutions require a two-thirds majority to pass, or slightly over 130 votes in favour. Indeed, this bloc has allowed small nations to have their concerns and interests brought up for discussion in this international forum, voting down resolutions which side-line the interests of smaller nations. This is done whilst leading the debate in environmental and social issues which have less of an impact on larger states, such as rising sea levels or human trafficking. Another example of an even more integrated bloc of small countries would be the Baltic States of today. With the traumatic experience of Soviet occupation remaining in the collective memory of their people, coupled with an increasingly irredentist and nationalist Putin administration in the Russian Federation, the militaries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia regularly hold joint exercises to deter Russian aggression. These three small nations also coordinate air defence plans and border security actions to counter Russian air force intrusions and border infiltrations by special operation personnel, which occurred in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. The Baltic States also sought membership in NATO simultaneously, and coordinate their efforts within NATO to lobby for more

“tripwire” garrisons and deployments in Central Europe to mitigate the Russian threat, with much success; Russia has not staged a cyberattack on the Baltic States since 2008, and garrisons of US Marines have been deployed to Latvia, a strong deterrent against any action geared towards destabilising the small nation.

Secondly, small countries are able to forge strategic alliances with larger nations in order to conduct relations with other nations on a more equal footing. While small countries tend to lack the economic ability to field large militaries and engage in expensive research and development on top of high tech manufacturing to equip their forces with up-to-date weaponry, larger nations are able to do so. This puts small nations at a clear disadvantage, liable to intimidation and the ensuing conclusion of unequal treaties or even annexation. To counter this, small nations can seek alliances with larger nations with which they have a confluence of geopolitical interest. This alliance may encompass the training and supplying of a small nation’s armed forces, which the larger nation’s more developed military-industrial complex is better suited for, or even collective security, which obliges the larger nation to go to war to defend the smaller nation’s independence. An example of such a strategic alliance would be the Five Power Defence Agreement concluded between Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. All five nations have a shared interest in maintaining right of passage and security in the Straits of Malacca; while Singapore and Malaysia are economically dependent upon it to facilitate entrepot trade and exports, Australia and New Zealand source virtually all of their imports from shipping routes which traverse the Straits of Malacca. Due to this confluence of interests, along with historic Commonwealth ties, the FPDA was concluded, requiring every nation to remain in constant contact, and to consult one another in the event of the outbreak of hostilities with a third party. The FPDA also holds joint naval exercises in order to better integrate the forces it is composed of in preparation for any contingency, and arms sales between FPDA nations are high. Thus, forging strategic alliances with larger nations allows small nations to field better-trained and equipped armed forces, and possess the protection of larger powers it shares geopolitical interests with, effectively deterring other large nations from utilising intimidation and shows of force to impose their will on these aforementioned small states.

Thirdly, small nations are able to mitigate the disadvantage imposed by a small workforce and a lack of land by amassing economic clout, which in turn ensures economic independence from larger nations which may have otherwise utilised the small nation’s economic dependence on it to influence domestic policy or apply pressure on its economy to perpetuate its own interest. Often, larger nations have applied economic pressure on small neighbours in order to rein them into their sphere of influence, eroding their sovereignty. One pertinent example of this would be Russia’s suspension of natural gas supplies to Ukraine in 2004 after the Orange Revolution ousted the pro-Russian leader in that country, ostensibly to pressure the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) to reverse this. As it was in the dead of winter and Ukraine had no other financially viable means to import energy, Leonid Kuchma was quietly restored to the presidency. To counter this, small nations could undergo economic restructuring to tap on global export demand, overcoming the limitation of a small domestic market by maintaining a competitive and innovative high-value added export-oriented economy. Not only would this make small nations less susceptible to economic pressure applied to it by a large nation, as they could simply do business with all the other nations, it would also make the small nation important in regional and international economic decision-making, its economic prowess serving as leverage against the sheer size which other countries may have. One example of this would be Singapore within the regional

framework of ASEAN; being the most globalised and competitive economy in the trading bloc, larger nations within ASEAN often defer to it in policy formulation for economic initiatives, such as the proposed ASEAN Free Trade Area of 2011. In the mid-2000s, when the President of the Philippines Gloria Arroyo publicly proposed the adoption of a common currency in ASEAN, Singapore's swift and utter rejection of that proposal has put it to rest ever since. Clearly, its economic prowess makes it such that many ASEAN initiatives would be doomed to failure without Singaporean buy-in. In this regard, a small nation can be on equal standing with other nations, if not at an advantage.

Some geopolitical analysts and pundits argue that small nations will always be at a disadvantage so long as a multi-polar world order is perpetuated. These detractors argue that so long as a monopoly on nuclear armaments and control over the United Nations Security Council is in the hands of a select few great powers, small countries possess no true independence in their pursuit of national interest if the great powers are united in opposition, as the sheer overwhelming economic, diplomacy and military clout amassed and utilised in the form of sanctions, condemnations and firepower could never hope to be matched by one small country. An oft cited example is Yugoslavia in the Kosovo conflict, which was subject to an aerial bombardment campaign by NATO forces (comprising 3 of 5 UNSC permanent members), a flagrant violation of its sovereignty. This was done to pressure Yugoslavia to grant Kosovo, then a part of Yugoslavia, independence. This constituted direct interference in a country's domestic affairs. Yet, this argument is invalidated by the fact that such police actions which receive the sanction of the UN only occur when the global community at large is in agreement that egregious atrocities are being committed. Indeed, ethnic cleansing and ongoing displacement of peoples was promoted by the Yugoslav government, thus voiding the international legal protection it would have otherwise received.

In conclusion, small nations will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with larger countries. Rather, with astute leadership and prudent foreign policy direction, a level playing field on the global arena is attainable.

Comments:

Well-written essay with relevant supporting examples and minimal grammatical errors.

Assess if small countries will always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries.

By Lee Xin Yi (16S32)

In our increasingly connected and globalised world today where countries are interdependent, no country is completely isolated, not even North Korea, which has trade links with countries such as the People's Republic of China and even Singapore. Countries will always have to deal with each other, be it to negotiate favourable trade deals, cooperate politically on various issues or bargain a settlement to a conflicting issue. As countries are of different sizes, some as big as Russia and some as small as the Vatican, the question of whether small countries will always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries naturally arises. It is in my opinion that small countries will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries because it is not true that smaller countries always have less bargaining power. It is not just size that counts, but also economic strength, military might, diplomatic ties and alliances that count as well. As is often said, size is not everything.

Skeptics might argue that small countries will always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries because smaller countries usually possess less bargaining power, and might even have economic deals with the bigger countries they are negotiating with and absolutely cannot afford to lose. They tend to cite the South China Sea dispute as a common example. China claims the entire South China Sea as its territory, according to its Nine Dash Line principle, which marks its territorial waters till the end of the South China Sea in the South, and there are countries in Asia that support it. For example, Cambodia and Laos, which practically live off China, support its claims. Even claimant states like Malaysia, which is getting closer to China diplomatically, are not aggressively pursuing their claim anymore. In fact, the Penang State government in Malaysia is trying to secure a loan of at least US\$1 million from China to cover its funding gap for a railway. Given the huge size and economic might of China, few states in Southeast Asia dare to stand up to it in their dealings in the South China Sea. They are even less willing to do so now with the One Belt One Road initiative by China that would benefit them. They are also at a severe disadvantage in bilateral negotiations when they stand alone against China. Hence, skeptics often argue using the South China Sea example that small countries will always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries.

However, not every big country is like China, and I beg to differ with the skeptics' opinions even in the South China Sea. The fact that no claimant country has officially given up its claim in the South China Sea yet shows that the South China Sea example cannot be used as an example that China trumps all. In fact, claimant countries smaller than China, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, have consistently pushed for multilateral negotiations instead of bilateral ones, to try to use ASEAN as a platform to negotiate as most ASEAN countries are claimant states. China opposes this, as even China sees the might of several smaller countries coming together, and is concerned that it might be at a disadvantage instead. Evidently, regional associations such as ASEAN can give small countries a bigger voice, such that they will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with bigger powers. In addition, not every big country is like China, and not every big country has the economic might it does.

Firstly, it is more often than not economic strength that counts when dealing with other countries. Smaller but rich and militarily strong countries like Taiwan, Singapore, Israel and Kuwait have never let their small size, and diplomatic recognition in the case of Taiwan, stop them from making favourable trade deals and military pacts with other countries. For example, all four

countries have bilateral trade deals with big countries like the United States of America, and also had multilateral trade deals such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum during the Obama Administration. Israel has also supplied many countries, both big such as Germany and small like Singapore, with its technologically advanced weaponry. In fact, the Singapore Armed Forces was built up with Israeli help. Even big and strong countries like the US and United Kingdom benefit from Israeli technology. Singapore, the smallest of the four states listed but possessing the highest GDP per capita in the world, has economists and politicians from all over the world studying its successful policies. Hence, due to economic and military prowess that small countries might have, they will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries.

Secondly, small countries may have high diplomatic standing and also strong ties with some bigger countries that prevent them from being at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries. The United Nations' founding principle of sovereign equality ensures that every Member of the United Nations gets one seat and one vote in the General Assembly, allowing for all countries to be equally represented in their dealings within the General Assembly, regardless of their size. Furthermore, the Republic of Korea, a relatively small country, saw the United Nations coming to its aid to intervene in the Korean War, once again showing the importance of diplomatic standing and powerful ties when dealing with other countries. Smaller countries like Singapore, which enjoys a longstanding strong bilateral relationship with the US and also much respect as the voice of ASEAN from its fellow ASEAN countries, easily get their voices heard on the international stage, and are respected as an equal by other countries. Hence, high diplomatic standing and strong ties with bigger countries do ensure that small countries are not always at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries.

Lastly, small countries will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries due to the presence of international justice. For example, when Singapore and Malaysia had conflicting claims to Pedra Branca, the matter was brought to the International Court of Justice which awarded Pedra Branca to Singapore, a smaller country than Malaysia, as Singapore's claim was deemed to be more legitimate. Singapore based its claim on a history of administration of Pedra Branca without prior Malaysian opposition, and this was deemed to be more valid than the Malaysian claim, despite Singapore being a small country. The world also condemned Indonesia for its annexation of West Papua, when Portugal tried to take it to the International Court of Justice over the matter. Hence, we see that international justice is on the side of the country which is right, instead of the country which is bigger. This is true, even in the case of *The Republic of Nicaragua v. The United States of America* ICJ, which saw Nicaragua submitting a case against the US to the International Court of Justice for the US's breach of its sovereignty. While the US rejected the jurisdiction of the ICJ in this matter and its ruling in favour of Nicaragua that ordered reparations by the US to Nicaragua, this case allowed the ICJ to develop international law by reiterating the illegality of intervention, use of force and breach of sovereignty, which laid out an expectation for the international community to follow, potentially benefitting other smaller states in the future. The ICJ ruling also gave Nicaragua the moral high ground and made the US look hypocritical as a long-standing champion of the ICJ before the incident, as can be seen by the General Assembly resolution passed by an overwhelming majority to urge the US to comply with the ICJ ruling, despite non-compliance by the US. This ensures that smaller countries will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries in conflicting issues.

In conclusion, as shown by the illustrious examples of how small countries are not at a disadvantage in their international dealings, I believe that the view that they will always be at a disadvantage is a fallacy. Small countries can be on equal ground with others, if not higher because

of their economic and military might, high diplomatic standing and strong ties, as well as international justice. Therefore, world and international politics is not two-dimensional, where only the sizes of countries count. Rather, it is multi-dimensional, where a country's strength, relations and legal standing do count for much in dealings between countries. Small countries will not always be at a disadvantage when dealing with other countries, and are often not.

Comments:

Cogently argued. Flow of language makes for an enjoyable read. Good use of a wide range of examples.

'In a globalised world, it is increasingly difficult for governments to rule effectively.' Discuss.

By Tan Chuin Wei (16S42)

Whenever the United States of America sneezes, the whole world catches a cold. This is but one consequence of us living in this highly interconnected and globalised world. It is not only our ideas, information and people that will spread all over the globe, but even our economic woes, as seen during the 2008 recession. In view of how the dissemination of ideas and information, along with the flow of human capital from country to country, has radically altered the nature of governance, it is difficult to argue that governments have not found it any tougher to govern and meet their ends of the social contract effectively in this globalised age. The easy flow of news and the rise of transnational citizen journalism also complicates domestic rule when it is under scrutiny from the international community, especially when domestic imperatives are at odds with international imperatives. Though there are governments that have not felt the pinch of globalisation or even those that take advantage of it, these states are few and far between. As such, I do believe that it is increasingly tougher for states to govern effectively in this age of globalisation.

With the advent of social media, one can notice the futility of censorship in the globalised age. Even traditional media has become globalised, allowing us to watch news or read print articles about a foreign land we have never visited before. This liberalisation of the flow of information has led to the proliferation and dissemination of a panoply of ideals and ideas, the more prominent of which has threatened various states' monopolies of power. Be it a democracy or a dictatorship, a government enjoys as monopoly of power agreed upon by the people in the social contract. With their subordination to the government's laws and regulations, the governed are promised stability, peace, and above all else that their welfare is protected by the state. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in 'The Social Contract' that 'Men are born free; and everywhere he is in chains' for the social contract is essentially a trade-off between the governments' personal liberties for a collective freedom to peace and stability. The unrestricted flow of information in this globalised age has threatened to dismantle this status quo, for traditionally Western liberal ideals, have found their way to the rest of the world and citizens of authoritarian states have become dissidents to some extent. By no means is this a negative trend, but we can all objectively see that the various states are finding it more difficult to control their people, and the social contract is being dismantled by the very people it was meant for – the governed. Citizens no longer see that trade-off as a fair one and desire more personal freedoms, giving rise to instances like the Arab Spring, where the despotic regimes of Mubarak and Gaddafi were overthrown, or the Tiananmen Square Protests, where students called for greater democratic rights in China. Even in Singapore, with the influx of Western liberal ideals, people have started to question the People's Action Party's more 'draconian' laws like the Internal Security Act, and Article 377A of Singapore's Penal Code, which is seen to limit the freedoms of homosexuals. By no means am I making normative judgement on whether these instances are to be celebrated or not, but I am simply pointing out that a government needs the support of the people and political authority to govern effectively, and the flow of such ideas has threatened to dismantle that authority. Prima facie, it is indeed more difficult for a state to govern people who have grown more rebellious in spirit to demand more from the social contract than the status quo allows for, as a result of globalisation.

However, we cannot make such generalisations so hastily without considering countries that have been relatively untouched by globalisation. Police states like North Korea seems to be free from such issues, due to its policy of censorship and propaganda to indoctrinate her people to be loyal to the state. Arguably, such Western liberal ideals are going to find it difficult to penetrate the minds of the North Korean people, let alone slip into Kim's personal dictatorship of a police state. North Korea is one of the few governments whose rule and unrestricted monopoly of power remain unscathed by the claws of globalisation. To a lesser extent, we also have China, which is still able to maintain the allegiance of her people to the state through censorship. The influx of liberal ideals has been curbed by the Great Firewall of China, and not allowing the services of Google and Facebook to enter the state. Controlling the search engine Baidu also allows the Chinese government to regulate the content seen by her people, and mitigate the effect of globalisation on the minds of her citizens. As such, the grip of globalisation has not made governing too difficult for China and North Korea, insofar as they still managed to hold onto their political authority and monopoly of power due to such regulations.

Admittedly, it is clear that such states are few and far between, and if we were to look at how globalisation in Eastern Europe via the liberalisation of the media caused the various communist governments to topple in 1989, or how globalisation had fanned the flames of revolution during the Arab Spring, it is clear that governments are losing their grip on power and this will undoubtedly impair their ability to govern in this globalised world.

On the other hand, some might argue that globalisation has actually made it increasingly easier for governments to govern effectively. These people might celebrate the ingenuity of governments in exploiting the forces of globalisation to meet domestic imperatives and protect the welfare of the people. These people might cite success stories like how Singapore managed to overcome her ageing population and declining birth rates via the inflow of foreign talent, both white-collar and blue-collar foreign workers to fill in the gaps in the workforce. The Third World has taken advantage of the rise of multinational corporations and free trade for their economic development, as seen from the great economic success of the four Asian Tigers of South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. These countries managed to transform their economies to improve the lives of their people by riding the waves of globalisation. With this in mind, it is understandable for people to think that globalisation has actually made it increasingly easier for governments to govern effectively.

However, there are always two sides to every story. Despite some countries riding on the wave of globalisation for better futures, other countries are drowning in it. Globalisation has brought about a host of unprecedented problems. The easy flow of human capital and interconnected global economies gave rise to new threats like transnational terrorism and the spreading of economic slumps. Governments today have it a lot tougher to protect the welfare of their people, and ensure that they uphold their end of the social contract. One issue that clearly epitomises this is the issue of migrants that even became a key point of contention in the 2016 Presidential Elections in the USA. With the rise of globalisation, many migrants have found their way to the USA, which contributes to an increased risk of terrorist attacks and even the loss of jobs for the average American. Donald Trump won because of his promises to ban Muslims from entering the country and build a wall to deter Latino migrants from entering the country, and this shows the severity or at least perceived severity of these problems arising from globalisation. Likewise, the fact that Brexit was partly motivated by the disdain of European migrants in the United Kingdom also indicates the perceived severity of the flow of people. Taking a closer look at the 'success stories', Singapore's utilisation of foreign talent was not without a spike in nationalistic and even xenophobic sentiments. The growth

of the Asian Tigers was not achieved without accepting the great risks of being part of an interconnected global economy, which is clearly seen when the Asian Financial Crisis crippled these Asian economies. All these problems indicate the decreasing ability of governments to uphold their end of the social contract to maintain the welfare of the people. While riding the waves of globalisation, each country risks drowning in it too. While there are success stories, the tide of globalisation is uncontrollable and it is just a matter of time before one falls off. Indeed, globalisation has ultimately still made the task of governing more difficult than ever before.

Besides that, globalisation has also allowed for international scrutiny of domestic matters, which has complicated the nature of governance. Governments need to meet not only the needs of the governed, but also of other governments and foreign groups. The easy flow of information and rise of transnational citizen journalism due to the advent of social media has allowed foreign entities to keep watch on a country's domestic affairs, and makes it easier for such foreign entities to interfere or chastise a country for its choices in the domestic arena. This is exemplified by the strong international opposition to Duterte's war of drugs that allowed for extra-judicial killings. This conflict of interests complicates the governance of the Philippines, as they are forced to choose between a rock and a hard place. 'Either let the country remain in its crime-ridden state or be condemned by the world' is my guess at the dichotomy put forward by Duterte. Human rights watchdogs have also been quick to condemn Singapore for charging Amos Yee using the Internal Security Act, complicating what was actually a relatively fair trial based on agreed-upon laws. With international scrutiny as a result of globalisation, governments may find it more difficult to make decisions in their governance when domestic imperatives contradict international opinion.

In the grander view of human history, human populations have diverged when the early humans migrated from the African continent to the rest of the continents. Today, humans are converging with the advancements in transportation and communication technology. This new-found interconnectedness is not based on some superficial construct, but perhaps an idiosyncratic sort of human kinship and very human qualities such as the love of freedom. Perhaps that is why such ideas easily intoxicate us as we yearn for more liberty, threatening the state's authority in doing so. The problems associated with globalisation, and the greater international scrutiny, also makes it more difficult for governments to rule effectively today. That is why the statesmen of the world must prepare themselves for this great convergence of mankind we call globalisation and embrace it with a forward-looking spirit, for only if we can ride the waves of globalisation can humanity explore the uncharted waters of the future.

Comments:

Good range of examples from around the world. Counterargument on states untouched by globalisation could be refined.

“In a globalised world, it is increasingly difficult for government rule effectively.” Discuss.

By Long Xuan (16S55)

With advancements in transport and telecommunication, the world has become more integrated and globalised. Even without stepping out of our doorsteps, we are able to shop for foreign goods, chat with friends in another country, and obtain the latest news from abroad. Though a globalised world has brought convenience to our lives, governments are facing increasing challenges in terms of national security, social harmony, and integrated economies. As globalisation brings about freer movement of people, goods, and ideas, I believe that it is more difficult for governments to exercise their political power and bring order to their countries.

First of all, one of the primary roles of the government is to ensure a high standard of living for its citizens. This is achieved by maintaining growth in the economy, and protecting the economy from fluctuations in the international market. In the globalised world today, governments not only need to allocate resources and manpower efficiently in order to improve productivity within a country, but more importantly, they are required to protect the country from external downturns of the economy. For example, Singapore is a very small and open economy, with international trade comprising a major component of its Gross Domestic Products (GDP). Though the country benefits from the world's integrated economy and its people have obtained a high standard of living, the Singapore government is constantly watching out for any fluctuations in the world economy, because economic slowdown or recession in its trading partners will severely impact Singapore's economy immediately. With an increasingly globalised world, Singapore will be more vulnerable to the external economic environment. Hence, the government not only needs to train its people to be more employable, but also increase reserves to buffer against any crisis. In the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the collapse of various banking institutions in the United States affected Singapore's economy adversely. There was a decline in demand for Singapore's goods, and as a result, many Singaporeans lost their jobs. In response to this, the Singapore government encouraged local entrepreneurs to start small-medium companies to bring new jobs and explore new economic opportunities locally. However, all these efforts are still dependent on the response of the global market, considering the small size of Singapore's population. Furthermore, with a globalised economy, many developed countries are challenged by lower costs of production in some developing countries such as Bangladesh and China. Hence, governments in today's world need to constantly identify global economic trends and find innovative ways to drive the economy, while providing buffer for potential crises.

Secondly, the national security of a country is challenged when foreigners are able to enter the country more easily. In the past, when the number of people travelling in and out of the country is small, governments had the luxury of carefully reviewing the background of each applicant and checking for any potential threats they might bring to the country. In the globalised world, where millions of people pass through borders for business and leisure, much more advanced data management technology and manpower are required for governments to identify terrorists or criminals in the overwhelming crowd. Coupled with the rise of terrorism in the Middle East, governments are facing more difficulties in ensuring national security. For example, despite the improved surveillance after the Charlie Hebdo

attack in France, terrorists still found their way into the continent, and conducted a terrorist attack at a subway station near the Headquarters of the European Union in Brussels. This attack bears testament to the fact that governments need to step up surveillance to a much higher degree, to face the threats of terrorism in a globalised world. In the process of expanded surveillance, governments also need to find a balance between tightening border controls and encouraging foreign trade and investment, as foreign businessmen may find it less convenient to conduct trade with the country.

In addition to external security threats, globalisation may also endanger domestic social stability and racial harmony. As foreign ideologies become more readily available on the Internet, some people may be influenced by extreme religious ideologies and subscribe to fundamentalism. As the individuals become self-radicalised, they undermine the trust among members of the society. For example, a self-radicalised student set off a bomb at a marathon race in Boston a few years ago, fueling Islamophobic sentiments and marginalising Muslims in American society. With the development of the Internet, governments may find it much more challenging to protect their citizens from violent and skewed ideologies.

On the flip side, globalisation has encouraged international cooperation in solving environmental issues. Governments from different countries come together more frequently to discuss solutions for global problems, such as global warming and pollution. For example, many countries signed the Paris Agreement, agreeing to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Since the nature of many environmental and social problems today is transnational in nature, global corporation is a prerequisite in solving these issues.

In conclusion, I believe that globalisation has indeed brought about many new challenges for governments to deal with, in order to maintain stability and meet the aspirations of the citizens in the country.

Comments:

Well balanced argument with apt examples. However, a broader scope would have made it more comprehensive. You sort of ran out of steam towards the end. Good use of grammar.

How far should the government be involved in the private lives of its people?

By Alexander Gan (15S64)

Privacy and individual freedoms have never been emphasised so much before as now. Citizens around the world are exerting pressure on their governments to adopt a more laissez faire approach to their personal lives, especially amidst today's climate of mistrust and animosity towards power and authority. Even in traditional 'nanny states' such as China and Singapore, governments may capitulate to the demands of its people in affording them greater liberty when it comes to decisions concerning their personal lives. This naturally engenders a pertinent question: how far should the government be involved in the private lives of its people? In my opinion, the State should interfere more often than not in the personal decisions of its citizens, although certain parameters must be set to ensure intervention does not evolve into outright intrusion or manipulation.

Governments have to be involved in the private lives of its citizens to ensure that good governance and effective policies can be implemented for the betterment of society. Individuals are concerned with their own personal self-interests – this is the nature of human beings. The welfare of others is generally not considered in one's decision-making process. If the State were to stay out of the private lives of its citizens, many national objectives cannot be achieved. Efforts involving population growth and family planning, racial harmony, cleanliness and societal order, amongst others, will not be achieved without the authorities intervening in people's private lives to ensure that they work towards a common goal, rather than ones of self-interest. As the late former Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, once said in his National Day Rally Speech in 1986, "If the government did not meddle in the affairs of its citizens, then we would never have had the successful society we have today". Many of the Singaporean government's policies adopt this line of thinking. Against a backdrop of low fertility rates and couples wishing to get married later, the government intervenes in the personal matters of marriage and families, either by giving incentives to married couples to bear children, such as the Baby Bonus Scheme and allowing both mothers and fathers to take leave, or by prioritizing families in areas such as the purchase of government housing or application for grants. Without active involvement by the government in the areas of love and the home, fertility rates would remain stagnant and the country will face a severe population crisis in the future, threatening our prosperity as a nation. Sometimes, it is better to forgo one's personal liberties for society to progress, and this can be best achieved if the government gets involved in the personal decisions of its people.

As the world becomes more dangerous with the increasing threat of terrorist attacks, governments have to interfere in people's private lives to maintain national security and prevent devastating attacks from occurring on their shores. Globalisation and technological advancements have resulted in a proliferation in terrorist activities and attacks worldwide. The unprecedented scale and reach of terrorism is evident in recent attacks in Paris, Brussels, Orlando and Istanbul, prompting an immediate call to action. Governments can only do so much in fortifying national borders and increasing support for the police – for the authorities to keep track of and prevent terrorist attacks, there has to be surveillance of people's actions. By monitoring the populace on a wide scale, governments can surface suspicious activities and follow up with investigations. To do so, the State has to enter what is considered private domains, for instance, one's search history on the Internet. Such an intrusion may seem unwarranted but is in fact necessary for the government to ensure the safety and security of its people. Already, some government have engaged in surveillance efforts to curtail terrorist threats, to much success. In Singapore, four attackers based in Batam who

plotted to bomb Marina Bay Sands were arrested after Singapore informed Indonesian police of suspicious activity found when tracing their movement both offline and online. Further abroad in Britain, increased surveillance by the Home Office has prevented terrorist attacks from occurring on their shores, even as their neighbours experience them. The passage of omnibus surveillance bills through Parliament, such as the "Snooper's Charter", were necessary prerequisites for the authorities to monitor suspects in the digital realm. Without these powers, there will be no way for governments to monitor and eliminate potential threats. The privacy of a country's citizens should not be to the detriment of national security.

While the government should definitely be involved in the private lives of its people in many cases, I acknowledge that in some areas, government intervention is not required as these concern very private matters of or between individuals which the government has no right to dictate. Individual freedom is still treasured by many people as an inherent and inviolable right, and the involvement of the State violates that. The government's interference in areas concerning one's personal choices and preferences is unwarranted and in some cases, cause deleterious effects. By respecting the personal decisions of its people, the government can build better relationships with the public and gain their trust to pursue a more worthy agenda. For example, in many countries, abortion used to be under the purview of the government as efforts were made to discourage or prevent it outright. Such interference did not fulfil the government's aim to stem unwanted pregnancies, but in many cases led to women turning to illegal, unregulated abortion services instead, leading to health problems which further burdened the government. When countries such as Canada and France removed abortion restrictions, the State respected the private decisions of women in choosing whether to go ahead with their pregnancies, and this resulted in a safer, regulated environment for abortions to be carried out. Government intervention in areas like abortion have proved problematic and potentially harmful. By staying out these private personal decisions, a conducive climate is created which posits a win-win situation for all. Hence, the government should not always be involved in the private lives of its citizens.

While governments are generally trusted to do the right things, sometimes an overly-powerful State may also excessively interfere in citizens' private lives for their own gain rather than for society's welfare. Government's' unfettered and unrestrained access to the private lives of their people may lead to their being manipulated or even prosecuted, creating a totalitarian state in the process. If the government restricts freedoms of religion and the right to privacy, they could target those who oppose them and suppress dissident voices. In China, the government actively monitors the actions of its people online to censure comments which criticise the government, and even prosecute those who express that feeling. Even in liberal democracies such as the United States, heightened surveillance has caused concern over the extent of the government's authority. When Edward Snowden revealed the unprecedented scale of the government's activities in collecting browser search history from Internet services providers and wiretapping phone calls, there was a massive backlash as people realised that the data collected was revealing and extensive. If the government attempts to use such data against them, they will be none the wiser and cannot defend themselves. Unbridled intrusions into private lives may lead to the creation of a climate of fear and self-censorship, and exposes the State to the temptations of authoritarian rule. For the protection of the people, the government should not be too involved in their private lives lest they run the risk of a less free and more restrained society.

Even when considering these counter-arguments, I am still inclined to err on the side of greater governmental involvement. In a much more complex world, the government needs to do more than restricting its actions to the public domain. Some involvement in private affairs has to

take place for security to be upheld and progress to be sustained. The threats facing countries today – ageing or burgeoning populations, terrorism, even simple matters like physical well-being, need a healthy dose of involvement by external forces to ensure that people live comfortable and stable lives. Understandably, concerns about a state with too much power vested in it are warranted but countermeasures exist to ameliorate this risk – elections, independent judiciaries and international watchdogs all keep a check on government when they go too far. Thus, I am steadfast in my belief that the government should be involved in people's private lives, for the betterment of us all.

Comments:

A clear and cogent argument. However, the examples used could have included really private matters such as choice of career, life partner, religion and the like.

How far should the government be involved in the private lives of its people?

By Esther Chong (15A12)

"Nanny State"- a term coined by the British public after the British Labor Party won the elections and enacted some rather controversial, paternalistic policies in the United Kingdom. Referring to this term as well, the late Lee Kuan Yew had also expressed that he was "proud to have fostered" one. Some have agreed with the Labor Party and Mr Lee's views, believing that the interference of paternalistic or authoritarian governments in the private lives of their citizens- through dictating how many children they could have, how much of their salary should go into their savings account, what they could and could not say, is ideal. They cite the government's ability to bring about unhindered economic growth and the maintenance of the integrity of a country's social fabric to substantiate their view. Granted, these positive outcomes are fairly indisputable, but they come at a price. The individual's liberty to decide for himself how to lead his life is utterly compromised and the excessive management of the private lives of citizens by the government can seem like an insult to the citizens' intelligence, with such unfavorable policies possibly resulting in the ousting of political leaders from their position in a democratic system of governance. Hence, state interference is justified, but only to a small extent.

Paternalistic governments and authoritarian regimes often justify their involvement in their citizens' lives by presenting splendid economic growth rates as proof of the validity of their actions. In Singapore, double digit Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates in the 1970s and 1980s could largely be credited to the government's intervention in determining the number of children couples could have. The "Two is Enough" campaign was launched with the hope of relieving the strain on public commodities such as hospitals, education, libraries, all while allowing the less-occupied mothers to enter the workforce and contribute to the economy. This proved beneficial for the budding nation of Singapore through its crucial development years. Likewise, in China, the one-child policy characterized the rule of the communist party, and helped to transform the country which was once ninety percent agricultural land into the economic giant that it is today. In Singapore, the government even took the citizens' financial planning into their own hands, launching the Central Provident Fund scheme which citizens have to contribute to monthly. This was to reduce the reliance of citizens on the state for welfare and handouts, allowing the state to channel these funds for further economic development. Through the interference of the state in family and financial planning of its citizens, it seems that the resultant higher incomes and standard of living does indeed justify state interference.

When the integrity of the country's social fabric or the loyalty to the country's leader is at stake, it does seem logical for state intervention to be used to ensure the stability of the country. Laws which ban the insulting of races and religions have been passed and enshrined in Singapore's constitution. The banning of articles and websites that portray the Chinese Communist Party in a way that the Chinese Communist Party deem derogatory or demeaning to their cause on China's "internet", and the constant surveillance for possible signs of dissent are good examples of the efforts of China's government in intervening to ensure loyalty to the country's leader. This, however, means the banning of Facebook, Instagram and certain American television programmes. Such laws and measures mean that people no longer have control of what they can say or even read anymore.

The government hold their tongue and shut their eyes to materials which may cost the country its integrity as a state. This is viewed as beneficial as harmony, stability and submission to the state are viewed as virtues.

However, such intervention comes at a cost which might be too hefty to be justified by economic development and stability of the country. Lives are literally lost due to family planning policies enacted by the state. In China especially, the one child policy and the parallel legalization of abortion in the country has led to a sharp spike in abortion as the culture is one that places emphasis on males which have the potential to carry on the family name and hence the lineage. Incidents of grandparents and even parents strangling and fixing needles into the baby's soft scalp to kill baby girls are far too common, especially in rural areas where abortion is either unaffordable or inaccessible. Is the country's economic growth really enough to justify such inhumane acts?

Additionally, state intervention can also come across as an insult to an increasingly educated population's intelligence. In a time where people were not as educated, financial planning by the government which possesses financial expertise does seem like a smart decision. However, the more educated populace now does have the capability to think for themselves and such interference could suggest that the government looks down on and is unable to trust the abilities of the citizens. In addition, the ban on discriminatory remarks does imply that citizens or even journalists for that matter do not possess the intellect to engage in self-censorship. In this day and age where the mass media are so infused into our lives and we have more knowledge of events around the world, we should be able to have our own views and be able to express them. Additionally, we should be given control over our finances. Thus the role of government involvement in our lives will be diminished.

Furthermore, the non-intervention of the state in the private lives of its citizens may prove to be beneficial as well. In a democratic society, it is crucial that the governments enact policies which resonate with the populace. The NSA surveillance scandal in 2013 in America had cost the popularity of the Democratic Party due to the American's displeasure with the government's move to invade into their private lives in an attempt to eradicate terrorism. In Singapore, which still proudly claims to be democratic, it is crucial that the government does not engage in over-involvement, as the People's Action Party's (PAP) hold over Singapore can be loosened at any moment, as proven by the 2011 General Elections, during which the PAP's votes had dropped by such a margin that it was the lowest ever in Singaporean history. Hence, it is important that governments are aware of the sentiments of the population and not engage too aggressively in their citizens' lives.

In conclusion, I believe that the government's involvement is justified when the population is generally uneducated and in need of a professional perspective towards family and financial planning. However, as the citizens become more educated and knowledgeable, intervention is increasingly unacceptable and may in fact bring about negative implications to the country.

Comments:

You discussed relevant issues and gave appropriate examples. However, analysis and evaluation could have been sharper. What if a country's national security and socio-economic well-being are at stake? Should there still be minimum involvement then? Consider also moral concerns and personal choices. Good use of examples from a wide range of countries to diversify scope of essay and substantiate points. More evaluation can be done in conclusion for more impact.

To what extent is it justifiable for the state to intervene in the private lives of its citizens?

By Ashna Khatri (17A11)

Ever since the signing of the Magna Carta, all democratic institutions and states govern based on the guiding principles of the social contract- whereby the state's primary role is the duty of care for its citizens. The social contract, guided by utilitarian principles, states that the rights of the masses outweigh the rights of an individual. If an individual is found guilty of violating social norms or laws, therefore compromising the rights of another, he is liable to the justice system of the state- whereby he is compelled to give up the rights of his own. Even for innocent civilians, more pressing basic rights- like the right to live- take precedence over rights to privacy. Thus, the state often justifies the subversion of the right to privacy, by intervening directly or indirectly into the private lives of its citizens, claiming national security reasons. However, for most of such cases the threat outlined within such national security reasons is vague and based on isolated incidents, making it harder to justify or account for such governmental interventions - in such cases there are almost no checks and balances for the power wielded by the state. Additionally, it is harder to regulate the private lives of civilians, when the state's power mostly pertains to the public sphere - leaving lifestyle choices to the discretion of citizen's privacy.

State intervention into the private lives of its citizens is considered justified when it pertains to national security reasons, whereby the safety of other citizens is at stake. According to the social contract, the state has to uphold its duty of care, whereby any government intervention is justified insofar as the welfare of other citizens and the entire country is at stake. Such was the argument cited by the Obama administration in 2011, when a former intelligence service agent, Edward Snowden, released classified documents, proving that the US government had been conducting far-reaching surveillance on all of its citizen's private lives- whereby communications through phone calls, text messages and the Internet were all monitored by the National Surveillance Agency (NSA) . The US government claimed that after the September 11 terrorist attacks, national security was at risk due to terrorism and the 'war on terror' mandated such governmental surveillance, as it made it easier to sniff out any potential terrorist plots and foil them before they could come into fruition- thus ensuring national security.

However, the national security threat was vaguely defined and based on an isolated example of a terrorist attack. Not to mention, such instances of governmental surveillance presume the guilt of all citizens, even innocent civilians, placing the responsibility on the telecommunication data obtained to prove the innocence of these citizens. This is inherently a subversion of the most basic principles of justice, whereby everyone is considered innocent unless proven guilty. Furthermore, in the case of the US, government surveillance has yet to have been proven successful, given that there has been no recent news on potential domestic or international terrorist plots foiled within the US. In fact, in retrospect it would seem that such cases of the subversion of the right to privacy via governmental intervention, highlights the underlying issue of unchecked power wielded by the government- which is rarely accounted for. Were it not for whistleblowers like Edward Snowden, US citizens would have never known about their rights to privacy being subverted by the government, through state surveillance.

Additionally, the duty of care of the government is often limited to the public sphere, unless the safety of citizens within a private household is threatened. When activities that citizens indulge in within the public sphere threaten the welfare of other citizens, it is completely within the state's

right to intervene, as they have jurisdiction in this matter. For example, given that second hand smoking is known to cause lung cancer, to protect the health of non-smoking civilians, the Singapore government enforced a ban on smoking in public places like bus stops and sheltered walkways. Additionally, after the Little India riots was revealed to have been exacerbated by public intoxication, the Singapore government enforced a ban on the sale of alcohol after 10pm at night. However, it is both outside the jurisdiction of the government and harder to regulate the private lives of its citizens, which is why governments never ban smoking or drinking alcohol at home. Nonetheless, when the safety of members of a household is violated, the law permits state intervention into the private lives of its citizens. For instance, in most countries, domestic abuse is a crime- with the exception of more conservative societies like Saudi Arabia where domestic abuse is in line with accepted social norms- which is why when found guilty of it, the state intervenes in the personal matters of such a household. Any person found guilty of domestic abuse is then held accountable for their actions in front of the state's justice systems. Criminals lose their right to privacy when they are found guilty of violating the law which upholds social norms. In containment facilities like prisons, they are deprived of second-hand rights like the right to privacy, facing constant surveillance by prison authorities. They are the only exception when the subversion of their privacy by the state is justified.

Lastly, private lifestyle choices are often left to the discretion of individuals and their right to privacy is respected. Such choices could include dietary choices; in the case of junk food or fast food, it is known that the overconsumption of such unhealthy food can have adverse effects on one's health. For example, it could often lead to obesity and heart conditions. However, even though it is the government's responsibility to ensure the welfare of its citizens, intervening in the dietary choices of citizens would be a direct violation of their freedom to choose. Additionally, an individual's unhealthy dietary preferences have no link to the welfare of other citizens, making state intervention unjustified. However, when it is proven that such unhealthy dietary preferences affect an entire country, the state can choose to intervene. For example, in the USA and selected other European countries facing an epidemic of rising obesity rates, the state chose to implement a sugar tax to encourage healthier lifestyle choices. Nonetheless, it should be noted that even under such circumstances government intervention was limited to the economy within the public sphere, proving that the private sphere is often outside of their jurisdiction.

In conclusion, contrary to the perception one may have upon reading the magna carta, the state's powers are limited and subjected to comprehensive nuances. In most cases, state intervention in a parliamentary democracy is subjected to the state's powers outlined in a country's unique constitution, it varies in different countries. State intervention can be subjected to judicial review, however the objectiveness of the executive judicial process can be rather questionable when constitutional judges are hired by the state. Additionally, for countries within an authoritarian regime like that under Bashar Al Assad in Syria, it does not matter whether state intervention is justifiable as there are almost no checks and balances to ensure state accountability. Nonetheless, it is the public duty of journalists and citizens alike to keep themselves informed of such matters, so that they know what their rights are and they know when their rights are being violated. This empowers them to champion their rights and hold the state accountable for unjustified intervention into their private lives.

Comments:

The essay raises some insightful arguments and is eloquently expressed. However, be careful when organising your paragraphs such that the arguments are clearer and they don't overlap. Take care also not to ramble on about premises already established in the question.

"Government censorship remains necessary today."

To what extent do you agree?

By Aretha Reyhan Aryono (17A11)

In 2010, Wael Ghonim, an internet activist, took to popular online platforms to voice his unhappiness against then-president, Hosni Mubarak, and effectively sparked what was known worldwide as the Facebook Revolution of Egypt. As the name suggests, such is the unfiltered nature of the media in today's world, with the uncanny ability to empower and mobilize millions in the direction of their cause. In this digital age, information is accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. And the world becomes an audience to the woes, joys and anger of the keyboard warrior. Regulating said information, rampant in the media, in its largely unfiltered nature, might prove to be a difficult task to the government which is limited in success and viability, considering the sheer amount there is to sift through and filter out. However, it is the inexorable flow of said information, in its boundlessness and power to cause great change, that makes it all the more important for governing bodies to control, in order to protect the interests of the nation, stem dissent and maintain societal order. Hence, I agree to a great extent that government censorship remains necessary today.

Firstly, regulating the free-flow of information effectively protects the interests of the nation and the security of its people. With the limitless information the media and the Internet is home to today, and the great advancements in technology, come boundless opportunities for the misuse of information, seen in activities such as hacking and whistleblowing which could adversely impact lives not only on both the personal level and national level. Edward Snowden, for example, leaked top secret documents from the USA's National Security Agency, compromising the interests of the nation and undermining the power of the government. Julian Assange, similarly, was the founder of Wikileaks, a site on which people share hacked or stolen information for all the world to see. The existence of such a site in itself is proof of the uncontrollable nature of information available in the media today, and its adverse effects, such as the leaking of top-secret government information to rival countries, who could utilize the information, compromising national security and interests in the process. On a personal scale, hacking into one's private account subjects the common online user to danger if that information is used against him. There have been numerous cases of online assault, where money is paid in exchange of a promise not to leak private information online. All this is simply due to the uncontrolled nature of online media. It is therefore necessary for the government to step in and regulate the free-flow of information available online and the unlimited potential to be misused, in order to protect the security and interests of people not only on a personal scale but also on a national scale.

Next, government censorship is vital in order to prevent dissent that could hinder the nation's progress. As stated earlier, the unfiltered, liberal nature of the Internet promotes empowerment; it encourages people to voice and verbalize their woes with regards to the status quo. While this empowers certain social groups previously unheard of in society, it has the potential to be destructive, and to cause dissent against the ruling bodies of the government. The Arab Spring of 2010, for example, saw a series of revolts against the governments of Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries, which was sparked off and exacerbated by the rampant use of online media as a platform to speak out against the governing bodies. Online groups were formed that advocated the same agenda, culminating in a series of protests that lasted for months and took the lives of thousands involved in the protests. In that sense, to prevent dissent that could culminate in societal unrest and the loss of lives of many in revolution, it is necessary for the government to step in and prevent societal unrest, which could hinder political cohesion of the nation and its development, To

consolidate government control, regulation is important. This is particularly so in small states like Singapore; its small geographical size means that any form of unrest or protest would bring about immeasurable damage to the country. As such, government censorship is practised online and in newspapers and publishing companies such as Mediacorp. Therefore, government censorship is necessary to consolidate government control, prevent unrest and ensure the nation's growth.

However, the fact that so many people make use of the Internet to retrieve or release information renders government regulation largely futile and unnecessary. It is almost impossible to stem the free flow of information, as evident in the case of the Panama Papers or Wikileaks; large scale leaks and misuse of information just like these indicate an inability of the government to control information, in an age where information is thriving and multiplying in quantity and access. Furthermore, the active presence of the people on the media subject users of the media to online policing; they act as a check-and-balance, controlling the kind of content one publishes for the rest of the world to see. In the case of Amos Yee, who posted a video on Youtube insulting the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the government of Singapore did not have to intervene as other users of the Internet, appalled and disapproving of the offensive contents in the video, called him out and persecuted him. This, along with many other similar cases, are subjected to online policing; whenever one posts something, it is not published in a vacuum, others can view it and evaluate it, acting as checks-and-balance. Hence, government regulation is unnecessary in this age.

However, government regulation of the media prevents controversial pieces of information from being seen by the public audience in the first place, eliminating the possibility of conflicts between people by filtering out the content to retain and which to leave alone. This lowers the chances of conflicts between people of different racial groups, backgrounds or beliefs, and therefore maintains societal cohesion and harmony in the nation. This is especially important in nations with multi-ethnic groups in society such as multiracial Singapore and ethnically diverse Myanmar and Indonesia, because conflicts that arise out of a difference in belief and/or culture could very much displace the society that is constructed on a multi-ethnic, diverse foundation. This was why the incident of Amy Cheong, a Singaporean Chinese who insulted Malay wedding rituals online, caused such a big uproar and tensions brewed between those who agreed with her, and the Malays in Singaporean society. It is better therefore that the government intervenes and steps in, filtering out potentially divisive or controversial content in the media before it reaches the people and potentially causes dissent. Hence, to maintain social cohesion and harmony, government censorship is still necessary.

To conclude, the liberal, unfiltered nature of the media can be empowering and give a voice to the previously-unheard cast aside by society. However, while this is so, the free-flow of information, if unchecked, could lead to disruptive dissent, a compromise of national and personal security and interests as well as a division in society. As long as the government is free of ill-will and corruption, and acts in the best interest of its society rather than to pursue personal interests, government censorship will create a safe space in the media, for people to derive full enjoyment and benefit from. Hence, I agree to a large extent that government censorship remains necessary today.

Comments:

Aretha, a very perceptive and thorough essay that makes clear reference to the characteristics of modern media and society and relates that to the necessity of censorship. Examples are also very current and relevant. Language use is confident but can do with more concision. Sentences are sometimes long and unwieldy which affected clarity.

“Government censorship remains necessary today.”

To what extent do you agree?

By Nicholas Giancarlo Canete (17S42)

The watershed passage of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in Singapore’s legislature, stipulating that all forms of national print media were to obtain permits and were under the jurisdiction of government surveillance, foreshadowed a shift towards a compromise of civil liberties, such as through censorship, to achieve national interests. While the Singapore government maintains that the enforcement of censorship is necessary to ensure social cohesion, liberals around the world disparage it as an unjustified curtailment of free speech that all individuals should otherwise be entitled to. While I agree to a large extent that government censorship remains necessary today, as censorship provides a medium for the government to depoliticise the public, curb extremism and protects social cohesion, its necessity is undermined by governments abusing it as a blank cheque to unjustifiably enforce political and religious orthodoxy. Thus, I agree censorship is necessary to a large extent only to secure political and social stability, and not to maintain political orthodoxy.

The necessity of government censorship lies in its ability to depoliticise the public and curb the inexorable proliferation of extremism. With the increasing fragility of political conflicts internationally, political and sectarian cults have taken to various forms of the media to radicalise and recruit people as pawns of their causes. The need to protect the public from such corrupting political influence has amplified the imperative to censor and stem the reach of these influences. This was highlighted in a recent case in Singapore, when a female infant-care teacher was radicalised by ISIS militants to support their cause, amongst others who were galvanised by the extremist group through their websites. The pervasive proliferation of demagoguery and populism through the Internet is also seen in Germany, where the anti-Islam Pegida movement called on its supporters to stage chaotic demonstrations in protest of the Chancellor’s pro-refugee policies. Thus, to protect the political landscape of a country and ensure stability, it is necessary to enforce government censorship to prevent the propagation of fervent reactionary politics.

Censorship also remains necessary to protect the social cohesion of a country. The prospect of legal chastisement through censorship policies has often been a deterrent to the proliferation of hate speech, such as xenophobia and racism. The prevention of hate speech represents a systematic imposition of a greater degree of tolerance that is perpetuated in the long-term, creating a lasting legacy of social stability. For example, in Singapore, the Sedition Act was implemented to implicate anyone engaging in hate speech, ensuring that a culture of tolerance and self-control among Singaporeans prevails. This was seen in the arrest of a couple behind a socio-political website ‘The Real Singapore’, which allegedly published remarks online that could promote ill-will and hostility among the different races in Singapore. There are other incidents of the use of hate speech by citizens, for example in the wake of the Little India Riot in 2013, and in response to a proposal to celebrate Filipino Independence Day in 2014 at a shopping centre in the heart of the city. Xenophobic furore from a vocal minority was met with a backlash from voices of moderation, evidence that Singapore’s censorship policies are needed to help create a more tolerant society, and prevent a crystallisation of a ‘them-against-us’ mentality which will undermine social cohesion.

However, I concede that the ability of governments to censor has been abused by some governments to perpetuate political or religious orthodoxy, and to legitimise their own political parties. The abuse of censorship to censor valid criticism or stem transmission of ideas to maintain national status quo is bound to create a closed-minded, politically inactive society that enables the government to act with little opposition. This is seen in Turkey, where Prime Minister Erdogan made use of censorship powers to block Wikipedia, on the pretext of blocking criticism towards his government. North Korea's incessant and stringent policies on censoring all forms of Western media, even going so far as to sentence those prosecuted of possessing such forms of media to death, has manifested itself in the form of generations of politically uneducated masses, creating a cult of personality obsequious and loyal to the Kim regime. Thus, censorship risks creating a closed society.

On the other hand, countries that have been known to abuse censorship see it in their own right to secure a loyal and unopposed regime to maintain national unity. Take for example the censorship of pornographic material in Islamic countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. While this would seemingly create a closed society, such censorship is necessary to perpetuate the rule of Sharia law, which characterises their national and cultural identity. Thus, censorship is not always a manifestation of corrupt governance.

In conclusion, I agree to a large extent that it is necessary to have government censorship, as it creates a legacy of social cohesion, and depoliticises public life from radical influences that would otherwise cause political turmoil. However, governments must be careful to practise restraint and keep themselves away from abusing censorship to meet narrow self-interests; they should use censorship purely as a means to police the social and political landscape of the state and maintain stability. The issue of censorship presents a double-edged conundrum for governments characterized by a delicate balance between protection and control, and so long as governments stay away from an egregious abuse of censorship, they would be in a better position to maintain national cohesion. Thus, government censorship is only necessary to protect national integrity, so long as governments do not try to protect their own orthodoxy and narrow self-interests.

Comments:

Nicholas, a well-argued response to the issue of the need for state censorship with a good range of examples from different parts of the globe. Do ensure factual accuracy though. Is there only that one counterargument – abuse by the government - especially since this question is about 'today'? Must censorship be by the State? What about netizens and vigilante movements? Excellent vocabulary and felicitous expressions abound.

Social Issues

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“In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

“What I fear is complacency. When things always become better, people tend to want more for less work.”

Lee Kuan Yew

KIASU
ExamPaper 

“If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”

John F. Kennedy

”

Is your country doing enough to make sure that nobody gets left behind?

By Adelle Lee (16A15)

Singapore is known for its highly competitive and fast-paced society, and this inevitably leaves those who are less inclined in various fields like the workplace, school or even the physically impaired, behind. Yet, this is not the case in Singapore, as the Singapore government does its best to put into place schemes, policies and laws. These create many opportunities to help lift the poor out of poverty, the workers to constantly improve themselves to remain competitive for this globalised world, and to help the elderly and the disabled integrate cohesively into society. Hence, I believe that my country, Singapore, is doing enough to ensure that nobody gets left behind.

Firstly, the government of Singapore creates opportunities for everyone economically, by providing funds and money to those who need it to help themselves progress further in society. The government recognises that education is key in pulling and lifting people out of poverty, as education provides the necessary basic skills and certificates to get employed and receive an income. Hence, it provides free education for primary school for every Singaporean citizen and secondary and tertiary fees at a subsidised amount. Even the tuition fees of local universities that are ranked highly on a global scale like NTU and NUS are relatively cheap, with NUS offering Law at \$17,100 per year with MOE's tuition grant subsidy, as compared to US universities which offer Law at a hefty \$56,086 per year. By providing free and subsidised education for the masses, even the poor can attend school, and hence can be exposed to learning and basic education, necessary for them to get a job and not be left behind in this competitive society.

Furthermore, the government also recognises the importance of workers staying competitive in the economy, and the repercussions if one's skills become obsolete over time. Hence, the government also pumped in money in the form of directed and targeted funding called SkillsFuture credits, which blue-collared workers, who face a higher risk of unemployment due to outsourcing triggered by globalisation, can use to improve themselves and go for retraining. With the announcement that they would be allocating \$1 million to this SkillsFuture programme, it can also be concluded that the government has indeed done much. With its sheer financial muscles, it is providing help to people who are disadvantaged to seize the opportunities that they could not previously, due to the nature of society and the lack of monetary means. It can also be said that the government has put in much thought on this issue, as they have also strategically planned their allocation of money in a sense that they have restricted the use of SkillsFuture credits to only retraining programmes, unlike other welfare states in the world which give benefits in the form of real money. The government's execution of this helped to ensure that the poor do not jeopardise their own future by squandering the given money on unnecessary things like alcohol and gambling, which would set them back even further despite government efforts. As such, I feel that my country is indeed doing enough in the economic aspect to ensure that everyone progresses forward, be it through education or the workplace, and their efforts to even help those who stray off the path to progress are indeed commendable.

In addition, the government creates a fair environment for everyone to compete in, thus providing opportunities not only for the rich, but also for the poor, elderly and disabled. As the disabled and elderly face much discrimination in the workplace due to their lack of skill and physical strength, the government addressed this by placing policies such that companies are more incentivised to hire these groups of

people, and laws that a company must not deny work from a disabled person or the elderly just because of their identity. In recent years, the reduction of corporate tax for companies that fire these disadvantaged groups have proven to be effective, as renowned food chains like MOS Burger and Pepper Lunch are hiring such groups, and it suggests that such companies are more willing to provide opportunities and make judgements devoid of discrimination. Furthermore, the government has also once again targeted the root cause of progress, which is education. As aforementioned, the government subsidises education fees for Singaporean citizens. However, not only did they do that, they also made sure that every school is a good school, in terms of the facilities provided like music rooms, science labs and even sports facilities. The government also dispatched quality teachers who are well-trained to every school, ensuring that the quality of teaching is constant through the nation, and that every student gets to learn from the best. Through this, it does not matter whether a rich child goes to a prestigious private school or a poorer child attends a government school; the exposure of both groups of children will still be the same and the quality of learning will be still comparable. In addition, the government also caters to the disabled by creating schools like M.I.N.D.S, to allow these handicapped students to also have a chance in life. Hence, through the government's widespread efforts to invest in infrastructure and policies to facilitate an environment of non-discrimination, and instead one of comfort to work and learn in, it shows that the country is indeed doing a lot to ensure equal opportunities for everyone, making sure nobody, regardless of economic stature, mental and physical ability, age and class is left behind.

Yet, it must be highlighted that the government's influence may just not be enough to completely change workplace environments to accepting ones that do not discriminate. Some huge companies, while also heavily invested in the welfare of their employees, are not swayed by the government's policies and incentives, as they are powerful and rich and do not need to subscribe to the government's ideas and encouragement to be more inclusive. Furthermore, retail shops, especially those promoting a certain stereotype or advocating some form of beauty standards like The Body Shop and Burberry, have turned down employees based on their looks, and in a sense denied them of opportunities. Furthermore, while the government may be able to hold a fairly large influence over education, external factors may tilt the playing field once again, making the opportunities that the government provided less prominent and valuable by raising the bar. Such external factors include the extra financial muscle that some parents possess to elect their children to an even higher level holistically, such as providing tuition to improve their grades, extra sports trainings or leadership classes. While these factors push a generation of children to their zenith, it also suggests that those who do not possess the means to remain compatible will fall behind again, and this is unfortunately out of the government's control.

In conclusion, I still feel that the government is doing enough to ensure that nobody gets left behind, and their efforts are commendable and rather significant, seeing that the nation is progressing as a whole in recent years and not just the upper part of the social echelon. Yet, there are still some factors that may hinder the effects of the government's strategies to fully manifest in society, such as the government's inadequate influence over some parts of the economy, and the inevitability of external factors that may cause unfairness in competition despite the carefully constructed fair environment that the government has formulated. All in all, the government is doing well according to their capabilities, but just not enough as there is still room for improvement.

Comments:

Sound discussion of valid issues with apt use of supporting evidence, although some claims and assertions could have been more clearly qualified. The use of supporting evidence could have been more consistent for some parts. Nevertheless, a decent attempt.

Is a world without stereotypes attainable?

By Lindy Oon (16S32)

'Women should stay at home and be good mothers and wives.' 'Muslims are terrorists.' 'Men should bring in the bacon and support their families financially.' These are just a few of the myriad of stereotypes present in society, and like any other stereotype, they are fallacious, giving the different communities in society a blanket label based on the actions of a few, or because of deeply rooted traditional mindsets. Stereotypes have a pernicious impact on society. They limit people's potential, and some are simply downright insulting and demeaning. While some effort has been put in by governments around the world to remove stereotypes in society, I feel that a world without stereotypes is very much unattainable due to people's mindsets.

Detractors may point out that governments have put in place a myriad of policies that challenge stereotypes, in an attempt to shift towards a world without them. Policymakers have started to realise the detriments and foolishness of stereotypes, and have introduced ways to encourage their people to lay aside their stereotypes. For instance, fathers in Finland now get as many days of paternity leave as mothers do to promote father-and-child bonding. As a result, over 60% have taken up this offer, and the culture of a stay-at-home dad is becoming increasingly popular in Finland. Similarly, from 2017, Singaporean fathers will get an additional second week of paternity leave to spend more quality time with their newborns. This shows that the government in challenging the traditional mindset that women should be the ones taking care of children, especially their newborns, while men continue to work. By pushing for policies that encourage men to spend time at home to care for their children, governments are trying to banish the stereotype that men who stay at home are less masculine. As the government is seen as the apex of society, when the government introduces policies that challenge stereotypes, the people are more likely to put aside their personal stereotypes and work together with the government towards a better society without stereotypes.

However, people often have extremely deep-rooted mindsets and stereotypes that are so entrenched in them that they may resist government policies. Stereotypes are derived from humans' innate instinct to judge others and categorise them. We are afraid of the unknown, resistant to change, especially when something is so deeply inculcated in us. An example would be how Manal al-Shariff, the first female driver in Saudi Arabia, managed to convince the government that women should be allowed to drive legally. However, she has not received much support from the people, even the women, as women in Saudi Arabia have been under the impression that they are the inferior gender, that they cannot go out in public without a male companion, and that they are forbidden to take the steering wheel of a car. Such a culture has been present for decades or even centuries, deeply entrenched in the society and in the hearts and souls of the women, so much so that they are afraid of changing the status quo, causing them to resist government efforts to banish gender stereotypes. Evidently stereotypes have been around for an extremely long time, some for centuries. Misogynistic stereotypes have existed even during the period of dynasties in China, where women were concubines and objectified as nothing more than pretty faces to look at, evident from the ancient foot-binding practices in which women were forced to break the bones in their feet to fit into dainty 3-inch shoes. As such, stereotypes such as those about the roles of females are simply too entrenched in our world, so much so that government initiatives to challenge them may be met with resistance.

Furthermore, many governments in the world, especially non-secular ones, inherently promote stereotypes, making it impossible to achieve a world without stereotypes. These extremely religious and conservative nations have laws that perpetuate the presence of stereotypes. For example, there is a persistent stereotype that couples should consist of only a male and a female, making homosexual acts in many countries illegal. In Uganda, homosexuality carries a lifetime imprisonment. Another stereotype these countries promote is that women should not be educated for their roles and are merely to be mothers and homemakers. This culture is extremely prevalent in Pakistan. In Pakistan, Every 1 in 10 women is not educated. Not only is the Taliban kidnapping schoolgirls, the Pakistani people themselves burn down public schools to prevent girls from attending them, leading to a thriving private education industry in Pakistan where girls attend school in secret. Evidently, many governments in the world are promoting stereotypes instead of trying to move towards a world without them. Many of these governments are influenced by religion and their interpretation of it. As they feel that God or another higher being has outlined these roles different communities in society should play, they do not wish to go against God's will, and thus introduce laws that inadvertently emphasise stereotypes. It is unlikely, even impossible, that these governments will change their minds and mode of action any time soon. Thus, with non-secular countries still having stereotypes perpetuated by the law, a world without stereotypes seems impossible to achieve.

In addition, the media constantly promotes stereotypes as well, especially gender and racial ones. The media is ubiquitous in today's technologically-advanced world, from social media to magazines to television. Thus, it has an insidious impact on the way society thinks and acts. It tends to promote stereotypes, be it on purpose or subconsciously, thus influencing people and emphasising the stereotypes they already have. Famous movies and TV shows from Hollywood feature mostly Caucasian stars, with a few Asians and African Americans thrown in for good measure. Yet most of the time, if not all, they are merely the supporting characters- the geeky Asian nerd, for example, because based on racial stereotypes, all Asians are smart. Blonde girls with well-endowed chests and attractive faces are often portrayed as the 'dumb blonde' or a mean girl out to make the protagonist's life a living hell. This is evident in countless characters, such as Regina George and Karen Smith from the movie Mean Girls, and Sharpay Evans from High School Musical. The fact that Caucasians dominate the film industry suggests that the stereotype of white supremacy is still present. For instance, superheroes are almost always portrayed by Caucasians. Examples include Iron Man, Captain America, Spider Man and Thor. Evidently, the stereotype that white people are superior to all other races seems to be perpetuated by the media, as are other foolish stereotypes based on one's appearance. Advertisements also promote gender stereotypes. For instance, detergent commercials always portray women cleaning their homes. Car commercials, on the other hand, portray mostly men. All these serve to promote the ideas that women should stay at home, in the kitchen, while men should be in charge of seemingly masculine activities like driving a car. As the media is so widespread and accessible, people get influenced subconsciously, and these stereotypes the media show are imbued in them. The media is also difficult to control, especially social media, as people often extol the freedom of expression. Hence, with the media continuing to entrench stereotypes in people's minds, it seems that a world without stereotypes is not within our reach.

In conclusion, I believe that while improvements have been made and effort has been put in to remove stereotypes, it is still highly impossible to achieve a world without them. Policies can be implemented with relative ease, but shifting people's mindsets is an entirely different story, especially so because these stereotypes have been present for centuries and are entrenched in them. Other factors, such as the media, further exacerbate the problem by promoting stereotypes.

However, this does not mean that we should stop trying. Even if achieving a world completely without stereotypes is not possible, a little progress is still better than nothing, as stereotypes impede our progress and shackle us to outmoded ways of thinking and acting. Only by striving to reduce their impact can we move towards a better world.

Comments:

A lucid presentation of mature arguments in this essay, as evident in the thoughtful development of each point! You have strong potential overall. Just be mindful of the occasional slips in language (especially the informal tone in some sentences). Well done! Good, insightful examples.

“Not enough has been done to tackle discrimination in the world today.”

Do you agree?

By Lin Mingxuan (15A14)

Discrimination is the systematic oppression and unequal rights of individuals on no rational basis, such as his or her race, gender or sexuality. Cultural norms brought over from the past have led to the disdain of certain groups of individuals, such as women, homosexuals and people of African descent. Society, unused to seeing these individuals as equals, had curtailed the rights of people within those groups, such as the right to employment, the right to education and the right to access social services. Across the world, development in the fight against discrimination has been uneven. The efforts to tackle discrimination have been most optimistic in liberal, democratic nations. Yet, their efforts are insufficient as discrimination continues to plague the lives of people arbitrarily born into disadvantaged groups, with society remaining unaccepting of people within those groups. Such a situation is only bleaker in conservative nations, where discrimination is rife and severe. Hence, efforts to tackle discrimination are not enough in today's context.

In more liberal and democratic Western nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom or other Western European nations, some might argue that policies put in place to protect the rights of discriminated groups of individuals are already sufficient. For instance, anti-discrimination laws are put in place in the United States, to ensure that employers cannot unreasonably fire or reject hiring based on grounds of the employee's or applicant's race, religion, gender or sexuality. This creates fair opportunities for all citizens in employment, alleviating the problem of discrimination in the workforce. Another example is the legalisation of homosexual marriages in Ireland and all states of the United States, allowing homosexuals the right to a dignified social union between two individuals that heterosexual couples always received. Evidently, legislation had been used to combat discrimination by equalising the rights and opportunities of discriminated individuals, bolstering the argument that enough has been done to tackle discrimination.

Yet, even within these nations, legislation is inadequate due to intrinsic harmful perceptions of discriminated groups. Discrimination is internalised in individuals in privileged communities. This is largely because of negative stereotypes of certain groups of individuals such as the African-Americans in the United States, who are perceived as people with violent tendencies. These stereotypes are illogical but remain stubborn, pointing to the fact that there are inadequate measures to tackle discrimination. Legislation does alleviate the problem, but fails to tackle the roots of this problem, which is the negative normative view of the people at the receiving ends of discrimination. For example, police brutality in the United States is inextricably linked to racial discrimination. Cases of policemen opening unwarranted fire usually led to a higher proportion of African-American victims across the years, including Michael Brown. Discrimination was further observed as the white policemen were able to get away scot free after the death of the teenagers, showing deep injustice for the teenagers' wrongful death. The excessive use of police force is necessarily conflated with the negative stereotype of African-American individuals, promoting policemen to use their weapons unnecessarily. Unfortunately, discrimination is more often than not innate, and little has been done to correct stereotypical perceptions of certain

groups of people. Hence, efforts to tackle discrimination have been inadequate.

Moreover, legislation has limited jurisdiction in the ability to police discriminatory actions. Micro-aggressions, which is the everyday discrimination of groups by ostracisation, cannot be enforced upon. For example, workers within the same office may refuse to talk to or actively criticise an openly homosexual colleague. These are personal choices that cannot be punished, but at the same time inflict significant emotional harm on the victims of discrimination. Another instance of legislation failing is in discriminatory practices for private services. For example, there are churches in Ireland which refuse to solemnize marriages between homosexual couples, with the state powerless intervene in the churches' religious affairs. Evidently, legislation is still not enough if people are unwilling participants, and continue to discriminate against other individuals to whatever extent that it is legal.

Furthermore, stubborn stereotypes are likely to continue festering, due to the lack of interaction between different groups. Even with the most liberal country, the United States, racial enclaves have been formed and entrenched. African-Americans are concentrated in the outskirts of the cities like Harlem, while the privileged white Americans live within the richer dwellings of Manhattan and New York. This is problematic, given that interaction on a day-to-day basis is limited, and little is done to build up such interactions. The schools which children go to also tend to be dominated by the different racial groups. For example, in Michigan, schools have an average population of about 70% white students, a vastly inaccurate representation of the racial composition of the country. Evidently, the hope for a shift in the mindset of our younger generation is also stifled by the racial enclaves and segregation of different groups.

Additionally, discrimination seems to be on the rise, due to the rising rhetoric against groups usually subjected to discrimination. There has been increased migration of workers across nations, usually for employment opportunities. For example, many Europeans of different ethnicities are moving to the United Kingdom in search for better jobs. Consequently, this led to xenophobia, where the British are rejecting and discriminating against migrant workers, under the rhetoric that these migrant workers have displaced the British of their jobs. As a result, this has led to a more intolerant society. In fact, efforts to tackle this problem are being hampered by the racist tendencies of people, who fuel such xenophobic attitudes. For example, the right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party, which campaigned for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, based its campaign on stemming the inflow of migrant workers into the country. After the Brexit referendum where the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, there was a rise in racist attacks against people who were not white-skinned. There were street protests demanding for Latinos to leave the country, enshrining discrimination and putting fear in discriminated groups. Another example is the French Burkini Ban, that disallowed Muslim women to wear swimsuits fully covering their bodies due to its 'religious connotations', once again showing gross intolerance and disrespect of minorities' cultural and social rights. The efforts to tackle discrimination is clearly insufficient, as governments have instead worsened the problem.

In more conservative states, efforts to tackle discrimination are hardly present, and many continue to indulge in discrimination. Discriminated groups can be persecuted on a irrational basis,

sometimes even being denied of their basic human rights. For example, homosexuals discovered in Uganda would be stoned to death. Another example is women in Saudi Arabia, who are expected to be confined to domestic domains, and are not allowed to pursue education and employment. Evidently, discrimination in less progressive nations is entrenched, and the situation is far worse due to the lack of any effort to tackle discrimination.

In less extreme cases, we continue to see the lack of political representation of discriminated groups across both liberal and conservative nations. In many Arab nations, women are not allowed to participate at all, being denied of their right to even vote. In countries like China or even the United States, we hardly see women in the political realm, and if they are, they usually benefit from other privileges. For instance, Hillary Clinton came from a rich family with vast political ties. We continue to see a lack of representation of Black communities in European parliaments as well, illustrating another example of discriminated groups being disproportionately underrepresented. Evidently, political control continues to lie in the hands of the privileged few, and this would be a stumbling block to equality.

In conclusion, while some efforts may have been taken to tackle discrimination, more so in some countries than in others, the efforts are problematic, and they are clearly inadequate in rooting out discrimination.

Comments:

This is a comprehensive discussion which covers both developed and less developed societies and evaluates efforts to address discriminatory practices. Structure was well-organised and easy to follow. Conclusion could be more wholesome and leave some food for thought for the readers.

"Boundaries which separate people are never shown on maps." Discuss.

By Natalie Chee Wen Hui (17S51)

The United Nations geoscheme organises countries into specific geographic regions, such as Southeast Asia, North America and Europe. A country is also constricted by its own boundaries, both on land and sea. In this way, we would naturally associate certain people with certain places; the Chinese live in China, and the Indians originate from India. However, people can also be separated in ways that cannot be geographically defined. Without doubt, not all boundaries that exist in the world can be plotted onto maps. These include racial or religious segregation; hierarchy within societies; as well as the central idea of a group identity.

Some boundaries that separate people can be easily displayed on a map. For example, people with similar income levels tend to live in the same areas. In Singapore, the working and middle income groups tend to live in HDB (Housing Development Board) flats, while those who earn a higher income usually would reside in landed property like bungalows. In Northern Ireland, the boundary between the Protestants and Catholics can be clearly mapped: it is represented physically by the Belfast Wall. Though what remains of the Berlin Wall are mere fragments, it was once the boundary that separated East and West Germany, due to the different political beliefs. However, there are many instances where the boundaries between people cannot be mapped.

With increased mobility and advanced technology, the majority of countries now consist of a multicultural society, with people from all over the world living together. A high inflow of foreigners would predictably cause the locals from the 'in-group' to find themselves straying away from the 'out-group' of unfamiliar faces. Segregation is the result, causing a gap between the two groups that is only socially, but not physically, present. For example, from 2000 to 2010, the increase in foreigners in Singapore was 2% of Singapore's population in 2000. Although Singapore actively promotes the integration of immigrants to form a peaceful and harmonious society, the segregation between locals and foreigners remains profound. In schools that accept Chinese scholars, such as Anglican High School and Temasek Junior College, it is clear to many that the different nationalities are immiscible. Intrinsic communication between the two groups is rare, and in an interview conducted by the Straits Times, a Singaporean Permanent Resident (PR) even commented that he does not feel Singaporean despite living in here for over 20 years, and would prefer to retire in China, his homeland, rather than the country he spent majority of his years in. We can therefore conclude that the segregation between different races or nationalities occurs, but it is impossible to display the distinct clusters of people topographically.

In addition, classes or even hierarchies may exist within countries. Though some would claim that these are rare in urban societies where people are educated and taught not to repeat the mistakes of the past, there are many concrete examples of their existence. One would be that of the infamous caste system in India. In urban circles, the term 'community' is used instead of 'caste', thus giving the impression that the system no longer exists. In rural areas and small towns, the system is even more pronounced, as the people there see no purpose in concealing the system. Even if urban Indians argue that the system only exists in villages, they are more often than not oblivious to the fact that 70% of Indians live in villages, therefore implying that it is still a dominant phenomenon in the country. Hence, the lower and upper classes may live in geographically different areas due to the

various types of housing their income permits them to purchase; but a hierarchy is a social barrier that is manifested in the mindsets of the people and this cannot be physically plotted on a map.

Economists, in the study of choice and scarcity, abide by the principle of marginalism, which states that by rationality, people would only buy items if the benefit they gain outweighs the price they pay. Likewise, people would flock to those who can make them feel good about themselves. In order to feel appreciated and gain a sense of belonging in society, people would seek those with common interests as them. Hence, this creates a social boundary which separates people. By no means is this detrimental: it simply implies that people would make friends with people they like, and vice versa. Within schools across the world, it is common for students to form 'cliques' with the people who provide them emotional and moral support. Many adults also have their own groups of friends, and interest groups are common. Accordingly, such relationships that connect people cannot be mapped.

The boundaries between people can be plotted on maps, if there are physical barriers or different regions that separate them. However, the distinctions between people can also occur because of the variation in personalities and preferences. Every human is unique to himself; and therefore, it would not be possible to map the reasons that govern our behaviour, and as a whole, our lives.

Comments:

Well done! You picked a seemingly easy topic and demonstrated mature understanding of the issue proposed. A good scope covered with a couple of insightful evaluations. Could do better with a wider range of examples.

Should countries encourage migration today?

By Roxanne Hon (15A15)

Migration is defined as the permanent movement of people away from their place of origin, constantly on the move to seek better lives due to their innate survival instincts. This is a phenomenon that has been occurring since the start of civilisation. However, the causes of migration today are slightly more nuanced and complex, as an increasing number of people migrate to evade political persecution, war, conflict, poverty and starvation in their countries. This makes this issue of migration highly debatable, with the debate – which stems from the vastly differing stances of countries which are politically, economically and culturally diverse – showing no signs of abating. This essay will attempt to expound on the possible reasons why countries should, or should not encourage migration.

As the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights rightfully and solemnly states, “All humans have the right to food, shelter, peace and protection.” However, in the real world where conflicts and wars are rife, this statement sounds more like an aspiration to the people living under the rule of the Janjaweed in South Sudan, or the schoolgirls whose pursuit of education in Pakistan have their lives threatened by the Taliban. Ethically, they deserve to escape to seek peace and protection, even when their own countries and governments do not have the power to grant them so. This is because the ethics of the situation rule clearly that as humans, they deserve to lead the best lives possible, and given that wars and ideologies led by extremist groups would require a long time to eradicate, their only way to make a better life is simply to migrate.

The picture of Aylan Kurdi, a three year old Syrian boy whose picture was shared over social media hundreds of thousands of times within the span of a few days, is but one of the many other Syrians, whose lives – if they are even alive after all – were utterly shattered by the bloody Syrian War. When migration is no longer an issue of the stakes – whether economic, social, political or even environmental – of individual countries, but one that has erupted into an urgent call for humanitarian aid with the need to save millions of lives, this is when I believe that countries should be more open to migration, as saving lives should be a collective global priority. Up to date, the catastrophic conflict between the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Syria’s ruler, al-Assad, has displaced 5.5 million Syrians, and caused hundreds of thousands to die at sea due to their unsafe transportation methods. The ones that stay arguably await an even bleaker future. With the daily bombings and explosions, there would be more Aylans appearing on our media outlets, should our global leaders not decide to join hands and work together to solve this crisis.

The commonly forgotten aspect of migration is any debate of all is domestic migration, which involves the movement of people within a country, usually from the rural to the urban parts of a country. This phenomenon is evident in countries that have a large land area, such as China, Brazil and India. People often migrate to the city in search of a better life, as they perceive the city to be able to offer them better educational and career opportunities, and a better quality of life in general. This is because of the concentration of domestic and foreign investment such as Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and educational clusters, to equip the people residing around with the necessary skill sets to enter the workforce. The migration of people to these areas would be beneficial, as the increase in

labour pool, coupled with the opportunities to upgrade and utilise their skill sets, enable them to earn a higher wage, which can then be remitted to their rural homes. Hence, developing countries with such situations should encourage domestic migration.

However, there is a reason why, despite numerous protests and global conferences that are pro-migration, with the intent of saving lives, governments of European countries are still adopting conservative stances towards accepting refugees: the quality of lives of their citizens is severely compromised. In Norway, the government recently announced that they would be paying refugees 1000 pounds each to return home; in Germany, Angela Merkel's relentless 'Open Door' policy has been met with protests on the streets; in the Eastern European states like Lithuania and Hungary, authorities have already sealed their borders completely; in Denmark, the government would confiscate any valuables that the refugees own, to 'pay' for their stay in their country; and the list goes on. With the sudden influx of refugees, both the authorities and the citizens do not have sufficient time to prepare and put in place measures for their arrival to ensure a smooth transition into the Western society, which is vastly different from their Eastern one. This has led to growing tensions between the refugees and the citizens, and crime, resulting in the dissatisfaction of the citizens. In Norway, after the murder of a 22-year-old social worker by a man residing in a refugee centre who hailed from the Middle East, and numerous reports of molestation and rape of white Norwegian girls by "Asian looking men", the outraged public took the stance that refugees are merely troublemakers, and the influx of more refugees would only spell more disaster for their usually peaceful country. This has led to the rise of anti-immigration political parties, which furthered their stance on refusing to accept any more refugees. Given that a government, or the ruling body of any kind, is supposed to be "by its people, with the people, and for the people", it is only right that these governments place the interests of their citizens first, especially when their well being and safety is being compromised.

The effects of migration can be varied, with the different stakeholders achieving different ends from the process. When a highly skilled and economically competent person migrates from a developing country to a developed country, the host country would evidently benefit more than the country he or she leaves. When a large number of such people leave their developing nations, the problem of "brain drain" surfaces, as their best and brightest leave in search of better opportunities. For example, this can be seen in the poorest Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Myanmar, where many leave their poor nations to further themselves in the rich and advanced society of America. The rapid flow of migrants from Central and South American nations like Haiti, Mexico and Colombia also attests to this pattern. However, this in turn leaves the developing nations in a worse state, making it harder for them to develop in the absence of their intelligent and knowledgeable minds, rendering them to be trapped in their cycles of poverty for a longer time.

Together with the host of benefits that economic migrants from the rural areas bring to the cities come an array of problems. The city planning authorities might not be able to anticipate when or how many migrants would be coming to the city at any point in time, and therefore they may not have built enough infrastructure. The amenities would be stretched, and this could result in many migrants living in dilapidated housing or slums without proper sanitation facilities. Moreover, the resources might be overstretched as the population of the city grows within a short period of time, leading to environmental degradation such as dirty waterways and deforestation to clear land. For example, Brazil,

with its urban population growing every year, has the highest deforestation rate globally. Moreover, other problems such as traffic congestion and overcrowding at public places would also result. Hence, authorities should closely monitor this situation so as to best cushion the people and the area from any harmful effects that may result.

In conclusion, when migration has turned into a massive global humanitarian crisis, it is pertinent that countries work together collectively and do their best to facilitate the migration process, to prevent the further loss of life. Given that the nature of every country is different, there is definitely no "one size fits all" approach when it comes to migration, much less a clear, definite answer on whether countries should at least put in measures to protect both their citizens and help migrate, especially when their safety and lives are at stake, and treat them humanely regardless of what their stances towards the issue may be.

Comments:

Consider why migration can help to increase the population of developed countries that need a larger labour force. Consider governments who may wish to decentralise urban areas which are overpopulated. Link ideas to whether migration should be encouraged. Evaluate the problem of city life when this happens, and recent policies in China to encourage the development of inland regions.

Should countries encourage migration today?

By Rebecca Goh (15A14)

The onset of globalisation as a worldwide phenomenon has given rise to the increased ease at which people can enter and exit countries. While generally seen as something to be encouraged at first, the question of migration has been swirling with the recent refugee crisis in Europe. While recognising that being pro-migration may cause countries to become vulnerable to increased competition and potential unrest, I am of the view that countries should encourage migration today. This is namely due to the onset of impending population issues many developed countries face, the need for continued sharing and spreading of technology and knowledge in a fast-paced world, and the responsibility that countries should uphold towards their fellow countries.

Firstly, migration is a key method that governments can employ to solve or alleviate their population crises, which threaten the sustained economic growth they have thus far achieved. Primarily, several countries are now grappling with an ageing population caused by falling fertility rates. A pertinent example of this circumstance would be Germany, which could potentially lose up to 35% of its population in the near future. Such a drastic fall in the population could adversely affect Germany's labour productivity and thus economic growth, which has been outstanding for the last few decades. The uncertain outlook on the global economy, as well as the future of the European market specifically, thus necessitates that Germany strongly consider migration. This serves as an urgent, short-term but sorely needed panacea to its population crisis. The effectiveness of this measure can already be seen by current estimates that Germany would accept about 300,000 migrants this year, as reported by its immigration division. This statistic is consistent with previous years, and could possibly be related to the impressive economic growth Germany has maintained despite the global and European financial crises. Thus, since immigration has already been seen to be effective in promoting the strength of the German economy, it is all the more to be encouraged and even accelerated in the face of Germany's population issues. While immigration can be seen as constructive in solving the problems that countries have to deal with today, emigration is also an effective way to combat a burgeoning population, as seen in China. While China possesses much spare capacity due to its labour-intensive industries, the increase in the number of graduates, which stands at about 9 million annually, has resulted in high graduate unemployment levels, leading these graduates to pursue careers beyond Chinese borders. Migration utility here is two-fold, since receiving countries benefit from increases in skilled labour while pressures on China's value-added tertiary service sectors and professional industries are eased. Therefore, the economic benefits of migration can be evident in both immigration and emigration, demonstrated by the examples of Germany and China.

Beyond solving population crises, migration is also useful for increased proliferation of modern technology and knowledge, especially for developing countries. The success of such a tactic is seen in Singapore, which had opened its doors to foreign investment and foreign firms that brought with them their managers and professionals, with expertise in fields that Singapore wanted to develop. The influx of foreign talent who provided technology training and sharing arguably had a cascading effect on Singapore's population, and enabled Singapore to progress towards employing more capital-intensive methods of production and establish successful service sectors. Immigration of labour from more developed countries thus had a beneficial impact on Singapore's economy, which many developing countries have sought to emulate. For example, Burma and Singapore are in the process of inking industrial deals, to allow for an influx of skilled labour into Burma in hopes of

kick-starting the newly opened-up Burmese economy. Singapore was also involved in the launch of industrial parks in China, such as the Suzhou Industrial park. These initiatives have proven to be useful for successful Singapore firms like Creative, which had brought along their specialists who are in turn able to train Chinese labour on the ground. The positive effects of migration are hence well-recognised, from Singapore's success story, and current attempts to work with other developing countries to lift them up and enable them to enjoy such benefits as well.

However, migration does impact a country beyond its economy; the detrimental effects of migration on a society have been greatly felt as well. For example, the newly elected President of the United States, Republican Donald Trump, has earned support from blue-collar workers by using populist ideas such as blaming Mexican and Asian immigrants for the comparatively high unemployment levels that USA continues to face. The extent of the popularity of such rhetoric demonstrates the strong dissatisfaction and resentment that many workers have towards the immigrant community, for increasing the competition for jobs. Studies have also revealed that increasing immigration rates have had a strong correlation with increased uncertainty about job security and rising income in America. The ubiquity of immigrants being blamed as the culprits for Americans being unable to find jobs implies that it has become a commonly shared viewpoint, which threatens the safety and welfare of the immigrant community. Considering that the permeation of xenophobic sentiments cannot be negated or mitigated by the fact that American unemployment is actually at an all-time low, I believe that migration should be discouraged for the welfare and perceived benefit of both the locals and the immigrants alike, especially when safety threats have actually culminated in a rise in hate crimes against immigrants in the USA. The question of migration has become more pertinent with the humanitarian crises occurring worldwide. Countries faced with this problem should encourage migration, for there is an unwritten but understood social responsibility to assist people forced to flee their home countries. The most prominent example of this is the Syrian refugee crisis that European countries are faced with, with various countries adopting varying degrees of openness. The strongest argument for migration in this context is that governments have an obligation to protect the welfare of people, even if they arrive from other countries. Furthermore, the lack of a better alternative for these refugees puts them in a highly vulnerable state that governments cannot afford to be seen neglecting or even rejecting. Despite fears of increased terror attacks by terrorists pretending to be refugees, France has unequivocally continued to maintain its welcoming stance on the issue, in a bid to uphold the values of freedom of brotherhood. This exemplifies the unquestionable priority of helping victims of humanitarian crises, despite the uncertainty of social outcomes and legitimate security concerns that such a sudden and great increase in immigrants may pose. The gracious, albeit temporal and conditional willingness of Indonesia to allow the setup of Rohingya refugee camps at its borders shows how the compassionate spirit of giving has triumphed, in addressing the dilemma of migration due to humanitarian crises.

Notwithstanding the lofty and admirable ideals that freely accepting refugees advocates, countries cannot be held hostage by the obligation to constantly uphold their social responsibility, especially when already faced with crises at home. For example, Hungary has openly rejected the entry of refugees attempting to enter its borders, and has even erected a razor wire fence so as to deter these refugees and other illegal immigrants. The reason cited for this explicit and outright rejection was the country's perceived inability to support the refugees and successfully integrate them into the Hungarian society. While touted as an "escapist", "cowardly" and "easy way out" by critics, it is not unreasonable to limit or prohibit migration, especially in large numbers, should a government evaluate and conclude that its economy and society would not be able to accept and

support the undeniable burden that an influx of refugees would impose on the country.

Additionally, governments that could potentially support immigration can also rightly choose to reject it, to prioritise the welfare of their local populations. For example, South Korea has a largely homogenous society, something that the majority of its people wish to maintain. Hence, while not explicitly putting a cap on immigration, immigration rates into South Korea are lower compared to that of less homogenous societies such as the USA. In Singapore, the government has also shifted its previously open stance on immigration, in view of the unhappiness that was stirred up during the General Elections in 2011. In the post-election years, the government has tightened immigration criteria and quotas, and instead pushed to develop a "Singaporean core" in the labour force, guided by skills upgrading programmes such as SkillsFuture. This demonstrates that while migration is a feasible method to solve problems faced by the Singapore society, the government may choose to undertake more long-term initiatives that can negate the effects of an ageing population and consequent falling labour productivity, while appealing to the people's concerns at the same time. Under these circumstances, where a more holistic and popular approach is available, migration may but be a short term measure that should be replaced.

In conclusion, migration should be encouraged by countries, so as to alleviate domestic socio-economic problems and relieve the humanitarian crises that they face. However, its social effects in particular are questionable, due to the persistent and provocative nature of xenophobic ideas, and the ease with which immigrants can be used as scapegoats for pre-existing social tensions and areas of government inefficacies. Nonetheless, immigration should only be encouraged by governments confident of their financial ability to incorporate immigrants into society, lest the influx of migrants cause unforeseen problems. Emigration should also only be encouraged by countries that can afford the "brain drain" that would likely result, as it would be highly detrimental for countries that rely on skilled labour and have a small population. It is after all up to countries to ascertain their foremost priorities and juggle both global and domestic realms.

Comments:

A thoughtful discussion which reflects depth in evaluation and awareness of the issue. One point that is questionable is that of the refugees - do we really encourage the immigration of refugees?

“Much appeal but little value”. Is this an apt description of tourism in the modern world?

By Ng Wei Ying (15S36)

In a world where globalisation is an increasing phenomenon, one of the much talked about benefits of globalisation is the increase in business for the tourism industry. Tourism basically refers to the travelling of people to other countries, for purposes such as sole entertainment to even carrying out meaningful events such as volunteering and helping the locals there today. Tourism has evolved to be of many forms, such as the common commercialised tourism, to meaningful volunteerism and also including negative forms such as sex tourism. Tourism is considered to be of great appeal, and is attractive to the masses as people get to experience another way of life in a whole new environment. However, tourism has also been criticised for having no value, defined as people not getting to learn more about themselves on the world around them, and fulfills no purpose at all. I agree that tourism today indeed has much appeal but little value.

In the modern world today, tourism exists to just provide entertainment, and tourists often do not make an effort to learn more about the world around them. To these people, tourism is just about another shopping trip to buy more of the countries' material goods. This is largely evident in commercial tourism, where tour agencies promote trips that usually end up taking people to shopping malls or designated shops for people to buy luxury goods and for the tour agencies to earn a commission. As such, tourists who travel on group tours do not get to learn more about the world, and they do not travel with the purpose of knowing more about the culture or heritage in the place. For example, rich Chinese tourists make up an increasingly large part of the consumer demand for luxurious goods. They are known to spend their excess cash on shopping when they are overseas. China tourists travel to Europe just to buy cheaper luxury goods there such as Prada, Louis Vuitton, Chanel and so on, due to the weakening Euro and the strengthening Chinese Yuan. This proves that tourism is of little value, and just serves as an alternative way to spend money. This is also evident in people who travel for work, to close business deals or meet with clients. These business travellers usually spend most of their time in their hotels resting or interacting with their business partners. They rarely step out of the hotel to learn more about the environment around them. Hence, this shows that tourism is very attractive to tourists, but they contain little value in that their only take away is material goods.

Moreover, tourism often exists to promote and reinforce negative stereotypes of people in Third World or developing countries. This does not give value to the purpose of tourism, as it serves to allow people to form even deeper prejudices of people in different cultures and discriminate against them further, not helping them to understand and accept these people into their society. For example, Thailand is a widely popular tourist destination, but it is more than often than not also infamous for its sex tourism. Children as young as 12 years old are forced into the sex industry to cater to the needs and wants of these pedophiles, and this does no good for their lives, where they spend the rest of their lives entrapped in the poverty cycle and unable to break out of it. In short, the sex tourism industry destroys countless young lives and their futures. This degrades the value of such tourism even further, and while it is appalling to those who travel overseas to seek such “pleasures”, it is clearly evident that it provides less than no value to both tourist and the sex workers. Another negative stereotypes reinforced is that

of poorism. This occurs where people travel to slums in the country just for the sake of gawking at the slum dwellers living in poverty and unsanitary conditions . Despite knowing of the circumstances and living environment of these people, there is no value derived from tourism as it only serves to remind tourists that “these people are poor”, and tourists do not act on this to provide them with any help. Thus, tourism only serves to reinforce the existing biased and generalisations that people have, and certainly does not help to making people understand and accept one another.

That being said, just like how there are two sides to a coin, tourism can also have appeal and provide value at the same time. Tourism, by allowing the travel of humans across geographical boundaries, lets travellers experience the exotic places that they visit, and at the same time learn more about themselves and their own personality, thus achieving a new level of self-discovery. With the increasing proliferation of the world wide web and social media platforms arounds us, it is not difficult to know about their different culture and heritage practices of people in other countries, and know about their way of life. This can be done through watching videos, seeing pictures and reading up on Google. However, knowing is not the same as being physically there, and experiencing the entire process itself. Tourism allows people to travel to new places and allow them to personally feel and experience, thus reaching a new level of understanding about the place. For example, many people travel down to watch the annual Rolling Cheese Festival in the United Kingdom, where rolling of a block of cheese down a hill is used to pray for good harvest in the next year. This allows people to personally understand the mood and atmosphere in that place, and understand how the festival itself can serve as a binding factor for the entire community to bond, inherently becoming part of the cultural identity of these group of people. Other examples include experiencing the mood and atmosphere of the annual bull-fighting events in Spain, and religious festivals in Singapore that tourists would stop and to experience. As such, tourism allows people to gain an understanding of the environment around them, and to reflect more about themselves in the process. This is especially so for the travellers.

Tourism can be of value and appeal at the same time, as they allow people to contribute back to society while in the midst of travelling. Volunteerism is an increasingly common trend in the past few years, where people travel to different countries, and at the same time volunteer in the community, which allows them to give back to society while travelling. Such activity is increasingly advocated, for as it allows people to do good and continuously gives value to tourism as tourists do something meaningful in their trip. For example, tourists can travel to Third World or developing countries and offer to help villagers build roads, or educate the children there in various subjects and topics. This not only allows them to interact with the locals there during their period of stay, but also allows them to live there and experience truly the way locals live their lives, by sleeping, eating and sharing a common space of living with the locals. This allows them to truly experience their life there and integrate themselves into the culture, thus allowing them to gain value out of it. They learn more about how they want to help people, and also gain the experience of living in the countries. Accustomed to the group tours in commercial tourism, volunteerism provides a better opportunity for travellers to better understand themselves, the world around them and also do meaningful events at the same time by helping people. This shows that tourism is of as much of appeal as it is of value.

In conclusion, tourism can be of much be of much appeal, but not necessarily of value. This is because in the stressful and face-paced world today, tourism still serves mainly as a method of providing

people with mere entertainment. As people are too busy with their own lives, they often do not have the capacity to think of helping others, much less when travelling. Tourism is only a tool for people to interact with their surrounding world, and it mainly depends on how people choose to use the tool to either gain value or just merely entertainment. Unfortunately, it is mostly the latter in today's world.

Comments:

You've brought up a relevant and insightful argument. Consider featuring your counter arguments before the supporting arguments for a more impactful finish. Nevertheless, well done!

To what extent can education solve the problem of poverty?

By Ong Wei Ching (15S30)

Singapore appears to be the epitome of how education can solve the problem of poverty. By providing a compulsory education, and a rigorous study in Mathematics and the Sciences, Singapore has moved from a third-world country with endemic poverty to a first-world nation that is highly looked upon by others, within a short span of a few decades. Undoubtedly, education has solved the problem of poverty in several countries, and has the potential to eliminate poverty worldwide. Yet, on closer inspection, education can only solve poverty so much as the system allows for it. A strong commitment by the government to build good institutions, and supporting structures such as employment institutions, is required for education to truly annihilate poverty.

Without a doubt, education enables the poor to be self-sufficient by making a living with one's own hands, and bring home the bread and butter. Educating citizens with basic literacy and numeracy skills goes a long way, as they can communicate with the outside world and find themselves a job. Of course, basic education does not entail a high-paying job. However, the manual work that basic education enables the poor to take on is sufficient in providing a source of income. For instance, many Filipinos and Indonesians get themselves equipped with the English language, and travel to Hong Kong, Singapore and other developed countries to work as domestic helpers. Working tirelessly day and night has enabled them to earn some cash, and send them back home to feed their families. The money channeled is used to send their younger siblings to school to get educated, in the hope of escaping from poverty. Therefore, education brings about a ripple effect, and poverty appears to be meeting its doom.

Moreover, education in the developed nations has spurred many individuals to alleviate poverty with their own hands. Education has bred altruistic individuals, by opening people's hearts and minds to the plight of fellow global citizens mired in poverty. The empathy gained has driven several Samaritans to make their way to rural areas around the world, setting up schools for the less fortunate to attend. Village students tend not to have the ability to afford education in the city, as cities are located far away and have expensive tuition fees. This prevents the poor from escaping the poverty cycle. Empowering village students with literacy and numeracy skills enables them to find a city job, which gives them a higher income than slogging as a farmer. Through this, it is hoped that the poor can afford a decent standard of living. Hence, education has created empathetic individuals who try to alleviate poverty using their hands and brains.

Yet, the power of education is not fully harnessed today due to several fundamental obstacles. First and foremost, uncommitted governments have prevented countries from reaping the benefits of education, leading to the continued existence of poverty. To illustrate this, the Indian government sets targets on the number of schools to build, but no targets on the literacy level of its people. Consequently, many students are still illiterate despite having attended school for a few years. The lack of commitment by the government to set up a good education system with good teachers is hindering education's usefulness in annihilating poverty. Therefore, good education, and not merely education itself, is necessary for education to bring about a better life for the poor.

Next, the government's commitment to eliminate poverty using education extends to the institutions and supporting structures they build. The lack of a strong framework is preventing education from solving the problem of poverty. This includes employment opportunities for the

poor, and support from private companies. Despite having been educated on the best practices of farming, farmers in India have no money to buy seeds. Financial institutions impose a heavy interest rate on loans the farmers take, for which the farmers have a hard time paying back. They continue to be trapped in the vicious poverty cycle and have no means from escaping from it. Another example is the lack of employment opportunities that Filipinos have. At times, Filipinos are cheated by greedy individuals. Desperate to find a job, they pay a lump sum to go overseas to become domestic workers. Unbeknownst to them, the cheaters take their money and run away, leaving them to succumb to the miserable life they had initially. Therefore, to eliminate poverty, the government has to set up strong institutions, such as interest-free loans or perhaps a ministry that aids the poor to get reliable and decent jobs.

To sum up, education has the capacity to solve the problem of poverty by equipping the poor with a set of skills to be self-sufficient, and by creating empathetic individuals who see eliminating poverty as their goals. Yet, education cannot and has not solved the problem of poverty today, due to the lack of committed governments to build a good education system and strong supporting institutions. Education has eliminated poverty in several countries, such as Singapore, and we should not despair.

Comments:

Your arguments are clearly relevant and supported with apt examples most of the time. However, range of examples need to be expanded.

“Despite the rise in gender equality, females still take the backseat in sports.” Is this a valid statement?

By Manish Chamiraj (16A13)

Since the dawn of time, women have always been seen as inferior to men. This arose fundamentally because of the traditional beliefs of the roles of a man and a woman. Men have been long seen as the head of the family, the breadwinner who supported every single member. The women, on the other hand, stayed home to care for their children. This thinking came about because men have been built physically superior to women, so they were the ones who went out, hunted and brought home meals. This mentality has carried on even till today into sport. Since Baron Pierre de Coubertin started the first international Olympics in 1896, when he believed that women competing would be “uninteresting, unaesthetic, incorrect,” till today, women have been made, be it intentionally or unintentionally, to take a backseat in sports, even with the rising prevalence of gender equality. Although there have been multiple instances whereby a woman has garnered equal recognition, or even more than a man, it cannot be denied that women have been given the short end of the stick when it comes to displaying their physical talent. They are not as internationally-acclaimed as men, although they may be comparatively as talented. This stems from the fact that women’s sports, more often than not, are less competitive and less intense than that of men’s. Thus, the bias may not be completely unjustifiable, but is undeserving to women nonetheless as anyone, regardless of their gender, deserves to get equal opportunities. Therefore, it is a depressing fact that even in this day and age, women are not being given their fair share of the pie in sport.

Women are inadvertently pushed back in the sporting industry because of the fact that male athletes are more widely recognised and endorsed. A simple Google search will be able to prove this point. One merely has to search “Greatest footballers of all time”, to be confronted with a dazzling array of men exceptional at the Beautiful Game. Even in the depths of the twentieth page, it would be a stretch to find female representation, even though there certainly are women who embody the epitome of the sport. This is a tangible manifestation of the sad, sad fact that we do not view women taking part in sport the same way as we do men. A simple example is the Ballon d’Or, widely regarded to be the most prestigious award a footballer can attain for his talents. Year after year, we argue amongst ourselves, shoving facts and figures in one another’s faces about whether Messi or Ronaldo displayed a better performance, but do not stop to think about why there is no award of a similar magnitude awarded to women for their efforts and display of exquisite skill in football. Until we actively work to change the fact that we recognise male athletes more than we do females, this situation is not going budge towards a more positive direction even in the slightest. We have to accord either gender the same amount of respect for their skills, their expertise, and the countless years of blood, sweat and tears they put in to compete at that level. Thus, women are shortchanged in sports as they are not as widely recognised as men.

Furthermore, women are made to sit back in sports because of the societal expectations placed on them, certain cultural norms that they are expected to adhere to. Though we do not see this in developed, liberal countries such as the USA, this expectation still prevails in traditional countries, especially those that adopt Sharia law, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Since Muslim women are expected to cover their bodies up, they are unable to participate in events such as swimming and gymnastics. In the first place, women in these countries may not even be allowed to compete in any sport at all! The level of oppression and control these countries had over women was apparent in the entire uproar the FIDE Women’s World Chess Championship to be held in Iran caused. The women who were going to compete in the tournament, be it from Iran itself or other countries, were all told to wear hijabs. If they refused to comply, they would be

disqualified from the competition. This led to numerous boycotts by high-profile female chess players, from the USA, UK and Sweden, including the former World Champion and US Women's Champion Nazi Paikidze. In fact, these horrible, restrictive laws against women were hung like dirty laundry, showcased for the entire world to see, when Iran banned 18-year-old chess grandmaster Dorsa Derakhshani from competing for the Iranian national team for not wearing a hijab. Although there have been attempts to lessen the impact of these cultural barriers, such as the recent release of the "Pro Hijab" by Nike for Muslim female athletes, there is still a tedious journey the world has to undertake before we fully achieve gender equality in sport, starting, first and foremost, with changing our mentality. Thus, until we completely remove these cultural barriers on women, it will be difficult for them to become equally as respected as men in the sporting industry.

Having said that, it is still important to recognise the fact that in some cases, women are being given the due credit and honour for the endless amount of blood, sweat and tears they put in. For instance, in the 2015 football Women's World Cup, the American team fought hard, and beat defending champions Japan in the finals to clinch the title. This unprecedented event was celebrated not only by the Americans, but by people all over the world, as it was the first mark the USA had ever set in football. The team were not seen as women. They were seen as Americans, no more, no less. At that point, their gender did not matter. It was the fact that they had done their country proud. That was all that mattered. Furthermore, the player instrumental in their victory, the captain of the team Alex Morgan, became a star overnight. Her name resonated across the entire country, echoing across the entire planet. This was a joyous milestone not only for Americans for having won a prestigious title, but for women all over the world, as it represented the first ever time women were being given so much recognition and credit in sports. In fact, this was such an important milestone because it made the government increase funding for women's sports, as they realised that women could also do the country proud, not only men. This increase in expenditure was what led to the increase in the number of American women in the quarter finals of the 100m in the Olympics. From one woman in 2012, this number increased to three in 2016, with the youngest competitor being only seventeen years old! Thus, it is evident that women, too, are being given the recognition they deserve. Thus, they are not being made to take a backseat in sports.

However, it cannot be denied that no matter how much recognition women are being given in sport, they are still shortchanged because of the intensity at which their sport is played. Men, being men, are much better built physically than women due to the presence of testosterone. They are therefore able to compete more physically at a higher level. No matter how much a government tries to support their female sporting industry, it is human nature to watch something of a higher intensity, for the enjoyment it yields is much greater. This is apparent in the fact that no matter how widely recognised the Women's World Cup (for football) may have been, its viewership numbers were still nothing compared to the FIFA World Cup (for men). The final for the Women's World Cup was watched by millions of people worldwide. On the other hand, FIFA estimates viewership of their men's World Cup to have been 3.2 billion throughout the course of the tournament, and over a billion for the final alone! Half of the world population had tuned in! This is due to no fault of anyone, but us as humans. We are more inclined to watch something that provides a stronger surge of adrenaline and dopamine, as we egg on our favourite sports team in the tensest of moments. Sports played by men do this, as opposed to those played by women, as men are able to put up better performances solely due to the way their body is built. This phenomenon is also apparent in the National Football League (NFL), also known as American football, where the Super Bowl viewership was a hundred and seventy-two million, more than half of the American population! There was no such event for women in the first place, as the demand for women in American football is quite low, simply owing to the fact that it requires sheer strength, which women cannot gain as easily as men. Therefore, it is difficult to overcome the fundamental fact that male competitive athletes are able to compete at a higher

level than female ones, simply because their bodies are built that way, thereby causing women to take a backseat as more people will watch men playing sports rather than women.

Despite this, governments have still been actively taking measures to at least attempt to bridge, and therefore reduce the disparity between the sporting industries of men and women. In Singapore, for instance, when our Paralympic athlete Yip Pin Xiu won a gold medal, she was given a substantial amount of recognition for her hard work. Her name and face was plastered all over the news. The Singapore, government, too, rewarded her with a large sum of money, amounting to almost a million dollars, for having done the nation proud. This was also seen when the Singaporean duo won us a silver medal in the table tennis competition at the Olympics. They, too, were given a significant amount of recognition by the government, as they represented the first ever Olympic medal for Singapore since the 1980s. Therefore, although women's sports are less known and watched, and even less recognised, governments have been attempting to reduce this phenomenon to achieve gender equality even in sports.

In conclusion, it is difficult to argue that women are being given equal recognition and opportunities in sports, as this is simply just not the case. It is difficult to blame anyone for this, as the fact is that women's sports are just not as competitive as those of men, because of the anatomies of the male and female bodies. Although there have been attempts to bridge this gap, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ensure women are not being forced to take a backseat in sports, until we change our way of thinking. Certainly, as humans, we want to make the best use of our time and money to achieve maximum entertainment, but if we really want women's sports to succeed, we have to support them, regardless of the magnitude of enjoyment they provide. We have to work for a common cause rather than for ourselves. We have to be altruistic, not selfish. However, as we humans are so self-centred, equality may never be possible for men and women in sport.

Comments:

You have good knowledge of the topic and are able to provide apt examples. Attempts to balance are laudable. A decent essay.

Do you agree that women of today have it better than their predecessors?

By Jaime Niam (16A11)

Women are often seen as the inferior gender when compared to their male counterparts, and this is natural considering that stereotypes of the domesticated, submissive and frail housewife have been perpetuated throughout the ages. Due to this traditional mindset that a woman's place is in the household and that her duties are confined to the domestic, women have been deprived of many opportunities fundamental in securing a financially stable lifestyle. Instead, women are often defined in relation to their husbands, and become almost fully dependent on them since they are unable to earn their own living. In today's day and age, it cannot be denied that such issues have been greatly reduced, and have almost become a thing of the past. That being said, I disagree that the women of today have it better than their predecessors as the negative portrayals and stereotypes of women still persist, albeit in different forms. Women still face stereotypes such as that of a damsel in distress or are still being sexualised in the media, seemingly being defined as a domesticated object of men, just like they were in the past. In addition, only women in developed countries seem to have been given greater access to fundamental rights that men enjoy, and the oppression of women is still a real and prevalent issue in developing third-world countries.

Women today do not have it better than their predecessors, as their confining role as domesticated objects of men is still perpetuated today, just in a different way - the commonly seen sexualisation of women in media. Countless advertisements sell the image of scantily-clad women in revealing clothes, even when the product that is being marketed has no relation whatsoever to a woman's physical beauty and attractiveness. Such examples include advertisements for products like fresh mints, where the satisfaction brought about by the product is measured by a woman's ability to attract a man after consuming the mints. The sexualisation and objectification of women serves the fundamental purpose of making her come across as attractive to men as possible, which indirectly reinforces her role as a mere object and toy to men. Women in the past were obsessed with portraying the most alluring and attractive image of themselves, so that men would find them desirable and hopefully marry them. The same concept is being sold today, as women seem to be portrayed as sexualised objects to garner the positive attraction of the male audience, reducing themselves to mere pawns of men since their image and identity seem to be contingent on men's desires. Therefore, the women of today do not have it better than their predecessors, as they still face pressure from societal ideals that their entire existence and physical image should be based on men's desires. They are effectively still confined to the stereotype that they are mere pleasers of men, stripping them of their individuality.

In addition, women are still portrayed as damsels in distress in the media today, as if they are incapable of independence and are defined in relation to men. In the past, married women seemed to be solely dependent on their spouses for financial stability, as their roles were confined merely to the domestic. Yet this stereotype of dependence and fragility has not been removed from society and is still prevalent in society today. From the early ages of childhood, children are introduced to fairytales such as 'Snow White' or 'The Sleeping Beauty', that almost always feature a weak damsel in distress falling prey to a fragile twist of fate, and can only be saved by a literal knight-in-shining-armour. This means that from a young age, little girls are already influenced by the idea that men are the superior gender, and any women's misfortunes can be easily resolved by the presence of a strong, invincible male figure. Even in popular movies and novels today, this image of a

weak spineless woman still persists, such as Bella Swan in the 'Twilight' Saga who seems almost incapable of self-defence or decision-making, having to always rely on her love interest Edward to help her. Therefore, the idea of a woman having to depend on her male counterpart in order to attain security and comfort is still a prevalent stereotype circulating in society today and they are still being seen as the weaker gender even though, in reality, they are fully capable of taking care of themselves. Hence, the women of today do not have it better than their predecessors as they are still perceived as the weaker gender.

Of course, it cannot be denied that women's rights have drastically improved as compared to before, especially in developed nations which are already politically and economically stable, and have the privilege to start considering social rights and equality amongst their people. While women in the past were typically uneducated, since their duties were solely confined to the household, it seems almost a given today that women receive formal education. Their goal in life has evolved from being a mere obedient housewife, to being a well-educated individual who can hopefully secure good employment opportunities, just like their male counterparts. Such equality in educational and employment opportunities can be seen in the rise of prominent female figures today. Examples include female politicians Aung San Suu Kyi and Hillary Clinton, who were only able to get so far in life due to their right to formal education, which is often seen as the basis of a successful career. Moreover, female voices are becoming increasingly heard in society today, due to the emergence of feminist movements and organisations such as the UN Women's Charter and Singapore's AWARE. Emphasis on women's rights give women a place in society, by highlighting that their welfare is important and valued. The emergence of feminist historians in the 19th century has also introduced female perspectives in history, and this is significant considering that history is an important factor in shaping society and its values. Therefore, the women of today do have it better, as they are not only offered an equal element of choice and ownership of their individual lives, but their opinions and perspectives are also voiced actively in society.

Yet, this has only been the case in developed nations, as women in developing countries still face violent oppression. For example, arranged marriages are still a common occurrence in less developed countries (LDCs), and women are effectively deprived of the element of choice, since their job is to find a husband and get married out of the family as soon as possible. This is perpetuated by the caste system in India, where everyone is defined according to their social class. Women face double the oppression since they are thus also defined in relation to their husbands, stripping them of their individuality. In countries like Saudi Arabia, women are even banned from driving and have to sit in private cubicles in restaurants, a clear and explicit indication of how women's lifestyles are still unfairly restricted simply due to their gender. Also, domestic abuse is a common issue in these LDCs. However, the worst part is not the actual violence itself, but rather the frequent nonchalance of the law and easy dismissal of the severity of such crimes, leaving women doomed to a fate of violence and abuse. This problem is further compounded when there are no social welfare services available to provide assistance or emotional support for these women. Hence, it is not accurate to say that the women today are better off than their predecessors as a vast number of them, especially in LDCs, still face immense oppression and are not only deprived of what seem like fundamental rights, but are effectively muted since they have no outlet to voice their problems.

In conclusion, while I do acknowledge that the women of today are granted more rights and have a say in society, this can hardly be a generalisation considering the vast difference in the lives

of women across developed and less-developed nations, where women are still violently oppressed and could even be worse off compared to their predecessors. Even in developed nations where the oppression of women may not be as explicit, there are still countless underlying stereotypes that negatively characterise women as sexual objects or weak damsels in distress, undercutting their abilities and individuality as they are always being defined in relation to men. The fact that such stereotypes are so common, and still permeate society, means that mindsets towards women have not changed enough, and the perception that women are inferior to men reflects a lack of change from the times of their predecessors.

Comments:

A small degree of repetition of ideas across paragraphs. Otherwise, overall, a consistently argued piece.

“Academic Success is the best way for people to have a bright future.” Is this a valid claim for your society?

By Mirza Ansari (17S42)

As the late Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is a powerful tool which can be used to change the world.” The Education System in Singaporean society has been a point of national pride for decades now. Although Singapore lacks natural resources when compared to other rising economic powerhouses, it is rich in manpower as it boasts a relatively large population despite its small size. As such, developing and enhancing the skills of our workforce has become a priority of our government. This has led to the importance of education in our society being stressed upon time and time again. Resultantly, academic success is held in high regard. To a consumerist and capitalistic society such as in Singapore, achieving a bright future is usually defined by obtaining a respectable high-paying career and having a high income as a result. I believe that in my society, academic success is in fact the best way for one to achieve this bright future, as academic success provides one the qualifications needed, important skills, and the ability to remain relevant in their field. While some may argue that this is not always the case, and there are many instances of people not requiring academic success to achieve the Singaporean idealised “bright future”, I believe that such cases are irrelevant to the vast majority of people.

In Singaporean society today, competition in all fields have been growing at an exponential rate, due in part to the rapid growth of Singapore’s population, which is projected to soar to 7 million by the year 2030. While in and of itself 7 million people is but a speck compared to the populations of countries such as Indonesia, the United States of America, and the Philippines, this results in a country like Singapore having an extremely high density population due to its miniscule land space. Such conditions mean that competition for resources is huge and vicious. Nowhere else is this more apparent than in the Singaporean job market. Academic success, however, plays such a large role in tipping the scales in one’s favour. For example, having a degree or diploma in a certain field would make one appear much more desirable to potential employers, as it conveys the message that these applicants are well versed in the proficiencies required for the job. Furthermore, for other highly coveted occupations, such as in the fields of law or medicine, a degree in those fields are a requirement for one to obtain a job there. As such we can see that academic success becomes a sort of ticket to the working world, as they provide one with the necessary qualifications to impress employers and make the applicant stand out among the others, hence increasing the chances of employment. Thus, academic success is the best way to secure a bright future.

Academic success also imparts upon the students many important skills for them to thrive in society. These skills have been dubbed “21st century competencies” and include a wide range of skills such as critical thinking, technological expertise, collaboration and entrepreneurial dare. These skills are highly sought after by potential employers, as they show that the applicant would be able to adapt well to and survive in the ever-changing dynamics of our modern world. Education imparts these skills upon a person through subjects such as project work and Design and Technology, which both develop one’s critical thinking skills and collaborative expertise. In order for one to achieve academic success, he will be put through these subjects at the secondary and tertiary levels, and he would have to excel in them. In order for students to do well for such subjects, they would have to learn to use the aforementioned skills. As such, academic success is the best way for one to achieve a bright future in my society.

Moreover, a bright future does not stop upon getting one's dream occupation. After beginning their new career, one still needs to climb up the corporate ladder and continually strive for excellence, to ensure that they can cling on to their positions to continue to fund their lifestyles. As such, one would need to ensure that they are constantly keeping up to date, and not be replaced once their knowledge becomes outdated or obsolete. In order to do so, most occupations ask their employees to turn back to education for their answer. For example, teachers are often given subsidies to further their educations to the Masters or even doctorate level, to enhance their skills and ensure they are kept up to date. As such we can see that academic success is imperative in securing one's future, and an aversion to the striving for academic success would only hinder one's growth and ability to climb the corporate ladder. Hence, I agree that academic success is the best way for people to have bright future in my society.

However, there are those that argue that academic success is not the best way to secure a bright future. Achieving academic success is a long, arduous, and often expensive task, and some therefore argue that it pales in comparison to securing a bright future through creative innovation and expression. In my society today, we can see the emergence of people gaining fame on new platforms such as social media and the internet. The most popular of whom often bring in large amounts of money from their loyal fanbases and advertisers eager to hop on the bandwagon of their success. Some examples of the big names in this field include "Dee Kosh", "Night Owl Cinematics", "Tree Potatoes" and many others. The simplicity of starting out one of these channels makes people wonder why we even bother striving for academic success, when in reality with a video camera, a smartphone and a laptop one could theoretically begin the life of a social media influencer. On top of that, through this route, one gets to express themselves on top of earning money, making it far more enjoyable a process than studying. Other than that, people often cite the example of the gaming giant "Razer", whose CEO dropped out of NUS Law School to pursue his dream of producing gaming peripherals. Examples like this show us that academic success is not the best way to secure a bright future, because as long as we have a dream we are willing to pursue and some rudimentary means of getting there, we can still secure a bright future through sheer determination, vision, and to a certain extent luck, in a much more enjoyable manner than through achieving academic success.

All in all though, I still feel that academic success is the best way to achieve a bright future in the Singapore context, as obtaining a bright future through the other routes does not guarantee success. Very few people who attempt to take the unconventional route to success strike it big. Countless others have fallen before them. There is no guarantee that our dreams would be accepted by the public enough for one to achieve success. On the other hand, academic success is more straightforward in that it doesn't require us to take risks or be different, or even express our beliefs to others. By simply following instructions, we can achieve a bright future. Furthermore, the fame gained from being a social media influencer is fleeting, and the volatile dynamics of the platform's popularity is ever-changing, so there is no way for us to predict the next big thing. One could very well lose his fame as quickly as he got it. However, as seen in the quote I started this essay with, education is a timeless virtue that has been sought after for years, and is unlikely to fade in relevance anytime soon. Hence, I wholeheartedly agree that the claim "academic success is the best way for people to have a bright future" is valid for my society.

Comments:

A highly relevant essay with a consistent stand and coherent arguments. (Except for the conflation of academic success and lifelong learning which is not quite how academic success should be interpreted.) Some expression errors but otherwise quite fluently written.

"The world only needs one language- the English language."

Do you agree?

By Siow Mein Yeak (17S44)

Upon reflection on his three decades serving Singapore as Prime Minister, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew found one of his lifelong regrets: not learning Mandarin from young. In his book detailing his experiences with Mandarin, Mr Lee shared how ostracised he often felt from the rest of the Chinese locals, as he was unable to speak Mandarin with them. He wrote that language creates the ties that bind peoples all over the world. This sentiment is one that I concur wholeheartedly with. It is also one reason I largely disagree with the view that the world only needs the English language. Although it can be conceded that such a world can hypothetically exist, this world needs more than just English, because the statement is itself discomfiting. Moreover, languages create unique cultural identities and enable us to express ourselves fully.

It can be argued that hypothetically, we only need English for the world to function. As the lingua franca, English is spoken widely across the continents, and its reach is only ever expanding. Such a situation, coupled with the fact that English is known to be one of the easiest languages to learn, reinforces the possibility of an integrated, English-only world. There would be no linguistic barriers to speak of. Moreover, the implementation of a common language would result in great ease of doing business and in politics without the need for translators. However, this hypothesis insufficiently validates the statement that the world needs only English, as such an argument fails to consider the benefits that our plethora of languages brings to us.

I disagree that we only need the English language, because such a statement in itself is deeply discomfiting. It is filled with a sense of linguistic superiority and unbridled arrogance. There is nothing wrong with taking pride in one's language. Yet, such an entirely Anglo-centric and chauvinistic positioning of English on a solitary pedestal alienates originally non-English speaking peoples. Such ethnic groups are spread particularly across Asia and Africa, and form a majority over those who speak English. Naturalising them to English engenders a fundamental sense of detachment from native English speakers, as it is not the tongue of their race. Such a detachment is precisely why governments in many countries emphasise learning both English and the mother tongue, so as to connect people to their ethnic roots. Replacing all languages with just English can very possibly create a more fractured world, where we feel alienated from each other as we lose our own unique languages.

These aforementioned languages also create unique cultural identities. Each language, through its idiosyncrasies and mannerisms, provides the special traits that characterise different peoples. The Japanese, for instance, place great emphasis on honorifics in daily life, much more so than English. Close female friends are greeted with "ちゃん" (*chan*), while colleagues at work are addressed with "さん" (*san*). The Japanese are so unique due to their ordered social interaction and strict adherence to tradition, as reflected in their language. Such a social compact is a quintessential source of pride for the

Japanese. Their language has strengthened the fabric of Japanese society, by sewing tighter the ties that bind. As seen from the Japanese, languages create a whole gamut of cultures. Languages foster a sense of belonging in societies worldwide, as people feel connected to their society through their shared languages. Each language is fundamental to such a collective identity, and English is an inadequate replacement for that.

The world also needs more than just English, because having different languages provides us with the means to express ourselves more variedly and fully. We always joke about meaning being “lost in translation”. This phenomenon stems from the fact that we are often unable to fully express what we want to express in different languages. Though translation provides a workable substitute, the original language that said sentence or phrase is from has no true replacement. Mandarin has its “成语” (*chengyu*), which are sets of four characters. These sets are pithy expressions of almost everything under the sun. Yet, such concision is lost when translated to English. For instance “比上不足，比下有余” means in English that someone is not better than those who are brilliant, but is better than those who are not so bright. The difference in sentence length highlights how clumsy and contrived translations often are, and the poetic and rhythmic aspect of the proverb has just been lost in translation. This shows that English is a poor replacement for other languages. The intrinsic linguistic differences, in sentence structure or otherwise, prove how impossible it is for the sole use of English to fully express the human experience.

Hence, the world needs more than just the English language to function as beautifully and diversely as it does now. English is one of the working languages of the international community, but it cannot replace the other languages we have here on Earth. Different peoples should seek not to obliterate linguistic differences through a common language, but instead accept these differences with mutual respect. If we can do so, we thus take one more step forward in the continuation of the diverse world we live in.

Comments:

Robustly and cogently argued. You could consider debunking the assumption that everyone learning English would eliminate the misunderstandings and lack of comprehension amongst the people. English will develop into regional varieties with incomprehensible accents and slangs...(we already see that now- e.g. Scottish English is quite unintelligible to many English-speaking people outside Scotland). Your examples are effective but both are from East Asia- Japanese and Chinese. More diverse range?



"Singapore is an ideal place to raise children."

How far do you agree?

By Desiree Ng Yu Qing (16A11)

As Singapore celebrated its golden jubilee last year, it was a time of reflection for the government and citizens alike. It marked an important milestone, reminding us that Singapore has successfully overcome and conquered many seemingly insurmountable problems that have plagued our shores since our independence. Yet, one problem remains - our dipping birth rates. It raises questions about the ideality of Singapore as a place to raise children. After all, the fate of our nation lies in their hands. Most parents hope to be able to spend time with their children. They hope to raise their children to have good morals, be good citizens, have a healthy life and a prosperous future, where they can pursue their passions. I believe that Singapore is an ideal place to raise children, as its multiracial society is key to raising children of moral stature, and its holistic education and healthcare systems ensure that parents are able to meet their goals of parenthood - which lies, essentially, in their children's welfare.

Singapore has long been hailed for being a multiracial society. This provides children with the right foundation to be imbued with positive values and important life skills, like embracing diversity and accepting one another's differences as strengths. Home to many different racial and religious groups, Singapore as a society functions by being a cohesive entity, where people live harmoniously despite their differences. Thus, children in Singapore have the opportunity to mix with different races, through the policies put in place by the government. A key example is the Ethnic Integration Policy that enforces an ethnic quota in Singapore's common living spaces, such as HDB flats, to ensure diversity. As such, if children were to be raised in a diverse environment that allows the 'Kampung Spirit' of unity and togetherness to be forged between neighbours, they would be imbued with the value of acceptance. They would learn the importance of being comfortable with our complementary differences. Furthermore, this continues even in schools. Students of different races are mixed, and they forge bonds with one another through shared experiences, thus reinforcing the value of diversity and acceptance. In a survey conducted by Nanyang Polytechnic's 'Early Childhood' research team, 70% of parents agreed that embracing diversity and acceptance is of utmost importance in today's world. The world is becoming increasingly divided along social and cultural lines, giving rise to acts of extreme terrorism, as seen by ISIS's recent terror attacks globally. Thus, Singapore's multiracial society is one where children can be raised to be discerning citizens, with moral values that enable them to respect people with differences. This is especially crucial in the current climate, where race and religion are being used as divisive tools that threaten violence to mankind. Raising such children is key to putting an end to the vicious cycle of hate in the world. These children can make a great difference, and Singapore provides an ideal foundation for them.

Singapore is also home to an extensive and holistic education system that constantly adapts, catering to the needs of the 21st century. Children have the opportunity to receive a globally sought-after education, which can be seen by the masses of foreign students that pay exorbitant amounts of money just to receive a Singaporean education. Singapore's education system, as proclaimed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, is one that is steering its students to prepare for the future, in alignment with Singapore's goal of being a Smart Nation. The education system in Singapore ensures that students will develop critical thinking skills, which is evident in the 2015 PISA test that revealed Singaporean students to be one of the world's most creative problem solvers and thinkers - crucial skills that will enable them to be successful as part of the workforce. Furthermore, Singapore's

education system has seen the rise of more specialised schools to cater to students' diverse passions, such as the School of the Arts (SOTA), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and Lasalle College. The increased enrolment in these schools, and the subsidies given to them, point to the obvious fact that children who choose to pursue unconventional fields of study in Singapore will have the chance to do so. This gives rise to many opportunities to children raised here. Furthermore, with recent developments, the government has announced that computer literacy classes will be included in the schools' curriculum, to ensure that students are well-prepared for the future. While some may argue that this comes at the expense of students' well-being and causes them additional stress, it must be noted that the government has adopted effective measures to mitigate such problems, such as removing the 'T Score' in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), reducing competition and stress amongst students. As revealed by Times magazine, Singapore is also home to the best and third-best universities in Southeast Asia: the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU). This illustrates the multitude of educational opportunities that children raised here get to take advantage of in the future. Singapore's education system is apt for today's dynamic world as it promises a prosperous future for children, realising their parents' dreams.

Singapore is also a state that greatly prioritises its citizens' welfare. It is an ideal place to raise children, as there are many policies put into place to ensure it is a fruitful process. For example, the government grants parents baby bonuses and extensive subsidies when they give birth to children, which helps reduce the cost of raising them. Furthermore, Singapore also implements a five-day work week, a shift from the past. This allows parents to spend more time with their children, and help them forge a deeper bond. As seen in the Ministry of Social and Family Development's report, more families took part in family-based activities held around the island, and there has been a reported increase in the number of hours parents spend with their children. After all, this is arguably the most important part of raising a child - being able to spend time with them, and watch them grow and develop. This was also seen when the government introduced longer maternity and paternity leaves, and elicited positive responses from expectant mothers. Thus, it is clear that the welfare policies put into place by the government are effective, helping the process of raising children to be a less arduous one.

However, critics who do not think that Singapore is an ideal place to raise children may argue that Singapore is becoming more expensive to live in. Its income disparity keeps increasing, as reflected by the Gini coefficient, with Singapore ranked as a society with large income inequality. What does the future truly hold for children raised here? Is Singapore truly an ideal place to bring up the next generation? While these concerns are not entirely unfounded, it is important to note that the government has started to implement mitigating measures, such as increasing transfer payments, as well as increasing funds and subsidies to industries that ensure the citizens of Singapore have a place in today's globalised world. The future of children raised in Singapore is indisputably bright. Though I concur that it may not be the perfect place to raise a child, it is definitely an ideal one.

In conclusion, it is perhaps time for our citizens to reconsider the idea of raising children in Singapore. With a greater reflection on our society and in light of the government's various policies, what was once deemed expensive and undesirable can now be considered an ideal option.

Comments:

Effective introduction and conclusion, and a variety of language is used. There is also sufficient depth which illustrates your knowledge of the Singapore context in this issue.

TOPICS

The Media & Entertainment

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“The logic is clear – propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state.”

Noam Chomsky

“What the mass media offers is not popular art, but entertainment which is intended to be consumed like food, forgotten, and replaced by a new dish.”

W.H. Auden

“The media's the most powerful entity on Earth... Because they control the minds of the masses.”

Malcolm X

”

“Celebrities have done more harm than good in today’s society.”

Is this a fair comment?

By Jaime Niam(16A11)

In today’s society, celebrities of all sorts – actors, singers, authors and internet stars – do indeed have an immense influence on people. As public figures subject to intense scrutiny, there is the pressure for celebrities to be extremely mindful of their behaviour, and make sure that their influence is leveraged upon to bring positive impacts to society. This, though, is not always the case, and many have brought harm to society with such negative influences, further magnified due to widespread coverage of their faults. However, it is unfair to assert that celebrities have brought more harm than good to today’s society, as their talents, craft and influence have definitely brought many benefits to society, providing a go-to source of entertainment and even serving as powerful advocates for certain pertinent societal issues.

On one hand, the common argument for celebrities bringing more harm than good to society is the lack of discipline on their part, leading them to indulge in morally repugnant activities that only serve as a negative influence on their fans or simply society in general. It is not uncommon for the news to be peppered with salacious celebrity scandals and recounts of their inappropriate public behaviour. This clearly brings many detriments to society as the celebrity has not only failed to contribute meaningfully to society, but has instead disrupted the order of it, sending the wrong signal to their young, impressionable followers. Two of the most influential singers of their generation, Whitney Houston and Amy Winehouse, lost their lives to substance abuse and drug overdose, and such an undignified death should surely not be the image perpetuated within society. In addition, instances of celebrities being public nuisances seem to have become a norm, from famous pop star Justin Bieber spitting on “annoying” fans to Ariana Grande spouting vulgarities at the paparazzi. Such uncouth and juvenile behaviour clearly conveys an extremely negative message to their fans, who look up to these major influences and possibly subscribe to and emulate their behaviour. Especially since these celebrities are perpetually under public scrutiny and are clearly aware that their everyday actions will be covered in extreme detail across the media, their hiccups are even more unforgivable and influential than ever. Therefore, celebrities have done more harm than good to society as their ill-discipline and juvenile behaviour spreads negative influences amongst society.

Yet, it is unfair to claim that celebrities have only abused their influence by taking liberties with their fame to indulge in whatever they please, no matter how detrimental to society. Many celebrities have done the complete opposite, and used their influence positively to advocate pertinent social causes. Actress Emma Watson, who played Hermione Granger in the popular “Harry Potter” series, is a UN advocate for women’s rights and frequently delivers thought-provoking speeches to spur people on to join the feminist movement, fighting for gender equality in modern society. This is evidently an honourable role and definitely brings good to society, in that widespread awareness is created of an important societal issue imperative for progress. This also serves as a form of empowerment for what has always been considered to be the “weaker gender”. Celebrities have also come together and combined their influences for charitable causes before, such as the major collaboration between influential American sensations in the song “We Are The World”, as a sign of support for the victims of

the 2010 Haiti earthquake. With all these positive efforts to leverage upon their societal influence to spread global awareness on important issues, and hopefully spur some action within society, celebrities have definitely brought more good than harm to society as they are clearly endorsing a culture of mutual support and togetherness.

Celebrities have also used their wealth for extremely charitable and tangible causes, bringing good to the less privileged sectors of society. For example, the most-subscribed and arguably biggest YouTube sensation by the screen name of Pewdiepie has channelled over millions of dollars from his profits to charity, even engaging his fans to join him on such meaningful endeavours. Similarly, a fellow YouTuber – Kevjumba has built a school for children in Africa, while Ryan Higa, yet another Internet sensation, does an annual series in which he and his group of friends hand out food to the homeless on the streets of New York on Thanksgiving. Evidently, celebrities have not only advocated a society built on support, they have actually taken tangible actions to truly show their belief in such a culture, utilising their wealth to provide aid and contribute to a better standard of living for the financially-challenged in society, making sure they do not get left behind. Such charitable deeds undoubtedly represent a true, sincere desire to bring good to society, especially since they have been manifested in tangible, observable actions, and hence, it cannot be denied that celebrities have done more good than harm to society.

In addition, on top of the meaningful and more charitable benefits that celebrities have conferred upon society, they have also brought good to what may seem like a minute yet equally important aspect of personal life – bringing joy and entertainment to an otherwise mundane existence, by sharing their crafts and talents with the world. The countless sold-out world tours of popular singers and billions of views on YouTube channels testify to the desire of society to be able to indulge in quality content, and enjoy what celebrities have to offer to the world. Adaptations of books into movies also suggest that authors have done a good job of enthralling their audience with their stories, prompting the demand for even more of the franchise. Besides simply providing entertainment to the ordinary masses, celebrities' crafts have also shed more light and attention on growing industries, and provided society with even more platforms to engage themselves in. YouTuber Pewdiepie not only uploads interactive playthroughs of games for his fans to enjoy, but also helps sponsor game-makers by playing their creations and generating viewership on their products, greatly aiding the gaming industry. In fact, he has even collaborated with gaming companies and innovated his own games, killing two birds with one stone by providing an additional source of entertainment for fans and fuelling growth in an increasingly popular gaming world. The same can be observed in the music industry on competitive series like "The Voice", where celebrities take in budding singers as their mentees and cultivate them into confident performers, generating great viewership and introducing new talents and faces into the booming entertainment industry. Thus, celebrities have invariably enriched the mundane lives of the ordinary, bringing endless entertainment and material for us to consume and enjoy, even lending great help to various expanding industries.

In conclusion, I believe that celebrities have done far more good than harm in today's society. While instances of negative behaviour from celebrities do exist, these are but a minority amidst the sea of contributions they have lent to society. Not only have the positive impacts of the work of celebrities been recognised on a more micro level by enriching the personal lives of many, their contributions

extend to the macro as they have indeed offered much to the various sectors of society and benefitted the lives of many. Therefore, they have definitely brought more good to society with their wealth and status.

Comments:

A small degree of repetition of ideas across paragraphs. Otherwise, overall, a consistently argued piece. Good knowledge of examples to supplement and enforce points. A good read!

“Question everything.” Is this fair advice when approaching the media today?

By Nicole Seah (16A12)

The media as we know it today is made available to us in more forms than ever before, comprising more traditional outlets like television and radio, as well as other forms of new media such as the internet and social media sites. The diversity of media sources and unparalleled ability to create and access media today enables it to have a huge influence on daily life. I believe that it is fair and wise advice to coat our interactions with the media with a pinch of salt, and question both the reliability and likelihood of the content that the media presents to us. I believe that whilst doing so may be seen as overly cautious by some, it is imperative to ensure that we are not susceptible to misinformation and manipulation by media sites and those who fund them.

With the advent of the internet and the popularization of online media sites as a primary distributor of content and information, due largely to their ability to capture an international audience and following, there is just reason for us to be more cautious of the content that we are exposed to. The rise of the internet as a key medium by which media content propagates means that individuals now have a greater ability than before to engage in content creation, as there are fewer regulations that can be placed online as compared to more traditional news agencies. The vastness of the internet, and its less tangible and physical nature, makes it more challenging for governments to regulate and monitor its operations. The online platform is thus largely self-regulatory, and there are fewer checks on the reliability of information.

Apparent in the recent elections in the US and Brexit referendum in the UK is the ability of the media to misrepresent information in a way that causes misinformation of the masses. Fake news, a term used to refer to unreliable or even factually untrue news sources, have been on the rise. This phenomenon is enabled by the internet and the ability it gives these unreliable content creators to create content that appears as professional and legitimate as other news sources. In the US, unreliable and clearly un-objective media outlets such as that of Breitbart, a news platform run by the alt-right, has published content disparaging Muslims and immigrants with blatantly untrue statistics about crime rates and the ability of these communities to disrupt and damage American society. Whilst untrue, these statistics are presented in an extremely believable manner, with diagrams and infographics similar to actual government sources.

To “question everything” would be to approach such content discerningly, and to evaluate both the reliability of the source as well as the how realistic the information they are providing is. To take the media today at face value without questioning or checking the information provided makes us extremely susceptible to misinformation. This misinformation can come at a high cost to us, as it influences our decision making and potentially even the way we vote. This was observed in the UK following the results of the Brexit referendum, where there was massive public outcry upon learning that the “facts” and “statistics” about UK’s contribution to the European Union has been misrepresented to the public. To be discerning towards the media content that we are exposed to is an important way to guard ourselves against misinformation that can hurt our personal wellbeing. It is thus reasonable that as individuals we question everything that the media throws our way.

Even the traditional media outlets, which may appear to carry a veneer of legitimacy when pit against online media providers and unregulated content creators, should not be blindly accepted.

The media industry is one that is highly competitive and lucrative, and as a business venture, are often profit motivated. It is widely known that media agencies and conglomerates accept private and corporate funding to maintain their operations. Be it politicians who own a stake in media firms or large multinational corporations that invest in these media outlets, all have the ability to influence the media and its presentation of information. This results in media sites carrying their own biases in their presentation of information. If left unquestioned and trusted wholly, it has the ability to skew understandings and perspectives of viewers.

News agencies like Fox News have been known to have a conservative slant, made apparent during political debates and their perhaps too encouraging reporting of Donald Trump's actions. Viewers who subscribe to these media channels are thus fed one-sided and biased information about the events in their country. This causes them to act in ways that can potentially hurt them at the polls, and potentially instill in them beliefs founded on untruths. Corporate involvement in media agencies can be even more problematic, as the media is used as a tool to forward their own corporate agendas. ExxonMobil was infamous for using skewed media reports to downplay the role of human action and fossil fuels in global warming. This was done to retain the American public's support for the use of coal and fossil fuels, so as to raise ExxonMobil's own bottom line. The perspective that the media provides its viewers is extremely coercive, especially since viewers attain most of their information from a single source and accept the information unquestioningly. It is thus important advice to give to the 21st century audience to be perspective and evaluate the media that we are exposed to, either by fact checking or simply exposing ourselves to more than one source of information.

Those who disagree may argue that it is overly cautious and unfair for viewers to be told to "question everything", as it may be unfeasible and content is not always certainly unreliable. Proponents of such a view argue that not all the media sites today are unreliable, and that to question every piece of information would be too troublesome due to the sheer volume of content that we are exposed to. They believe that it would be more reasonable to suggest that we question the information only when there is reason to do so, such as facts that are hard to believe or that appear extreme and have the potential to create harm.

Even then, I still believe that there is great value in questioning every piece of information as this is the only foolproof way to prevent misinformation, even if it requires more time spent. In the digital age we are living in, it is understandable that instant gratification and access to information is of value, but I believe that the benefit of such convenience and ease can only materialise if the information is reliable, and can enable individuals to have a better understanding of the issues around them and make better decisions. The problem with only questioning what appears blatantly untrue or hard to believe is twofold: firstly, even fake news is oftentimes done skillfully and presented in a palatable manner. But more importantly, intrinsic biases are often a part of the reason that we are susceptible to fake news in the first place.

As fake news often appears equally legitimate and professionally done because it seeks to persuade and deceive readers into believing its narrative, it would be hard to find blatant and suspicious content. As such, the only way to sieve out such false information is to check and question all content, regardless of how legitimate and probable it may appear to be. More importantly, relying on one's intuition to identify misinformation is extremely challenging, and unlikely to yield much success in ensuring that we are able to properly evaluate media content.

Often times, misinformation occurs to the greatest and most harmful extent when it reinforces certain beliefs that we already hold, or that appeal to our innate fears and motivations. This oftentimes include playing on inherent racial stereotypes and divisions to incite fear amongst individuals. The reason why Americans living in coal cities bought into the belief that immigrants were stealing American jobs more than Americans living in more affluent areas was due to the fact that the poor unemployed coal miners viewed unemployment as a more pressing concern, one that affected their everyday life and the wellbeing of their communities. As such, misinformation that plays on such biases and fears are usually the most persuasive. In light of the nature of unreliable content and its ability to manipulate the human mind to appear legitimate and appealing, we must ensure that we are discerning to all media content, to be able to identify which is reliable and which isn't.

The clout that the media has over our access to information, and the beliefs and perspectives we gain from this information, has only grown with the propagation of media content on the internet. In its larger variety and harder to regulate form, I believe that it is only reasonable that we do everything in our means to guard against misinformation. We should capitalize on the variety of sources available to us to ensure that we are more informed individuals, and that we are accurately informed ones. I feel that to not be weary and take the information the media throws at us at face value would be to be informed, but blindly. To be blindly informed is worse than not being informed at all, as we would then be knowingly making bad decisions that may hurt our own well being. As such, I believe that it is not only reasonable but also extremely wise advice that we view the media with a pair of scrutinizing and discerning eyes, to ensure that we are able to access information that is factual and objective, so as to enable us to shape our understanding and opinions of the world around us and prevent the grave consequences of misinformed decisions.

Comments:

While you have raised some valid issues and provided sound insights, the paragraphing can be better. Your paragraphs are too long. The use of supporting evidence can be more consistent as well. The penultimate paragraph felt rushed.

“Question everything.” Is this fair advice when approaching the media today?

By Emmanuelle Koh (16S34)

In recent times, an ordinary person can be said to possess the world at his fingertips. With the rise of new technology such as smartphones, media outlets find no trouble disseminating information to their viewers rapidly and immediately. Yet, with these benefits technology provides come a growing problem – fake news. Therefore, I believe that it is fair advice to ‘question everything’ when approaching the media today, due to the increasing prevalence of clickbait articles, partisan news and inaccurate coverage of breaking stories.

To start, with the aid of the World Wide Web, many fall prey to clickbait articles that may contain false news, or “fake news”. The internet guarantees fast searches and a multitude of links to a wide variety of websites. It is so easy for a person to enter bogus websites, after being lured in by a catchy headline, with con artists earning money when viewers click on their article or visit their websites. This could be heavily seen in the 2016 US presidential election, when false articles flooded social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, linking to uncredible news outlets reporting the latest ‘scandal’ by the presidential candidates. These are created by unscrupulous people capitalising on the demand for incriminating news to make a quick buck. For those that are constantly on the internet and on social media platforms, discretion has to be used to avoid falling into traps. As such, because of these clickbait articles, it is right to suspect everything online.

Furthermore, biased news outlets may twist their reports in favour of a political party. Viewers run the risk of receiving news that was edited and nuanced into portraying a particular view that suited a certain political party. An unsuspecting viewer will hence be made to believe a certain view after watching or reading information from the biased news outlet. This is especially relevant today in the world’s superpower, the United States of America. FOX News is said to align itself with the Republican party, while CNN is said to align itself with the Democratic party. The information from both these two media outlets are polar opposites, with FOX news painting the Republican Party in a good light while CNN reporters heavily criticise the party’s actions. FOX News especially distorts the truth when covering Donald Trump’s outrageous actions. Viewers that only subscribe to one news channel, which is the likely case for Donald Trump supporters, are thus polarised because they were led to believe that the actions of the President are always justifiable, even if they are not. Citizens should not trust everything that is disseminated from news outlets, even those that are supposedly reputable. They should exercise critical thinking when receiving information, and not blindly accept the news due to biased news outlets today.

However, detractors of my stand may argue that people can still trust news outlets that are reputable and trustworthy, along with the news that they report. News outlets such as the Straits Times, The Guardian, Huffington Post and Channel News Asia have a reputation of being unbiased in their reporting, preferring to take a neutral stand and reporting only the truth. News from these outlets are thus said to be trusted. After all, the average citizen has to receive his news from somewhere. For example, the Straits Times remained impartial when reporting about the 38 Oxley Road case involving the dispute between Singapore’s Prime Minister and his siblings about the outcome of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s house on Oxley Road. It would have been very easy for the Straits Times to side with the more ‘powerful’ Prime Minister Lee, and influence their readers to do so as well. However, reporters from the Straits Times accurately reported information from both

sides without bias. A person who receives news from these reputable and trusted sources need not question and suspect everything, because these media outlets report the truth.

That being said, even trustworthy news outlet may make mistakes. Due to the speed of which breaking news are covered daily, there could be mistakes made because there is no time to verify the information thoroughly. Today, breaking news is covered immediately. Reporters flock to the scene of the news within minutes, informing their viewers on updates periodically. Often times, they would rely on sources to give a wider perspective or information of the ongoing events. However, these sources may not be fully accurate, but with pressing time to deliver a story, the reporter would be unable to verify the truth. For example, when a mass shooting occurred at a Quebec City mosque in January 2017, certain American news outlets reported that sources heard the gunman shout "Allahu akbar!", and thus instantly assumed the terrorist to be radicalised Muslim. After some time, the information soon proved to be inaccurate, and the shooter was found to be in fact a White Nationalist. Although it is safe to believe information from reputable news sources, there will still be mistakes as to err is human. Hence, one should still be critical and question the information provided.

In conclusion, I believe that given the needs of today's world, which are the immediate coverage of news and the ease of access to a wide range of information, questioning and being critical of news provided by all sources is sound advice. After all, it is also said that critical thinking is a 21st Century skill that most people should develop, and with the rise of "fake news", biased news, and inaccurate information, one should always exercise caution in one's judgement.

Comments:

A very sensible and well-balanced piece! A pleasure to read. Just be careful when writing to avoid little slips in expression. A thing to note, relate each paragraph to TODAY more overtly as it is the context of the question. Keep it up! ☺

"Social media has enslaved rather than liberated us." Is this true?

By Jocasta Tan Wei Xi (16A15)

In a technological age where almost everyone has electronic devices, we are all connected with one another through social media platforms, where our lives become heavily intertwined. Detractors and disapproving adults may criticize how the younger generation has been enslaved by social media and become addicted to it. However, I posit that social media has liberated us rather than enslaved us. This is evident through all the activist movements that have allowed people to fight for what they believe in, hold the government accountable, as well as break the geographical boundaries of communications that once confined us. Thus, it is untrue that social media has enslaved us rather than liberated us.

Firstly, social media has given activists and the marginalized a platform to speak about their concerns and issues, giving them a chance to liberate themselves from their situations. Without social media, these people would not have been heard at all. For example, activists against climate change have come together to make a video about the Arctic's decline. They went to the Arctic to film the Inuit people, interviewing them about their concerns regarding the issue of the loss of ice sheets that would damage their environment and destroy their homes. They also begged for oil fracking companies to stay away, as their presence in the Arctic would affect the delicate biodiversity and ecosystem in the Arctic. This video was shared online through various forms of social media, like Facebook and YouTube. It eventually garnered more than 10 million views, and hundreds of thousands of people signed the online petition to stop climate change and put pressure on oil companies to search for oil somewhere else. From this, we can see that social media has indeed allowed these people to tell the government about their issues; in a pre-social media age, this would have been less impactful and widespread. To add on, the marginalized are given a chance to speak about their concerns and raise awareness amongst the public. A significant example would be the #Blacklivesmatter movement on Twitter that garnered more than 3.2 million retweets in a day. Celebrities and important figures like Hillary Clinton have endorsed and supported the movement. Twitter has been a platform for the marginalized in the American society to speak out and raise awareness about their plight. All these examples show that social media has given these people a chance to speak out and be liberated from their circumstances.

Secondly, social media has liberated us from being a silent electorate who can only effect change by "writing" to the government, hoping that they would respond to our requests in some way. The advent of social media has allowed the masses to air their views, conduct forums and ultimately effect change. A classic example can be found in Singapore. In the past, the country was governed by the PAP, with Mr Lee Kuan Yew, a Machiavellian leader, at the helm. He was hard, firm and strongly believed in whatever he was doing, even if it was unpopular with the masses. The people of Singapore did not have a say in the country's decisions and policies. However, with the widespread influence of social media today, those who are unhappy with the government's policies or decisions can set up forums, where supporters and detractors alike can have heated debates and bring matters to the government's attention. In recent years, the Singaporean government has acknowledged the issues raised through social media and has even set up a platform, "The National Conversation", where people can talk about their grievances and unhappiness. However, social media can be used in irresponsible ways for people to air their views. An apt example is online blogger Roy Ngerng. He took it upon himself to criticize the government, slandering them by saying that they were corrupt and stole from the masses through the implementation of the Central Provident Fund (CPF). This atrocious use of social media to slander the government was uncalled for, and meant to spread discord in society. Social media is therefore a platform where the masses can be liberated from their

silence, giving them a chance to have a say in the government's actions. However, it must be used responsibly, and not threaten social cohesion in any form.

Thirdly, social media has liberated us from the geographical boundaries that used to confine us. Contacting and communicating with people all around the globe has never been this easy. In the past, talking to someone by snail mail would require weeks of waiting time before the person replied or for word to spread. In today's world, social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter allow people to communicate effortlessly and instantaneously. It no longer matters where one is, as geographical boundaries no longer dictate our communication methods. Furthermore, because news spreads instantly, financial aid can be quickly sent to places that have experienced devastating natural disasters. For example, a social media platform called Gofundme allows people to go online and read about individual cases, and decide if they want to fund the cause. A recent example is the Nepal Earthquake Relief Fund, where the contributions of people amounted to three times more than the original target amount. All the money went to the victims of the earthquake to help them cope with their current circumstances. There are many other campaigns that people can choose to support, depending on what resonates with them. From this, we can see that the instantaneous nature of social media has allowed for people to communicate with each other as well as for people to send aid to those in need, liberating us from and circumventing the confines of geographical boundaries.

However, it should be duly noted that social media has enslaved the younger generation to a significant extent. In a world where information is effortlessly and instantly obtained, it is inevitable that we are exposed to a plethora of information. Hundreds of millions of people use social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. All these platforms allow people to post real-time, live updates about themselves, be it the outfit they are wearing, the places they visit, or the food that they are enjoying. A phenomenon dubbed "FOMO", the fear of missing out, has caused people to be constantly glued to their electronic devices, checking for updates regularly. When it is time for students to study, they find it hard to put their devices aside. This addiction to social media devices, which allow one to be constantly bombarded with information and constantly being in fear of not being updated, shows that we have been enslaved by social media. Moreover, the pervasiveness of social media has allowed social ideals to penetrate our society and take control of many people's lives. The perfect image portrayed by celebrities and the glamorous lives they are leading have caused impressionable young people to be enslaved by these ideals. Many girls, who suffer from eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, have come forward to say that their conditions were fuelled by perfect images of models and celebrities in magazines which led to their low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. However, if not taken to the extreme, such images on social media can have a positive effect on people. Many who have seen celebrities eating healthily or following workout regimes have followed suit, improving their lifestyles and their health. Evidently, social media has caused addiction, and projected unrealistic and unattainable images that have affected impressionable youths significantly, but on the flip side, it can also be a form of motivation for one to improve oneself if taken positively.

In conclusion, social media has brought us a wealth of benefits – liberating the marginalized, giving a voice to the masses, as well as connecting people by circumventing geographical boundaries. These have enabled our society to strive towards higher standards of living. However, this liberation does come with costs, namely the addiction of people to social media and the obsession societal ideals that have enslaved the minds of some. All in all, the benefits of liberation have far outweighed the costs of enslavement and thus, it is untrue that social media has enslaved us rather than liberated us.

Comments:

A well-written essay that makes for a pleasurable and insightful read.

"Ignorance is not always bliss." How true is this of the modern world?

By Lim Jia Rong (16A11)

As the old saying goes, "ignorance breeds fear, fear breeds hate, hate breeds violence". In our increasingly complex world, where the pertinent issues facing humanity remain multi-faceted and highly contentious, resolving these issues remain as important as knowledge of and dedication to them is elusive. From the rise of a Salafist caliphate in the Levant, to an overwhelming exodus of peoples from the Near East and Northern Africa to Europe, it is evident that rational and well-informed discourse and political decision-making is indeed much needed if humanity wishes to progress beyond the twenty-first century. It is my belief that ignorance not only fails to confer bliss upon those who adopt it, ignorance incapacitates their ability to make rational decisions, and more often than not severely undermines their self-interest.

Firstly, ignorance impedes societal progress, rendering one susceptible to manipulation and ripe for exploitation. When one remains ignorant about politics, society and the hurdles which face their communities, one is in no position to work toward betterment, as one is simply in no position to do so. Furthermore, when an electorate selects ignorance over conscientious participation in the democratic process, the mechanisms of power, such as the executive, judiciary and legislative branches of the state are no longer subject to checks and balances. From Caesar's Colosseum to Hitler's Strength Through Joy campaigns, malevolent dictators often seek to extend their control over the masses by keeping them ignorant, thus keeping them politically docile. Often, such autocratic power-grabs are accompanied by widespread censorship and a determined effort at disseminating propaganda. This ensures that the people not only lack the interest and will to oppose them, but also lack the knowledge and information essential for deposing these dictators. A prominent example in the modern times would be Zimbabwean society, one which is immensely repressive and in essence, the antithesis of a functioning democracy. Established in 1979 after the violent Rhodesian Bush War which ended during minority rule, President Robert Mugabe was democratically elected as the leader of the Zimbabwean people. As the President became increasingly embroiled in corruption scandals and accusations of extrajudicial killings, martial law was declared and elections suspended. The bloodthirsty dictator then embarked on ruthless extermination campaign tantamount to genocide, eliminating an estimated 20,000 ethnic Ndebele persons in what was called Gukurahundi, a Shona phrase which translates into "the early spring rain which washes away the chaff". Yet through a methodical and highly effective propaganda and censorship campaign, the electorate not only ceased to oppose martial law, but embraced it as part of "Zimbabwe's continued struggle against Western imperialism". While imaginary enemies of the state were fabricated to distract this ignorant populace, the intellectual few who saw through this ruse were completely silenced, unable to agitate for true democracy without support from a now subjugated electorate. Currently, Zimbabwe faces hyperinflation on an inconceivable scale, with cholera ravaging the urban population due to a lack of potable water, and malnutrition sweeping the countryside. Decades of economic mismanagement has left the nation in shambles while the Mugabe family and his ilk embezzle state funds. In spite of all this, many remain supportive of the incumbent leader, and most are none the wiser about Gukurahundi. Through ignorance, a functioning democracy can be converted into an autocratic regime, an electorate can be deceived and debilitated, and a once free and prosperous society can become a failed state. In the end, the ignorant find themselves in a struggle for

mere subsistence, while those who manipulate them do indeed live in bliss.

Secondly, ignorance impedes personal growth, depriving individuals of their god-given right to live life to the fullest, to explore their true potential, and to achieve self-actualisation. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, self-actualisation, which is the discovery of one's true intellectual or mental capacity through the completion of tasks, is placed at the top of this proverbial "pyramid". Indeed, the ability to improve the self, to challenge the self and emerge stronger, is part and parcel of a fulfilling life. Yet, ignorance deprives one of such an opportunity, eliminating the discipline and drive one must possess to embark on such an enriching, albeit arduous journey. The ignorance and lack of ability to delay gratification, in favour of immediate pleasure in the here and now, stunts their growth as fully-functioning, cognitively-developed homo sapiens. Perhaps biologist and renowned scientist Richard Dawkins had put it best when he said, "We were blessed with a bipedal physique, opposable thumbs and the greatest brain to body mass ratio in the animal kingdom, and we sacrificed it to the altar of self-indulgence and purposeless hedonism". Indeed, ignorance has drained countless hours from the bulk of our lives, as potential to grow as individuals and discover more than what one had previously known is squandered.

Thirdly, ignorance breeds fear and hate, culminating in the impediment of both society and the individual. Previously, it was established that ignorance could lead to individuals opting out of the democratic process. Yet, the damage that the ignorant could deal to both society and the individual by enticing them to participate in non-constructive politics remains undiscussed. Through ignorance, a lack of understanding materialises between the various demographics any society is composed of, with each group unable to gauge the intentions and interests of the others. In many societies, the fault lines which delineate this rift are ethno-religious in nature. With this lack of understanding, misconceptions and misunderstandings are bound to occur, further marginalising these groups from one another or even mainstream society. Transgressions, be it genuine or fabricated, are propagated or even exaggerated, and the outburst of rage which ensues could possibly lead to racially-motivated hate crimes or even racial conflict. It is evident that ignorance obscures the obvious truth that each and every group in society only strives to create a better society for the next generation to reside in. To the ignorant, the alien or hostile group is "the other", one which seeks to undermine "their way of life". While those who participate in such identity politics may still strive to preserve their self-interests, they remain counter-intuitive in doing so, undermining themselves instead. This trend is universal in human history, and no different in modern times. Throughout Europe, far-right wing parties and militias have festered, preaching hate towards immigrants and even encouraging acts of violence against them in a bid to drive them out. These include the UK's National Action and British National Party, to Greece's Golden Dawn, Hungary's Jobbik, France's National Front, the Netherlands' PVV and Germany's NPD. These hate groups capitalise on public ignorance and lack of interaction with immigrants, publicise transgressions supposedly committed by them and mobilise voters to vote against immigration, thereby voting for them and their ambitions. Not only is this politically counterproductive, it eviscerates social cohesion and stability, with a once unified society striving towards the common goal of betterment splitting into disparate political and ethnic factions, each vying for control over the other and perpetuating their own self-interests. The ignorant individual is harmed here as well, with his or her radicalisation possibly leading to hate crimes or hate speech charges in court of law, along with having to live with immense, misguided hatred of another group of people for the rest of his life.

There are still some who believe that ignorance can be blissful, that ignorance confers upon us a peace of mind which absolves us of social responsibilities, and allows us to avoid having to be concerned with the complex and seemingly unsolvable problems which plague modern society. After all, in their view, one individual is unable to alter anything or be of any use in resolving these matters which constrain human advancement. In my opinion, such an attitude is not only misguided, but wholly defeatist in nature, highlighting the lack of willpower in the ignorant to better not only themselves, but also society. Often, mass movements have changed the course of history, altering political landscapes and redirecting the trajectory a nation is headed in. Yet, these mass movements comprise civilians with no power except for that of the ballot paper, and that of a desire for freedom. Indeed, each and every person can make a difference.

In conclusion, ignorance does not translate to bliss, but rather the complete opposite of it - suffering. However, I firmly believe in knowledge's eventual triumph over ignorance, as intellectual pursuit is not only the rational decision, it is the right decision. In the words of Immanuel Kant, "Knowledge dispels".

Comments:

'Modern world' could have been addressed more explicitly by examining some relevant characteristics of the modern world. Thoughtful analysis of the issue in various aspects and levels of society, that is consistently argued. Apt and well-explained examples, but some details can be forgone as they aren't always relevant. This will give you some space and time for greater scope.

Culture & the Arts

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"Culture is the arts elevated to a set of beliefs."

Thomas Wolfe

"Food is not rational. Food is culture, habit, craving and identity."

Jonathan Safran Foer

"The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls."

Pablo Picasso

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Is it the responsibility of the state to support all forms of art in society? Discuss this with reference to your country.

By Janis Lim (16S39)

Recently, an art student from LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore put up an art work popularly known as the "Golden Staircase" on a flight of steps at her Housing Development Board (HDB) public housing flat. While this might have been an acceptable norm in other countries, the Singapore government considers it to be an act of vandalism and prompted the removal of this installation. This leads us to the question of whether all art forms regardless of their nature, medium and message should receive support from the government. All art forms are created by their artists for a purpose and will, and to an extent, benefit the community and/or the artist. Hence, the government has the duty to support all art forms to fulfill its role of increasing society's welfare. However, this is provided that such art forms are not maleficent in nature and can contribute to the greater good of society.

It is the responsibility of the state to support all art forms which bring about economic benefit to society. In Singapore, art forms are supported by the state by means of funding or license approval for the art to be practised. With over 30 art museums and institutions in Singapore and with a record average of 23 art performances and more than 70 exhibitions on display everyday in 2015, the local arts scene is thriving. Without a doubt, art brings about economic benefit for the nation directly through the sale of art works, published literature and sale of tickets to performances. The state has the responsibility to provide support for these forms of art because it brings about economic benefit to its creators and publishers and it may be their form of livelihood. Not supporting such activities will mean the failing of the government to create welfare for its citizens and ensure a good standard of living for art practitioners. For example, the Media Development Authority (MDA) has the responsibility to support the digital design industry in the light of more gaming companies like Ubisoft and Marvel setting up their studios and headquarters in Singapore. Without adequate support that reduces regulations for license approval for example, these companies will face a higher production cost in Singapore and will move their capital to places like Vietnam where production is cheaper, causing Singapore to lose jobs and economic growth opportunities. Hence, it is the responsibility of the state to support such art forms for only then can these economic benefits be reaped and sustained.

In addition to improving economic growth, the government should support all art forms because all works of art are created for a particular reason by artists and only through supporting these art forms can their messages and meaning be brought to life for meaningful discussions about issues that are of importance to society. All art forms, be they paintings, drama, writing or sculptures, are created with an intention to express the artist's emotions, or his view on certain topics. These art forms can also be created to instill a message, make a commentary on current issues and evoke an emotional response to the work. As such, all works of art can be seen as micro-narratives from individuals in society that when put together, form a grand narrative of the Singaporean society, one in which each Singaporean can relate to and identify with to a certain extent. Supporting all art forms, therefore, is the duty of the government as it has a role to play in putting these narratives together to enable constructive discussion among countrymen and to foster a common identity among Singaporeans. For example, the government has provided much funding for the renovation and establishment of the National Gallery of Singapore which houses many contemporary works from all over Southeast Asia including paintings by Liu Kang and Georgette

Chen which exemplify Singapore's role in the history of the Nanyang style of art. With the National Arts Council lifting the ban on scriptless performance art in 2004, Drama Box, a non-profit company practising forum theatre has been bringing meaningful discourse regarding social issues such as multiculturalism, inclusiveness and terrorism close to the hearts of the masses through interactive plays. Such roles of the arts in forging a sense of national identity and facilitating true, uncensored and meaningful discussion cannot be fulfilled should the government not take the responsibility in providing support for all forms of art.

Nonetheless, it is not the responsibility of the state to support art forms that are against national interests and art forms that go against the law because supporting such art forms compromises the legitimacy of the government. In Singapore, acts of vandalism and unlicensed graffiti are against the law. While graffiti is considered a legal art form in some countries, supporting such forms of art will suggest that the government is not firm in its stance and hence will undermine the credibility of the government. The "Sticker Lady" saga in Singapore is a prime example where a work of art, as considered by some people, was prohibited by the government as it constituted an act of vandalism of public property. The "Golden Staircase" was considered a harmless act by many residents; the installation put up by a resident at a void deck in Yishun comprising an artistic tower of antiques was deemed worthy of display at the Singapore Biennale yet the authorities felt it was a safety hazard. Because of laws made against damage to public property which is absolutely necessary for the safety of the general public, allowing and supporting such acts of artistic expression falls under a grey area between allowing artistic freedom and abiding by the government's own laws. While the artworks mentioned above demonstrate the artist's intentions and have the potential to promote meaningful discussions among members of the public, permitting the practice of these forms of art will lead to others thinking it is acceptable to "vandalise" and do whatever they please to public property which will compromise public safety. Hence, it is better for the government to remain firm in its legislation and not be responsible for supporting such art forms.

In conclusion, the state has the responsibility to support art forms that will contribute meaningfully to the welfare of society even if some of these art forms go against the interest of the ruling party as without governmental support, the art scene will not flourish. After all, all art practitioners in Singapore require some form of licensing. Nonetheless, it is not the responsibility of the state, and in fact, the state should not support art forms that are hazardous or art that compromises society's safety and law enforcement.

Comments:

Sound knowledge demonstrated with some relevant issues raised and discussed. Apt use of supporting evidence as well. Rather fluently written. However, your scope could have been broader and included instances of how the government deals with art forms that go against national interests which can be political or moral in nature.

Do museums merit the vast sums of money spent on them?

By Tan Jia Yi, Nicolette (16S31)

A museum, described in technical terms, is simply a building to hold and display curiosities and objects from the past for the consumption of the public. Yet, its uses stretch far beyond simply providing a simple display to the public. Museums spark the imagination of many who step through their doors and act as our link between the past and present in ways unmatched by the Internet and other mediums. For such functions, the growth of the human mind and commemoration of its fruits, no price for the upkeep and updating of museums is too great. Hence, I do believe that museums merit the vast sums of money spent on them.

Some may question the need for such exorbitant sums of money to be lavished on the maintenance of museums. After all, the tangible and physical experiences derived from museums may now be experienced online in the form of the Internet. As such, the great sums spent on the design of displays, the architecture and maintenance of museums will be surely unnecessary. The World Wide Web is the largest encyclopedia that has ever existed on the planet. There is almost nothing that cannot be learnt or discovered from it if one punches in the necessary keywords into a search engine. The price of discovery and education has become inexpensive with the advent of the Internet, removing the need for museums.

Yet another argument exists against the merit of museums. Such an argument puts forward that much money should not be spent on them due to the fact that museums are no longer places to learn and be educated on culture and anything else worth learning. This is due to the fact that museums have begun to dumb down their exhibits and the like to appeal to the lowest common denominator, allowing them to henceforth sell more tickets. Museum exhibits no longer provide one with the insights that are valuable but rather with reams of useless and meaningless trivia. As such, if museums are to be like businesses, pumping out information that does not serve to improve the mind, it should also be so that their funding from the state should be equivalent to that of private businesses... close to nothing. For example, natural history museums have moved away from informative text on exhibits to Steve Irwin style gobbets of trivia to appeal to the public. Hence, museums, according to this argument, are undeserving of the large sums lavished on them.

Yet, the aforementioned two arguments have failed to address that museums, though they may be guilty on the above two counts, act as the bearers of dream and imagination. It is true that the Internet is able to provide one with information equivalent to anything found in a museum. However, a simple webpage or interactive experience online where information is simply harvested will never be the same as the experience of being in a museum while taking in its sights, smells and sounds. Museum exhibits are not only fields to be grazed for information but they are designed especially for one to derive maximum pleasure from the exhibit. For example, the Singapore ArtScience museum spends millions every year on making sure that their exhibits are of the highest quality. For instance, the ArtScience museum held an exhibit on M.C. Escher, an artist revolutionary for his use of tessellations to illustrate mathematical concepts of geometry and infinity. Within the

exhibit, human-sized installations were present to help the visitors appreciate the geometry of his artwork literally, providing one with a greater sense of understanding and pleasure derived from his work than a webpage ever could, providing fertile ground for inspiration. One would almost feel as though one were in a waking dream, when encountering the artistry and craft of such museum exhibits, making them worth the hefty investment for the artistic inspiration garnered.

With respect to the argument regarding the dumbing down of museums, the worthiness and presentation of information displayed in museums remain subjective to different people. To one who is a fan of topics leaning towards science, natural history museums and museums commemorating scientific achievements may seem sacred. He or she would believe, most likely, that information should be placed in a certain manner in accordance with his or her own narrow viewpoint. Likewise, he or she may believe museums commemorating achievements in pop culture trivial and a way of feeding the less highbrow minds of the common denominator. Pop culture museums such as the Studio Ghibli museum commemorate the production of feats of animation accomplished by Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*, and museums such as New York's Museum of Natural History commemorate the path of evolution that mankind has taken since the dawn of the earth. When viewed through lens unclouded by subjectivity, both types of museums have their own great value in shaping and filling the minds of generations with wonder and inspiration.

At the same time, the 'dumbing down' of museums may not be entirely detrimental; it may simply be a way to make information more accessible to all denominators of the public, even if it is an unintended consequence of selling more tickets. Museums are not the first to 'dumb down' exhibits, with tours around other national landmarks such as Alcatraz in the United States of America which rely on shock value renditions of horrendous prison conditions to garner more unwilling visitors. If such national historical landmarks warrant funding, being guilty of the same sin as some museums, it is conceivable that museums are too deserving of much funding for the same purpose of education and inspiration through what they present.

On another note, museums are worthy of the large sums of money spent on them due to the role they play in research - a role often unsung by the public due to ignorance. Curators and scientists in museums, when they are not keeping exhibits in order, analyse and study the contents of exhibits to uncover trends in the evolution of nature and possibly new discoveries in science. For example, in natural history museums, the study of pollen grains from fossilized plants shows one the effect of climate change in the way that plants may adapt their methods of reproduction via transmission of pollen grains. This, in turn, allows humans of the present to predict how landscapes may change as climate fluctuates, providing ample opportunity for the innovation of strategies to cope with a changing planet. If funding of museums should shut down, strides in research would be lost forever. Therefore, hefty investment in museums are worthwhile and highly deserved.

Museums also act as our link between the past and the present, making the triumphs and horrors of the past eternal and forever raw in the human psyche. Museums specific to countries show citizens their heritage, allowing them to appreciate a rich and sustained heritage or to mourn its loss keenly, maintaining a sense of identity in an

otherwise soulless nation. For example, in Singapore, the National Gallery and Museum used to be the old Supreme Court while the palace of the Sultan was converted into the Malay Heritage Centre. This ensures that Singapore, a globalized metropolis, captures a fleeting national identity. At the same time, museums commemorating wars or victories hold great meaning for the world, whether or not they are specific to a country. The Holocaust Museums in Auschwitz, Germany situated in concentration camps ravaged by the vestiges of time and sullied with the blood of a million Jews serve as a chilling reminder to the world of the consequences of genocide and racial cleansing and why such travesties should never be repeated. On a more personal level, they communicate to one the sanctity of life and the precious, fragile nature of peace. Museums are our link to our humanity and identity, even as on the surface they may simply appear to commemorate world events. As such, the vast sums of money spent on museums are definitely merited, for the remembrance of peace and humanity is priceless.

In conclusion, I believe that museums do merit the vast sums spent on them owing to the functions they serve in inspiring the populace, feeding the imagination, acting as hubs of discovery and finally acting as a physical reminder of what it means to be human. In that, museums are special that they serve the same function as the various laboratories, national landmarks, homes, places of worship, cinemas and every other buildings of significance worldwide, except that they encapsulate all of these establishments in a single place, promoting wonder, peace and discovery. Museums pass the souls of humanity's ancestors to the current generation. For that, I believe that museums do not only merit the large sums of money spent on them, they are priceless.

Comments:

A very engaging piece even though the introduction could have been better! Excellent use of language.

Do museums merit the vast sums of money spent on them?

By Sarah Liew Min Yi (16S35)

Museums are hardly on the top of the list of activities you would think of doing when wondering how to spend your free time. Museums today are often associated with the ideas of "boring" and "information overload", especially by the younger generations, who see no value in visiting museums. Yet, countries spend millions of dollars each year on museums, by offsetting the price of museum tickets, or funding operations and research projects. If such large amounts of money are being spent on museums globally, indeed there must be some value in them that majority of the general public are unaware of. Personally, I think that museums are essential to society, as they challenge us to reflect on our past so that we may progress, are hubs of education and research, and also develop and instil values in us. Hence museums are worth the heavy funding they receive.

Many do argue that museums are becoming irrelevant in society today, where information can easily be found online without the inconvenience of making a trip to a museum. The advancements in technology allow information, pictures and even artefacts to be captured virtually through programmes such as 3D technology, thus making museums obsolete. However, one cannot fully trust the information presented online and may have to filter through many pages before finding accurate sources, which can be highly inefficient. It would be much easier to pay a direct visit to a museum, where the information presented has high credibility and further explanations can be found in the museum guides which are available to visitors. Museums facilitate hands-on learning, and this can be more engaging than online learning. For instance, the Museum of Toronto showcases fossils of dinosaurs and other extinct species, with information of where they were located and what their diets and lifestyles must have been like. This information was made known through the research of scientists working at the museum, who were only able to carry out their projects and make new discoveries through the funding of the museum. Therefore, museums present opportunities for research and better learning experiences, and merit the large amounts of funding spent on them.

Furthermore, museums represent a preservation of culture, of which history and art are intertwined and serve important roles in our future development. History museums showcase our past, reminding us of our cultural traditions and major events that have impacted our current way of life. Art museums also portray this, as art is often used as expression of our way of life. For example, the Singapore National Gallery recently held an art exhibition about the British colonial legacy. The art pieces, ranging from paintings to sculptures to literature, showed how those in the past had responded to British colonial rule, either with discontentment or respect for the British. This shows that art and history collections in museums can express the views of the public, and by showcasing them to new audiences, can challenge them to think about their own stand and reflect about the issue. This develops critical thinking and will affect future decisions they make as they learn to consider situations with a pinch of salt. Therefore, museums do merit the vast sums of money spent on them, as they challenge society to reflect and think critically through the art and history displayed.

In addition, museums can develop mindsets and instil values in the people. US army museums showcasing new advanced military weapons and machinery, coupled with stories of brave

battles fought in the past, would indeed fill the hearts of US citizens with national pride, and a sense of nationalism that they belong to a powerful country. On the contrary, tourists visiting such US army museums would nonetheless develop a sense of awe too, but also a sense of fear towards the USA's military power, which can help deter other countries from threatening the USA. Another example is that of the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore. This museum showcases artefacts of Asian cultures, such as their ethnic costumes and handmade pottery or silverware. This exposes Singaporeans to the cultures of our nearby neighbours, contributing to the development of an open mindset towards foreigners. This is essential to our society so that we may live harmoniously even as there is an influx of foreigners into Singapore. Thus, museums are worth the funding they receive, as they play significant roles in shaping the mindsets and values of people to better the society.

Lastly, museums are important sources of inspiration to youths today, especially those in the arts scene. In Singapore, careers in banking, law and medicine are often the most emphasised. Many parents here are conservative and pressure their children into pursuing such "prestigious" careers. If their children wanted to pursue something unconventional such as the arts, most parents would not approve. This is due to the lack of confidence in the local arts scene, where artists often struggle to find a stable income and many eventually give up their dreams. This is where museums play a significant role. The emergence of new art museums in recent times, such as the Art Science Museum and National Gallery, shows how this apprehension towards the arts is shifting. These art museums often curate works of local artists, helping them to get a footing in the arts industry and showcasing their talents to a larger audience. Museums are thus essential in supporting the Singapore arts scene, and with a better outlook in the arts industry, many young artists may be inspired to pursue their passion in the arts. Over time, this would contribute to a bustling arts scene in Singapore. Therefore, museums play an important role in the arts scene to support and inspire, and hence merit the vast sums of money spent on them.

In conclusion, museums are highly essential to our society. They facilitate research and education in ways that technology cannot, and encourage visitors to think critically to make better decisions. Museums also shape societal values and mindsets, and can inspire youths through the support they provide in the arts sector. Despite the heavy bills they incur from their daily operations to their research projects, the benefits they bring to society make them definitely worth funding. Therefore, museums do merit the vast sums of money spent on them.

Comments:

Overall, Sarah, this is well-written and a joy to read. You have covered a range of arguments and provided appropriate examples for support. A little too Singapore-centric though. More references to museums in other countries and how they have evolved over the years to stay relevant would be good. Nevertheless, a good job!



Is the library redundant in today's world?

By Clara Toh Enci (15A14)

Massive shelves filled to the brim with books from all over the world, lined up neatly one after another, in a labyrinth that book worms would love to get lost in. The library has always been a place that houses both common and rare collections of literal reads and factual writings, acting as a platform for people to gain access to hardcover copies for no cost at all. The library has expanded to contain a wider variety of readings in the modern world, including newspaper and magazines, not forgetting multimedia devices such as CDs and computers for further entertainment and research purposes. Hence, this house of information cannot be deemed as unnecessary in modern society, as it is still an important venue for research, work and entertainment. Naysayers may say that the increasing pace of technological improvements has devalued the use of the library, but it should not be completely deemed redundant.

The library, known as an area of pin-drop silence, has become and still is much appreciated as a conducive study and work environment. Some people are unable to work productively in noisy environments, constantly seeking quiet and peaceful surroundings to maximise their concentration. The library is a viable option, not only boasting a peaceful and almost soundless atmosphere, but with many also being fully air-conditioned and providing comfort to its users. It is common to see a multitude of students lining up outside the National Library in Singapore before its opening hours, just to have a place for conducive study. With the National Library providing many work tables on most of its floors, including an exclusive affluent lounge to allow students to eat and study in peace, it is a popular option for many youths as a venue to revise their schoolwork. Even working adults see the library as a conducive working environment, with some bringing their laptops to use there. Hence, it is wrong to say that the library is not needed today, as there are many people who still appreciate its conducive work environment.

The library also houses some of the rarest and most priceless books in the world. It also contains materials needed for research, but are tough to attain or are sold at prices that inflict pain on one's wallets. Melbourne's central library is home to Shakespeare's writings, so precious they are kept in glass cabinets for viewing pleasure only. These literary treasures are not available anywhere else in the world, and fans of his work have to travel all the way to Eastern Australia just to admire some of his writings. Hence, one could say that the library is a kind of literary museum. Alongside rare collections are more commonly found materials, which may be a necessary part of any academic's work, but are too costly to obtain just for a few references. The Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, a part of Singapore's National Library, contains factual writings and encyclopaedias on an array of topics ranging from the arts to the sciences. Many university undergraduates writing their thesis paper head down to this library, to search for the references needed to support the arguments in their paper. It can be said that the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library is well-sourced, containing the writings of several well-respected figures on just one aspect of an issue. Hence, the library cannot be perceived as unnecessary in today's world, as it is the treasure core to many priceless reads, as well as valuable research materials that aid man in further broadening knowledge on worldly issues.

However, the increasing fast pace of technological improvements in the 21st century has made the library less patronised. Many websites on the Internet contain catalogues selling electronic books (e-books), which cost less than the hard copies, and with some sources even providing such

books for free. For instance, Amazon has catalogues selling tens of thousands of different books, available for download on one's electronic device, for a much lower cost than buying the hard copy. The latter, compared to a soft copy version of a novel, can cost at least USD 5 more. Google Play is an even more convenient platform for purchasing e-books on one's smartphone or tablet. Prices go as low as USD \$4 for a short novel, which can be subjected to further discounts, or even provided for free on special occasions such as the Christmas season. Thus, instead of borrowing a hardcopy book from the library that has a limited borrowing time averaging 2 weeks, many people opt to purchase e-books that are cheaper and more worthy of their money, a good read that is theirs to keep for a lifetime. With the increasing availability of cheaper e-books, more and more people are choosing to purchase books, rather than be subjected to borrowing with a limited time for reading. In the 21st century, this is especially prevalent as many people cannot afford the time to finish reading a book within the stipulated loan period, as they have other priorities in work or school in today's fast-paced society. Hence, having an e-book to keep with them for a lifetime is a more viable option than visiting the library for a book. Thus, this devalues the importance of the library in today's world.

Many countries, however, are doing their part to keep libraries alive. Campaigns promoting the use of the library as a suitable work space, or even extending the books' loan periods, are solutions to encourage the increased use of the library. For instance, in Singapore, the National Library Board has extended the loan period of hard copy books from two to four weeks, along with the option of renewing the loaned item for an even longer period of time. Thus, the problems faced by today's society in not having ample time to finish reading their loaned book is addressed to a certain extent. This aids the National Library Board in boosting its patron numbers, and the number of items used and borrowed for reference. Therefore, with policies implemented to salvage the dwindling utility of libraries and their resources, the library has not completely lost its relevance and usage in today's world.

The library is a treasured place for many, housing countless materials that provide information and insight to worldly issues. Hence, despite the decreasing utility of the libraries due to technology, and the lack of time to borrow reading materials from libraries, there are other functions of the library that still cater to many people today. Therefore, the library has been, and will always be, not just a building that holds dusty collections of books, but a place that we appreciate for its convenience and services.

Comments:

Nicely written. The introduction draws the attention of the reader, and the body paragraphs offer some interesting and insightful examples. However, you could have extended the point on reading and also looked at how the library has evolved with time, for your essay to cover more depth into the issue.



Is the library redundant in today's world?

By Ng Zheng Jie, Glenn (15S43)

Since antiquity, libraries have always been heralded as the symbols of academia and learning, which in turn brought humans out of the Dark Ages, into civilisation and enlightenment. However, with the paradigm shift in the way we preserve and contain our knowledge, many begin to question the library's relevance in modern society, where everything is becoming digitised. Despite this shift in preference from physical to digitised media, I still believe libraries are integral to the functioning of modern society, where they not only form a cornerstone to literacy today, but also evolve to the needs of modernity.

Detractors of this argument believe that libraries are redundant in today's world, as they believe that libraries as physical spaces in cities and economic hubs are draining on local resources. To maintain such infrastructure, in this age when things are constantly evolving, is extremely difficult. Bulky print media is less favoured over storing data in the cloud. As such, to still have a physical building for these resources is simply inefficient and redundant.

As much as the opposing argument holds truth, it is far too myopic to solely consider libraries as economic burdens. Detractors, as such, fail to see the evolution that libraries have also undergone alongside society. Libraries no longer just serve as repositories for books; they have also become modernised and ready to meet the needs of modern citizens. For example, in Singapore, the National Library Board (NLB) has been introducing new means by which patrons can access resources. The introduction of the e-Resources service allows patrons to access online encyclopaedias, microfilm newspapers or even music scores, right in the comfort of their homes. Furthermore, with the march of the Maker Movement, there has been an increasing popularity amongst budding engineers to start makerspaces, a place where they can access novel technologies such as 3D printing and laser cutting in order to prototype their ideas. In Singapore's Jurong Regional Library, the NLB has set up such a space for these interest groups, demonstrating the library's capacity to evolve alongside society. Hence, libraries are no longer just seen as economic burdens on modern society, but rather as dynamic institutions of learning that grow with time.

Furthermore, libraries still play a key role in modern society, as they are a key facet to literacy in the modern world. As much as society is moving toward the fields of science and engineering, there still exists the need for literacy. Libraries serve this need as their resources help individuals learn to read not only on a page, but also in pictures and images to aid with their visual literacy. This is particularly important for the impoverished societies in our modern world, which still require the basic skills of literacy to advance in education, as it harnesses the ability to lift them out of poverty. For example, in Curitiba, Brazil, there are libraries located all around the city. These libraries are widely accessible to the children in the area, where they can not only read the books inside, but also stay within the library, providing them a safe place to learn if their homes are unconducive. Hence, it can be seen that libraries still hold an important purpose in today's society, where it is a crucial mechanism that builds literacy: a skill so intertwined with the economy and society. It can be said that without libraries, there might be more illiterate individuals.

Lastly, libraries are still important in today's world, as they are a means through which we can preserve past knowledge and traditions with the resources they hold. Despite our growth as a globalised world and our attempts at breaking national boundaries, we still draw our identities from

tradition and history, which the library serves to preserve and protect. These sources of our history lie safely within the walls of the libraries, ready for anyone to access and learn. For example, to preserve old recounts of history like oral recounts of the Japanese occupation or the written archives of Singapore's growth as a nation, the National Heritage Board has partnered with NLB to come up with exhibitions and accessible resources, to allow the public contact with history and culture. Take, for instance, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. in the United States. It is the largest library in the world, holding over 2 thousand different manuscripts, texts, films and even music scores, dating back to America's independence. These archives, although inaccessible to the public, serve as a physical source of history that is key to the American identity. Thus, it can be seen that libraries still hold a special significance in today's society, in aiding efforts to preserve tradition, history and culture which would otherwise be lost to the corrosive action of time.

In a nutshell, libraries are still relevant in today's world, and should not be obsolete. They continually evolve to meet the needs of modern society, while still serving their roles as pillars of literacy and as preservers of knowledge and culture. Hence, it is still too early to pull the plug on libraries.

Comments:

You know, Glenn, every paragraph really was a gem, but there were only 4 of them! And the first was extremely brief! And you didn't address the reality of the digital age which you alluded to in the intro. No enough balance. Loads of potential base! Just peak at the right time!

Is food merely an everyday necessity?

By Mai Ting Kai (17S31)

Fundamentally speaking, food is any source of nourishment that provides Man energy and vitamins pertinent for our survival. Following our earliest records dating back to more than 100,000 years ago, food had humble beginnings in the form of simple nuts, berries and roots. As Man evolved to become more intelligent, so did the sophistication in the taste for food; we learnt how to use fire to make food tastier, and food thus evolved from here into a multitude of varieties and types as history continued down its path to the present, from soups to bread to meat. In the present context, food is now no longer just a necessity, but rather a way to enjoy life. Leaving impoverished countries starving for food out of the question, food has become a way of life, involving many varieties, tastes, flavours and textures, all coming together in a sort of potpourri to fulfil our innate desire for delicious food. As such, in the modern context, in many developed parts of the world, food is no longer merely an everyday necessity, but instead a pleasure to live with.

Food used to be merely nourishment, but now has also taken on a new role in our lives – that is, to provide us with pleasure and comfort. This idea is especially prominent in the concept of fine dining. High-class restaurants providing sophisticated delicacies are growing in popularity around the world, employing the latest techniques in food science such as molecular gastronomy, the art of using chemical methods to prepare food. Fine dining provides us with a smorgasbord of appetizing, irresistible food varieties that would make anyone happy just to have a bite. Thus, we can see from here a correlation, that increasing numbers of people are now willing to pay for more expensive food to obtain that ‘high’ from consuming the said food, further reinforcing the notion that food has transcended beyond just being something to fill the stomach and sate the appetite. This can be supported by considering Singapore’s heartlands; in recent years, dedicated restaurants providing high-class delicacies such as Gordon Ramsay’s “Bread Street Kitchen” are growing in numbers to capitalize on the country’s growing hunger for delicious food. Therefore, this is an instance on how food is now more than just a necessity.

Another way to show that food is more than an everyday necessity can be seen in a different type of pleasure food provides, namely entertainment. Turn on any television set in the world and browse the channels; one is likely to find a cooking show, a food competition, or a documentary on food. Basically, food is now also used to bring us pleasure via entertainment, either as spectators or participants. The growth rate of the popularity of “food-for-sport” is unprecedentedly high – everyday, many new cooking channels are aired, hundreds of cooking competitions are held, and thousands of documentaries are played. In addition, many people treat their “food-for-sport” seriously, with new concepts such as competitive eating coming into the limelight. For example, Japanese competitive eater Takeru Kobayashi, 39, holds eight Guinness Records for achievements such as eating many hotdogs and meatballs. He trains for annual hotdog competitions by chewing mouthfuls of chewing gum at a time, and scarfing down cups of water and hotdogs-on-a-bun, alternating between the two, before hurling everything up only to repeat the process. Therefore, there is an undeniable notion that food is no longer just an everyday necessity, but also a form of entertainment as well.

On the other side of the coin, the aforementioned idea about food being not just a necessity cannot hold water in impoverished or under-developed countries around the world, such as Ethiopia and North Korea. There is a shocking disparity in comparing the two worlds, where one has too much food and uses it for pleasure, and the other barely having any to the point of millions dying from starvation annually. Obviously, in these places, food is literally to die for, and food is eaten

simply for survival, very much like in the early beginnings of Man. However, the lack of food can be very extreme in some places, for example, North Korea. Referencing the book "Dear Leader: My Escape from North Korea" written by Jang Jin-Sung, a high-ranking government official who defected and sought asylum in South Korea, the food situation forces people to literally eat off the floor. There are many cases of how people resort to eating the grass, leaves and even trees and plants growing in plants just to live another day, or how people would sell off their mothers and sisters as slaves just to sate their hunger. This exemplifies that despite food being a luxury to many in the world, there are even more people that find food to be a necessity that is hard-pressed to come by.

Ultimately, to people living in developed countries, food is no longer just a necessity to live by. It is instead a way of life, where it is utilised to bring pleasure in various forms such as fine dining and food-related entertainment. However, there is still a large majority in the world who treat food as a necessity, mainly attributed to an environment where food is scarce. Therefore, to strictly answer the question, food is no longer merely an everyday necessity to some, but we must keep in mind that to a large majority, it still is.

Comments:

Very well written piece - sensible arguments with consistent use of illustration which are relevant and current. Wide range of vocabulary, interesting turns of phrase and a good flow of ideas. Scope can be broadened further for a more comprehensive discussion.

Is food merely an everyday necessity?

By Lau Yi Yi (16A11)

It is common knowledge that food is universal — the fact that all living things need air, food and water to live is an oft-repeated axiom in science textbooks and it is almost impossible to escape its ubiquitous and necessary presence in our lives. Food is, without a doubt, an everyday necessity; we need to eat to ensure that our bodies have enough energy to function and, today, food is still a highly relevant concern to global sustenance. Non-profit initiatives such as the Food Bank and World Food Programme are still striving to ensure that developing countries with food shortages can meet basic dietary needs of the people and alleviate the perennial issues of hunger and malnutrition. Food, at its core, is understood to be a universal right and an everyday necessity; nevertheless, I believe that it has so much more to offer and it is a complex, multi-faceted aspect of life that plays a much more significant role in our society than we think it does.

It is first necessary to establish that food is an essential part of daily life and it is the only source of energy for the human body to carry out life processes. The practice of eating at least three balanced meals a day pervades most societies regardless of culture and nationality; not only that, it is regarded as the benchmark for health and wellbeing. The Health Promotion Board of Singapore constantly stresses the need for a balanced diet and healthy eating through nationwide campaigns and initiatives, such as implementing nutritious meal guidelines in schools. This evidently shows how we accord such importance to food simply because it is such an indispensable necessity in our lives and it definitely contributes to the health and wellbeing of a country's citizens.

However, it is myopic to regard food merely as an everyday necessity because of its pivotal role in shaping cultural and national identity. It is exactly because food is something that we inevitably encounter every day, that it is an intimate and complex aspect of the human condition with a longstanding tradition since time immemorial. Food, therefore, becomes a mechanism for cultures and ethnicities to express certain features or specialties which often reflect the ideals and values of different societies. This way, food transcends the boundaries of daily life and individual diets, becoming cuisines that serve as national emblems and sources of national pride. One key example that exhibits this is Japanese cuisine; the tea ceremony is an icon of Japanese culture and its detailed, heavily spiritual nature reflects its Zen Buddhist roots as well as the importance of harmony and humility in Japanese society. Traditional Japanese haute cuisine, also known as kaiseki ryori, has a reputation for using only the freshest of seasonal ingredients as a display of reverence to nature and the environment. Not only that, Japanese cuisine pushes beyond the barriers of locality and has made a name for itself around the globe, with countries like the United States and China offering their own versions of Japanese cuisine as well. All these are testament to how food can serve as a vibrant cultural export and an irreplaceable cornerstone of national identity.

In addition, food is also a powerful social force especially when harnessed with the limitless capabilities of technology and new media. Social gatherings and communal life have always revolved around food since the beginning of time; yet what makes it especially potent today is the use of food as a status symbol of social life, as shared in the form of Instagram photos and blog posts. The 'cafe hopping' scene in Singapore is a classic example of this; with the rising affluence of the middle class, more and more people have the time and luxury to dine at trendy, bohemian cafes. The demand is real: in the year 2015 alone, about 370 new cafes had opened and it is no surprise that they are often located at upper-middle class districts such as Tiong Bahru and Holland Village. The popularity of these cafes also comes at a time when the emergence of social media has allowed for greater proliferation of food culture; should one walk to any hipster café, it is almost a given to find youngsters snapping away at their food while they are eating. While some have criticised such behaviour to be mindless and superficial, it is undeniable that food is no longer treated as a mere

necessity. In this day and age, it has become a tool for people to display certain behaviours to assert how 'trendy' they are, and one cannot ignore how it has influenced the way we view food as a vital ingredient in our social lives.

Furthermore, in the age of consumerism and modernity, food also reflects and shapes different trends and patterns in our lifestyle choices. The food and beverage industry is a capitalist behemoth that offers virtually everything ranging from fast food to organically-produced artisanal cuisine. Given that there is an undeniably intricate relationship between consumers and food, the choices and options which we are offered with invariably influence how we choose to lead our lives. The most telling example of this would be fad diets. Veganism has been on the rise since the 2010s and many people, especially young women in developed countries, are now seeking healthier alternatives to a largely unhealthy food industry that is ridden with preservatives and other harmful substances. Many internet personalities on sites like Instagram and Youtube now specialise in 'vegan blogging' and share tips on how to prepare homemade vegan meals and such. Their influence is widespread, with some of them having millions of followers. These reflect a stark change in mindset from the past to present. Vegan diets were definitely not a necessity to many decades ago, but now, more and more people are embracing it as an instrumental basis for their lifestyles. This illustrates how food has a significant impact on how we choose to lead our lives and in the light of this, it evidently pushes beyond the mundane boundaries of mere survival.

In conclusion, food is a universal necessity for all of us — we literally cannot live without it. However, it is highly near-sighted to merely view it as a singular aspect of daily life, and it is only right that we recognise the vast benefits it can give us for a truly meaningful life.

Comments:

Your last argument seems similar to the previous point stated in the fourth paragraph. Arguments could have been structured better to ensure clearer differentiation. Nonetheless, an insightful essay here that demonstrates your knowledge and passion for food! I especially like the refreshing and diverse examples given here. You have strong potential in language but do continue to challenge yourself further in the use of vocabulary.

To what extent is traditional food still relevant to your society?

By Nicole Lee Suet Kay (16S34)

Traditional food has always played an important role in societies around the world. They often represent something symbolic in their history and play an important part in their respective culture. However, as times are changing and evolving rapidly, many question the relevance of such traditional food in Singaporean society. In my opinion, traditional food still plays an important and relevant role in 21st century Singapore due to its cultural significance and the presence of people who are willing to pass down and perpetuate the values embodied in these traditional delights.

Critics of my view feel that traditional food is no longer applicable in today's age as the purpose of food is different. Traditionally, food played the crucial role of feeding hunger, forging bonds among those eating together and being culturally symbolic. For example, *shou mian* or longevity noodles is a traditional Chinese dish consisting of one very long strand of Chinese noodle; it is believed that whoever eats it will be blessed with a long and healthy life. However, the purpose of food is changing with the times. While food still serves its basic role of feeding people, new meanings of food have emerged with the rise of social media and the Internet. More than ever, food now serves as a form of entertainment, gastronomic and aesthetic pleasure. Food-centred accounts on Instagram garner millions of avid followers from around the world, giving rise to new concoctions. An example of this is the emergence of rainbow-coloured food such as rainbow bagels and waffles. While such artificially-coloured food is pleasing to the eye, it serves no practical purpose but to garner interest in online communities that only focuses on what is attention grabbing. In this day and age, traditional food and its symbolism gets swept away with no difficulty in the sea of new, creative, eye-catching foods.

Secondly, traditional foods are difficult to prepare in modern-day Singapore, where there is a strong emphasis on profit-making ideals like efficiency and automation-driven production. Food-making businesses are increasingly turning to machinery and automation to produce foodstuff in order to increase production and save on labour costs. As a result, large-scale businesses might choose to produce simple and convenient foodstuff for mass consumption instead of traditional dishes which involve a complicated production process and usually requires the expertise of professionals who have been producing that one food for decades. For instance, the Peranakan delicacy *buah keluak*, a special nut, is slowly fading into oblivion due to the high level of skill required to ferment the flesh of the nut which is poisonous to humans if not done correctly. Similarly, *shou mian* is difficult to prepare and cook as experienced chefs are needed to make and boil the noodle properly to ensure that it does not break during preparation, a sign of bad luck. A *shou mian* shop in Plaza Singapura had recently closed down due to the lack of experienced chefs. Thus, it can be seen that with the rise of modern ideals, the existence of traditional foods is threatened, bringing into question its relevance in modern Singaporean society.

However, I still feel that in Singapore, traditional food still plays an important and significant role in society, going by the numerous traditional festivals that we still celebrate yearly to this day. Traditional food plays a symbolic role in many of these traditional festivals celebrated in Singapore, and are symbols of the values, morals, traditions and history behind the race and religion. This can be seen in examples such as the importance of eating *tang yuan*, also known as Chinese rice balls, during family reunion dinners to symbolise the passing of a year. Many traditional foods carry a symbolic meaning with them, such as longevity, fertility or intelligence, and many people, both

young and old, insist of following such cultural practices due to superstition or just to keep up with cultural beliefs. Similarly, traditional events such as the Ramadhan period before Hari Raya Haji carry the significance of eating traditional foods as a way to bond the family and share cultural ideas and values. Before and after dawn during Ramadhan, Muslim families gather together to eat traditional Malay food like *Nasi Padang* and *kueh-kueh* after a day of fasting. Thus, as long as the practices of such traditional cultural festivals continue, traditional food will stay relevant and mainstream in Singapore society.

Additionally, due to the presence of elderly people in our society, the production and consumption of such traditional food have to continue on as they demand for it. While young people nowadays might not view traditional foods as importantly as they used to, the elderly in society still see traditional food as important and necessary today. For example, while the use of wild, endangered animals in the modern world is frowned upon and greatly discouraged by young people who are aware and understand the threat we as humans pose to wild animals and the ecosystems, many elderly people consider tradition to be more important. This can be seen in the traditional Chinese dish, shark's fin soup, which has been a must in traditional Chinese weddings for decades. The use of sharks' fins has been increasingly debatable and controversial, but the older generation still insist on having it served at weddings so as to continue the tradition. Singapore was named by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as the world's second largest consumer of sharks' fins. Thus, it can be seen that tradition still holds sway in the minds of elderly Singaporeans, who are not open to changing their customs in order to keep up with the times. Traditional food hence stays relevant and prevalent in Singaporean society.

Lastly, the presence of traditional food in Singapore is still strong due to the many Singaporeans, mostly young adults, who see the importance of such food and make the effort to continue producing and consuming it. Due to the increase in media exposure and education, many young Singaporeans are realising the cultural benefits of keeping the tradition going. Local social media influencers like Dan's Food Diary, Miss Tam Chiak and Eatbook, visit and review stores that sell traditional food and share them on social media in order to garner interest for such delicacies. Many young adults are also providing demand for traditional snacks like crystal gem biscuits and wheel crackers, a traditional Indian savoury snack, which remind them of their childhood days. This encourages firms to produce these traditional snacks even if they are mostly absent from large-scale and commercial supermarkets. Another factor that encourages businesses to reinvent traditional food is the opportunity for small businesses to flourish in Singapore. There are governmental schemes that help and financially support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to improve their business strategy and extend a safety net for them to venture into selling traditional food. Hawker centres also allow Singaporeans to set up small businesses to sell traditional food. For example, Heavenly Snacks, a store at Circuit Road Market selling *muah chee*, a traditional rice cake with peanut topping, managed to pique the interest of young Singaporeans by redesigning their storefront and using packaging with a minimalistic, simple design. This appealed to the tastes of new generation Singaporeans. Similarly, SMEs like Yah Kun Kaya Toast and Toast Box sell traditional Singaporean breakfast of kaya toast and *kopi* in a simple, clean and modern setting to attract young Singaporeans, while keeping their cooking and preparation methods traditional, such as using cheese cloth to prepare the coffee beans. In this way, many businesses are reinventing and redesigning traditional Singaporean food in order to adapt with time, and also appeal to changing preferences. This is how traditional food stays relevant and applicable in this day and age.

In conclusion, while traditional food is in danger of being swept away by modern ideals and preferences, the efforts of Singaporeans who value the meaning and significance behind such food help it stay afloat. By rethinking traditional food to keep up with the times, the traditional food industry can remain a fierce competitor in modern times as the years of history embedded in such food will add to its timeless appeal.

Comments:

A lovely piece! A refreshing read! Really excellent, especially when accomplished under time pressure! 😊



To what extent is traditional food still relevant in your society?

By Ooi Wen Ting (16A15)

"The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." This was often impressed upon young women of marriageable age in the past, when women were expected to take on the role of homemaker. One of their duties was to ensure that the meals of the family were taken care of. Despite the seemingly archaic mindset that this statement perpetuates, the statement is still applicable today with a slight twist; not only does good food capture a man's heart, it captures everyone's as well. In a food paradise like Singapore which is increasingly integrated into the global community, Singaporeans are faced with more and more diverse food choices. Thus, some may say that food that holds cultural value has become a thing of the past. Yet, there are still instances where traditional food is still important in Singapore. It is not only a distinguishing factor that draws tourism, but also symbolic of our country's multi-racial and multi religious social fabric. For the young and old, traditional food is a token of remembrance of one's roots. Therefore, it would be erroneous and parochial to deem traditional food as irrelevant, given that it is still applicable in many ways.

Some may posit that in the face of Westernization and globalization, the influx of luxury foreign foodstuffs has rendered traditional food obsolete. This may be true for youths and young adults. The quest for exotic Western food has materialized in the form of numerous food bloggers who often visit cafes and upload their social media posts on non-traditional food, like "eggs benedict pancakes" and pasta. Youths who follow the social media pages of these bloggers are often influenced by Western Ideals and what is considered "cool" and "hipster". Even the renowned bakery, Tiong Bahru Bakery which is supposedly famous for its traditional pastries has changed its menu to cater to the tastebuds of consumers by introducing a wide range of Western and non-traditional pastries like croissants, tarts and danishes. The obsession with non-local, non-traditional food may be due to the popular notion that compared to Western food, local food is "boring" and "uncool". Non local delicacies like sushi and burritos from Japan and Mexico respectively are much more appealing to the younger generation, and this change in tastes and preferences is not only seen in the consumption patterns of youths, but also in the proliferation of stores selling non-local and non-traditional food. Franchises like Stuff'd, Nando's, Sushi Express and Mad Jack are now the to-go dining places for youths, a far cry from the traditional bowl of "bak chor mee" or "mee goreng" that the older generation prefer. Thus, the shift in food preferences seems to suggest that traditional food is being replaced and has become archaic.

However, it cannot be denied that for most Singaporeans, traditional food still remains as a source of familiarity and creates a sense of rootedness. As food is highly emotive due to its engagement with the senses, consuming traditional food allows people to remember and connect with their heritage. During special occasions like the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival, mooncakes and rice dumplings are eaten to commemorate important events in history. Rice dumplings are traditionally eaten to commemorate the death of poet Qu Yuan, who would rather commit suicide than divulge the secrets of his country. For the old, the consumption of these food as a yearly affair probably evokes strong feelings of nostalgia of times bygone, when their parents told them the stories behind these festivals and why certain food was eaten during these occasions. For the young, it is a much needed reminder of the rich culture and heritage that they are part of. Traditional food is not only restricted to the Chinese. Even in everyday life, the traditional way of eating for members of the Indian community is to scoop rice into their hands, mix it with gravy to shape into sizeable balls. The unique eating style creates a homely atmosphere, a sense of belonging, and shapes one's identity. Similarly, many Chinese in Singapore swear by the traditional breakfast of toasted bread with kaya and butter, accompanied with half boiled eggs. The comeback of traditional food is evident in the marketing of Yakun and Breadtalk's Old School Ice Cream Sandwich. It is thus obvious that facing the waves of globalization and diluting nationalism,

traditional food can act as an anchor for Singaporeans as it provides the sense of home that Singaporeans need and crave for. The ubiquity of traditional food, relevant not only during special occasions but also in our daily lives, is testament of the fact that it is still relevant in Singapore today.

Additionally, the appreciation of different types of traditional food showcases Singapore's multicultural and multi-religious social fabric, enforcing the need for social harmony amidst growing global instability. In recent years, Singapore's society has become increasingly diverse, providing a breeding ground for tensions primarily along racial and religious lines. One notable example is the conflict between a Mainland Chinese family and a local Indian family over curry. While curry is more often fragrant and aromatic to the noses of local people, the Chinese family had complained that it was "smelly" and adversely affected their lives. Netizens, in response to the accident, came up with the "Cook-A-Pot-Of-Curry-Day" in appreciation of the traditional Indian delicacy and to show that such racial intolerance in Singapore is not welcomed. Similarly, some stalls in Singapore have modified the traditional "bak chor mee", replacing minced pork with minced chicken so as to cater to the dietary requirements of the Malay Muslim community. These instances show a sensitivity to the needs and practices of different races and religions, especially crucial in Singapore, a melting pot of different cultures and religions. Given the growing trend of intolerance and Islamophobia internationally, Singapore is indeed blessed with the wide variety of traditional food that can bridge the gap among people of different races and religions. Thus, traditional food with its diverse cultural origins has become a potent and valuable binding force, ensuring peace and stability in these tumultuous times.

Finally, the unique nature of traditional food makes it a lucrative source of revenue for Singapore's tourism sector. While young Singaporeans may view local dishes without much enthusiasm as they are used to seeing them daily, traditional cuisine is often beguiling and exciting for foreigners as it is different from what they are used to seeing. In a survey conducted by Singapore Business Review, more than half of the tourists surveyed said that they were willing to spend more than \$50 on a traditional food tour in Singapore. For food lovers around the world, Singapore is definitely a to-go spot to try out local delicacies and immerse in the traditional old school charm of food in Singapore. Singapore also gained global recognition when world renowned chef Gordon Ramsay specially flew in to find contestants among hawkers for his television programme. Even Bengawan Solo, a traditional nonya 'kueh' shop, is internationally famous for its light and fully Pandan Cake, which tourists deem a must-buy when they visit Singapore. The cake, a commonplace food item, is often given to friends and family back home for a taste of Singapore. Given that tourism contributes almost 10% of Singapore GDP, and that food is such a significant factor drawing tourists to Singapore, it is undeniable that food, especially traditional and unique ones, are crucial in contributing to Singapore's tourism sector. The novelty and exotic nature of our traditional food to foreigners entice them to fly to Singapore. Hence, to deem traditional food irrelevant would be erroneous for it is a distinguishing factor that gives Singapore a competitive edge in tourism.

In conclusion, while some may see traditional food as a thing of the bygone era, it is in truth, anything but that. In an increasingly globalized, competitive and diverse world, traditional food plays a pivotal role in cementing a sense of rootedness, acting as a potent force to bind the social fabric, and contributing to tourism. Perhaps those who do not see the allure of traditional food need to look more closely around them, for if they do, they will see for themselves the tremendous worth of traditional food which Singapore offers.

Comments:

Generally very well written with just a few minor issues. You have included many illustrations of traditional food in your society but you could have focused more on their importance and relevance today. Consider the hassle of preparation especially in a modern society as well as the adaptation of such food to the lifestyle of today.

Science & Technology

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"We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the Universe. That makes us something very special."

Stephen Hawking

"The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science."

Albert Einstein

"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

Marie Curie

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Is science and technology advancing too quickly for the good of mankind?

By Kenneth Loi (15S35)

Throughout history, there have been many scientific discoveries and technological advancements made that greatly improved the physical well-being of humans. For example, Penicillin was discovered in World War 1 and proved to be extremely useful, as it helped soldiers fight against bacterial infections on wounds and heal faster, saving countless lives. Transportation technology has improved significantly as well, allowing humans to travel from one end of the planet to the other in less than a day. Currently, science and technology is advancing at an unprecedented rate. Some individuals argue that it is advancing too quickly for the good of mankind, as mankind is still susceptible to human flaws and the full consequences and side-effects of scientific and technological advancements is not known. Others believe that science and technology is advancing at a rate that is sustainable for the good of mankind, since there are still many medical problems yet to be solved and humans are capable of preventing one another from crossing ethical boundaries in the development of new technology. Science and technology is hence advancing at a sustainable and beneficial rate, so long as mankind considers the ethical implications that might arise.

However, some people believe that science and technology is advancing too quickly for the good of mankind, as mankind has always been susceptible to innate human flaws such as greed, ambition, and the thirst for power. These characteristics are inherent human flaws, and cannot be completely eradicated. Since science is amoral and serves only to fulfil its functions, it is ultimately the user who decides how it is used. Thus, if the user intends to use certain types of benign technology for malicious intents, it will harm other human beings and hence be detrimental to mankind, especially in this day and age when science and technology is advancing at an unprecedented rate. For example, advancements and breakthroughs in nuclear technology enable countries to easily fire ballistic nuclear missiles at other countries, and countries such as Russia have the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Therefore, with so much power under the control of mankind, and with mankind being susceptible to human flaws, the thirst for power might result in countries employing scientific and technological tools to fulfil their selfish aims. This can cause many lives to be lost, especially if nuclear weapons were deployed, resulting in disaster for mankind.

In addition, science and technology is advancing too quickly for mankind, as the full consequences and side-effects of these advancements are not known. This means that even though certain scientific and technological products might be extremely useful and beneficial today, they might have severe consequences on mankind in the future, especially if these products have been considered 'safe' for consumption and the majority of individuals have been consuming them. For example, rapid scientific developments have resulted in the development of Genetically Modified (GM) crops that can now be grown under harsh conditions, or have additional nutritional value beneficial for consumers. One example of a GM crop is Golden Rice, which is genetically modified to have Vitamin A, essential for maintaining eye health. Thus, it seems that scientific and technological advancements have benefitted mankind by mitigating food shortages. However, the full impact of these scientific and technological advancements is not yet known, and the numerous studies on the possible health consequences of GM food have been inconclusive. Hence, the uncertainty surrounding the side effects and health consequences of such developments is a cause for concern.

On the other hand, science and technology can be said to be advancing at a sustainable rate because new solutions to existing medical problems are still being discovered, showing how there are still issues science and technology have yet to solve. For example, intensive research and tests

are currently being conducted to search for possible cures to diseases that threaten the survival of mankind such as Ebola, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and cancer. However, no cures for these diseases have been discovered yet, resulting in the loss of many lives each day. Many families have lost loved ones as a result of such diseases, showing how they still threaten the survival of mankind up till today. Scientific and technological advancements provide the glimmer of hope that patients will soon receive their cure. Therefore, science and technology is advancing at a sustainable rate, and should even be sped up in order to find cures to harmful diseases.

In addition, science and technology are advancing at a sustainable rate beneficial for mankind, as there are legal and ethical limits in place to ensure that new inventions are made with the appropriate intentions. Legal and ethical limits function as a check on scientists and researchers, ensuring that they do not get too caught up with the possibilities that science and technology has to offer, such that they compromise on the unique human aspects of empathy and compassion. Ethical and legal limits hence function as a check on our moral compass, and ensures that scientific and technological advancements are being made at a sustainable rate beneficial for mankind.

In conclusion, science and technology is not advancing too quickly for the good of mankind, but is advancing at a sustainable rate. Furthermore, the question's use of the words "too quickly" implies a negative connotation regarding the advancements in science and technology. However, advancements in science and technology are not necessarily bad, and this is exemplified by breakthroughs in the agricultural and medical sectors. For instance, the Da Vinci robotic surgical system has been used over 20,000 times, saving many human lives. Therefore, science and technology have advanced at a sustainable rate for the good of mankind.

Comments:

Provide more illustrations for your points. Morals and ethics, moral dilemmas involving new technologies need to be substantiated with illustrations. Nevertheless, the points are brought across clearly, which is good. Your conclusion can be improved - you should not introduce new points or examples when closing your essay.

Is science and technology advancing too quickly for the good of mankind?

By Rachel Chua (15S65)

In contrast to a few decades ago, whereby people still went to the wells to collect their daily use of water, it is convenient and within reach for us to take public transport and get to the nearest supermarket to get our groceries. In the olden days, lamps had to be used for students burning the midnight oil but in a modern city of today, the brightness we require at night is available at the simple click of a switch. These developments are possible due to the advancement of science and technology. While certain irresponsible acts have tainted the use of these advancements, it is indeed undeniable that it has brought a tremendous amount of benefits to the lives of mankind, as there are new discoveries in the medical field that saves lives, new developments to curb environmental problems, and also new initiatives to allow more ease and comfort.

Science and technology is definitely not advancing too quickly for the good of mankind because of the rapid progress in the medical sector. It is essential to constantly research on new medications and technology in order to save lives of the terminally ill. This would bring improvements to physical health and allow humans to enjoy a greater life expectancy. Outbreaks of viruses and diseases, such as H1N1 and Ebola, posed a dangerous threat to the survival of humans because such illnesses spread from person to person, with no complete cure at the moment. It is ideal for science and technology to advance quickly to find more solutions for the longevity of mankind. The achievements of many medical institutes can be attributed to the proliferation of science and technology. The American Heart Association has successfully reduced the number of patients with coronary heart disease by 25% in just 8 years. More improvements can be expected as science and technology thrives. Another controversial issue is stem cell development. There were ethical implications as to the practice of this medical research, especially since it involved the destruction of human embryos, which goes against certain religions' beliefs. Major protests of such acts as 'playing God' have deterred the development of this aspect of the medical field. The ball of cells in the human embryo can potentially be developed for those critically ill and in need of a transplant. However, with more advanced research, there has been a partial solution to this ethical dilemma. The discovery of 'induced pluripotent stem' (IPS) makes use of human cells to develop other forms of tissues and organs. This is contrasted with the 'human embryonic stem' cell that involves the use of embryos to engage in such research. While some embryos are still required for present experiments, the IPS has definitely paved a new walkway for the solution to those sickly patients. Owing to the fast paced development of science and technology, such initiatives can save lives and prevent moral implications concurrently, bringing about benefits to mankind in terms of health.

The world population is expected to reach 8.2 billion by 2030, which further advocates for the necessity of science and technology. It would counter the potential shortages of food and energy, and more importantly slow the process of global warming. The Green Revolution is a turning point in the history of mankind. Struggling with scarcity, the high yielding crops have definitely eased the food shortages while the drought resistant crops have better maintained the livelihood of the farmers ploughing tirelessly on the fields. Hydrology models have been developed to ensure a continuous supply of clean and drinkable water for the growing population. Singapore, a leading global hub for science and

technology, developed its technology of NEWater, whereby wastewater is purified to generate water suitable for drinking. This is a milestone for the nation without natural resources, and the key for a sustained supply of water. Singapore has also embarked on desalination, where seawater is reclaimed and purified water is regenerated. The city-state has been importing water from Johor Bahru, but due to the drought Malaysia is facing, Singapore has instead had to supply water to Malaysia. Singapore is reaching the state of self-sufficiency in terms of water supply, and science and technology has a major role to play in this achievement. On a global scale, the consumerism culture has further fueled the crisis of global warming. Such climate change has caused more occurrences of natural disasters and rising sea levels, dangerous to mankind. With science and technology, however, satellite imagery and remote sensing equipment has been in place to monitor the impact of climate change, and can also be used to detect incoming earthquakes, tsunamis and other catastrophes. This would save the lives of mankind if the prediction of such disasters can be made beforehand. The severity of climate change has prompted us to seek new methods of energy production, and to use cleaner sources of energy such as natural gas and solar power. Science and technology is thus relevant in solving the major environmental issues faced by mankind, and is not advancing too quickly since more needs to be done to curb scarcity and hinder the aggravation of global warming.

Science and technology has also led to the invention of autonomous vehicles. Examples include Tesla, Google and nuTonomy for their production of self-driving cars. While the population may still have reservations about these cars, it is nonetheless a growing sector in the transport industry. More tests and research are being conducted to bring the cars to the market, while ensuring safety. For example, it has been reported that the cars are able to cut costs for passengers, as there is no need to hire drivers. It is also predicted that 200,000 lives can be saved in a year due to the multitude of the car's functions. It has a wider range of vision than a human driver, and has also passed a series of tests where the car is subjected to a series of harsh conditions such as heavy rain and on dark roads at night. It can potentially decrease the carelessness of drivers behind the wheel, and promotes the convenience and cheaper use of these vehicles by passengers. It is therefore good for mankind as we can enjoy safer roads and a decreasing in spending in terms of transport, all made possible by the advancements in science and technology.

However, critics may argue that science and technology are advancing too quickly for the good of mankind when it comes to nuclear power. The developments are too rapid for regulations to be made and ensure the safety of mankind. The tragedy of nuclear meltdowns in the Chernobyl disaster and the Fukushima plant led to the release of radioactive materials in the atmosphere, endangering lives. The lives of mankind are at stake, especially when these plants surrender to the forces of Mother Nature, a crisis that cannot be avoided. Recently, North Korea released a warhead missile which landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone. This alarmed nations all over the globe as the missile landed in the area where fishing boats and vessels operate, which poses a threat for mankind. Any further research and development on these nuclear weapons may call for World War 3 as more conflicts of power arise. In response to the threat, South Korea has allowed the implantation of US missiles on its soil as a form of deterrence for national security.

On the other hand, nuclear power will grow to be a source of energy we cannot live without. While it is dangerous, the advancements of science and technology are needed to ensure a safer use of

nuclear plants in order not to threaten human safety. Coal and fossil fuels are depleting in supplies fast and global warming is increasingly worsening. It is with this alternative, powerful source of energy that we can ensure the continuity of survival for mankind. This is especially apparent for the rising demand of energy to fuel the process of urbanization and industrialization. Therefore, the advancement of science and technology is not too quick, because of the need to pursue a greater generation of energy to sustain human development.

All in all, science and technology has proven to have a great impact on human society as we know it. While there are cases of misuse of power and technology, science and technology has still largely brought benefits to mankind. There needs to be regulations to ensure moral implications are reduced to the minimum and laws to prevent government's abuse of power. This would on the whole be better for mankind.

Comments:

A good range of ideas and illustrations is considered. However, the paragraph on autonomous vehicles needs to be linked to how technology is advancing 'too quickly' for the good of mankind, in addition to considering a wider range of new technologies for the scope of the essay.

“Science and technology can solve all of the world’s problems.”

How far do you agree?

By Ooi Wen Ting (16A15)

Advancements in technology and science enabled the human race to improve by leaps and bounds over the last century. Technology enabled us to be connected and paved the road to globalisation, while scientific breakthroughs have solved age-old problems like diseases, hunger and even energy constraints. Yet, science and technology cannot be said to be a panacea. As we enjoy the benefits that science and technology brings us, it is crucial that we are aware of the other issues that they also bring. While science and technology has mitigated the effects of natural disasters worldwide, it is insufficient in eradicating all the issues that mankind face. Hence, though it should be acknowledged that mankind had benefited much from science and technology, it would be an erroneous assumption to say that it can provide a solution to every problem in the world.

Science and technology enabled mankind to protect themselves from naturally occurring calamities. Technologies, such as the Japan Earthquake Reactor Systems and crowdsourcing of information on the website Ushahidi, have minimised the impacts of natural disasters. Without science, mankind would never have understood the way disasters like earthquakes work, and created machines to predict and warn the masses of these disasters. While mankind had always struggled with survival in the face of natural disasters, science and technology help to mitigate the effects by increasing awareness, hence giving people more time to escape from potential areas of destruction. Similarly, science has created the vaccine for polio, and technology has enabled it to be mass produced, thereby lowering the cost of each vaccine dose to less than USD\$1. Technology has also enabled the transportation of polio vaccines worldwide, benefitting the global community. Polio, once a threatening disease to mankind, has been eradicated in most parts of the world today. Hence, the industrialisation and globalisation brought about by technology has worked hand in hand with science to make mankind better off than before, not only for polio victims but other diseases like asthma, cystic fibrosis and many more. Hence, science and technology seems to solve mankind’s challenges with the natural environment, as they provide a solution to these problems.

However, one cannot ignore the limitations of science and technology. Due to the vested interests of individuals, science and technology is unable to provide a solution to the selfish aspect of human nature. Individuals’ greed, avarice and desire for dominance over others are stumbling blocks to the good that science and technology can bring. For example, even though there are earthquake detection technologies available, they are simply not utilised in many parts of the developing world. Rural China, specifically Sichuan, suffered from the devastating impacts of an earthquake, with many school buildings collapsed and children killed. On one hand, one can argue that the earthquake was of great magnitude, and its occurrence during school hours contributed to the large number of casualties. Yet, one cannot ignore the fact that corrupt government officials had siphoned off money intended for the building of these schools, rendering them less stable and more susceptible to the effects of earthquakes. Arguably, the rampant corruption also led to the lack of earthquake detections, as investors shy away from these officials who are only looking to further their private interests. Similarly, the Pakistani government had informed the public that polio vaccines were aimed to infect the children and sterilise them. With the government’s vested interest of holding on to their mandate to rule and

reign over the people, it is hard for science and technology to ameliorate the plight of the disease-stricken. Hence, science and technology are unable to provide benefits to individuals when those in power seize the opportunity to further their interests, at the expense of the common folk.

Despite solving the world's hunger issue, it should be acknowledged that science and technology have brought about a plethora of other problems. Undoubtedly, the Green Revolution has increased food yields exponentially, and strains like the Golden Rice have addressed Vitamin A deficiency in many parts of Asia. Yet, we cannot be blinded by the positive impacts of science and technology, and ignore the adverse consequences of them. While the advent of GM (Genetically Modified) seeds have enabled farmers to grow crops that are more resistant to pesticides and extreme climate conditions, it also put them at the mercy of MNCs (Multinational Corporations) like Monsanto. Traditional farming methods allowed farmers long term food security, as they are able to save seeds from previous batches of crops to plant during the next season. However, profit-driven corporations engineer seeds that grow into infertile plants, meaning these farmers would have to go back to buying seeds from Monsanto each season. This reliance on and domination of MNCs has impoverished many farmers, as they are at the mercy of price increases, and would not be able to maintain their livelihood when the price of seeds increases. Hence, dire social consequences are seen due to a reliance on science and technology to solve our hunger problems.

Besides social consequences, environmental issues are also a growing concern globally. In agriculture, the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers pollute the environment, and render water sources unfit for human consumption. These chemicals were artificially engineered by scientists to improve agriculture, yet they resulted in environmental degradation. Similarly, the planting of specific crops resulted in a loss of biodiversity that threatens to collapse ecosystems. Due to the technologies available during the Green Revolution, bananas produced were genetically identical. This resulted in the extinction of Gros Michel, a type of banana wiped out by fungal infection in the 1970s. The cause for concern is even more pertinent when one is aware that bananas today are planted using the same cloning method, which makes them highly susceptible to extinction. While this is merely speculation now, it is highly possible that such a reality will come to fruition, and ecosystems relying on this fruit will collapse. Hence, adverse environmental concerns that we may not even comprehend can result from the use of science, and these far reaching consequences may not be what mankind may be prepared for.

Furthermore, the fact that science and technology has intrinsic risks should not be lost to us. The 21st century has seen rapid advancements in nuclear technology and stem cell research. However, the nature of these technologies makes the consequences uncertain, and it is important not to get too carried away with the possibilities that science and technology promise. While nuclear technology solves the world's energy problems, stakes are high as it can be easily exploited by belligerent leaders to wreck havoc. The radiation involved in nuclear technology is also a cause of great concern, as seen from the Fukushima Nuclear Plant disaster. While nuclear technology promises a great deal for a better future, and provides efficient energy for the ever-growing energy-intensive world, we should remain cautious and remember that it can create even greater problems in the future if mishandled. Similarly, stem cell research provides endless possibilities, and promises leaps and bounds in the pursuit of science. Yet, we need to be cautious of the ethical concerns that stem cell research brings. These concerns are especially detrimental to society, as various groups with different stances regarding stem cell research can come

into conflict because of it. It would be fallacious to ignore the dire risks of science and technology, and only look at the possibilities of solving the world's problems.

Additionally, there are some problems that science and technology cannot solve. International conflicts like the Arab-Israeli War, South China Sea conflict, and Sino-Japanese animosities are all long standing problems that have dragged on as science and technology advanced. Due to historical baggage, it would take far more than science and technology to resolve tensions between China and Japan. While the Nanking Massacre still leaves a mark in the hearts of the Chinese, the Japanese history curriculum glosses over the atrocities of war and in fact, glorifies war exploits. When psychological trauma is so fresh and deep in the minds of the Chinese, it is impossible that they will simply forgive and forget. This also manifests itself in geopolitical conflicts like the Diaoyu Islands, with both parties' demands being related to the war. Arguably, technology had improved communications between these countries, but the historical baggage prevents the resolution of these tensions. It can even be said that with technology, widespread destruction of regions can be achieved when countries in conflict see no other way of resolving their differences. Hence, technology or science may not be able to resolve conflicts that are so deeply rooted, and can instead aggravate these conflicts.

In conclusion, the argument that science and technology can remedy all of the world's problems does not hold water. While science and technology does bring about unparalleled benefits, they are also the cause of many other problems that mankind has yet to find a solution to. Besides that, the sheer magnitude of the problems the world faces makes it impossible for science and technology to solve them all. While we keep in mind the problems that still exist and work towards resolving them, it is crucial we also keep in mind that science and technology have limited capabilities, and be cautious about experimenting with the unknown.

Comments:

An insightful and sound discussion of the issue. Various concerns are raised and evaluated in relation to the central ideas of the question. Apt use of supporting evidence for most parts of the essay but need to be mindful of your paragraphs, some of which are too long. Overall, a decent effort.

“Governance not technology, is the answer to many of the problems faced by the world today.” What is your view?

By Foo Yiew Min (16A11)

Einstein once said “I do not know what World War Three will be fought with, but World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones”. He meant that growth in technology had been so exponential such that it was nigh impossible to predict what kinds of new weaponry humanity would possess, except that these weapons would be so advanced that they had the potential to destroy everything, for us to begin once again as primitive beings. Beyond the military sector, technology today has clearly been growing at an unprecedented rate. It took thousands of years for Man to conquer the sky in the form of the Wright brothers’ inventions, yet it has barely been a century and we have already transcended the sky to enter space. Smartphones are getting smarter yearly, with larger and larger capacities. These amazing advancements have led proponents of science to believe that technology can solve everything. However, I disagree. While technology has solved countless problems for mankind and will continue to do so, many problems in today’s world, such as global terrorism, discrimination and the lack of food in poor countries, are unable to be solved and sometimes even exacerbated by technology. These problems, which have their roots in society, cannot be solved by technology. However, governance, the method by which one governs a country, can be the answer.

The problem of starving, hungry people in poor countries such as Ethiopia or Zimbabwe can be better solved by poor governance than the improvement of technology. There are those who would claim that better technology can increase yield and production, ensuring there is enough food for everyone. Better technology, such as the genetic modification of food, can help people to grow crops in these arid and unsustainable environments. The use of technology in producing crops that are rich in yield to increase production, or crops so hardy that they can be planted in the barren wastelands of the country are all plausible long-term solutions. However, people often forget that the problem is not a lack of food in our world today. In fact, research has shown that our current food production is enough to comfortably feed the world population. The problem lies within food wastage, with millions of tons of food being thrown into the trash daily. People in developed countries have been pampered, and grown ignorant of their starving counterparts. Technology can do nothing to solve this problem, with all of its capabilities in spreading messages through the mass media, resulting in people turning off the TV because the starving child is making them lose appetite, or pressing a ‘like’ on Facebook to bless the hungry and dying. Concrete actions taken by governments to reduce food wastage are instrumental in solving this problem. Governments have to undertake regulations, controlling amounts of food wasted by businesses, and they have to organise campaigns, in schools and workplaces, to remind people not to waste food as well as recommend food-saving methods in cooking. Governments should also encourage philanthropists or aid organizations to channel excess food to poorer countries. While this is a temporary solution, the shift in mindset will be extremely beneficial and will alleviate the suffering of many, at least until technology succeeds with a long-term solution. For now, governance is the answer.

Furthermore, governance can be used to change perceptions and stereotypes by taking concrete measures, whereas technology is unable to do so. This means that in order to change the perspective of people in a country, a government has to show its seriousness in the form of policies. For

instance, racial discrimination has been a perpetuating problem across the globe. Technology is not only unable to solve such problems which stem from the perceptions of people, but has instead perpetuated them. While there are countless anti-discrimination messages online, confirmation bias has rendered them ineffective as people with deep seated prejudices reject these messages and look for those which they agree with. This has perhaps led to a domino effect, evident in the increasing trend of hate crimes against certain racial groups in America. While America has tried to pass anti-discriminatory laws such as those forbidding employers from choosing or rejecting job-seekers based on race, governance has largely been ineffective, due to the segregation and lack of interaction between people of different races. However, this does not show that governance is not effective. It simply shows that more stringent and thoughtful governance is necessary. For instance, Singapore's Ethnic Integration Policy requires the racial composition of people living in government flats to reflect that of the general population. The increased interaction between people of different races has led to Singapore being a harmonious society, despite the multitude of different races. This shows that effective and well-planned governance can solve problems that technology cannot, simply because these policies force people to confront their false stereotypes and perceptions which can lead to a change in mindset. This does not only address racial discrimination, but other forms of discrimination such as sexism and ageism. As such, because governments can better reach out to the people and be more forceful in sending out a message, governance is a better answer to the social problem of discrimination as compared to technology.

Sometimes, governance can also be a better answer than technology, because it was poor governance that led to the problems in the first place. In such cases, technology is unable to solve the problems. It can only superficially attempt to treat the symptoms on the surface, and may actually exacerbate the issue. For instance, the issue of migrants and refugees that has been plaguing many countries, leading to a rise in xenophobic sentiments. Some of these reasons are not unfounded. The capacities of national economies have simply not been able to support the influx of refugees. Governments have to properly assess and evaluate what is best for the country, and decide how many more refugees to take in before social problems start arising. Furthermore, governments have to appease their people and soothe their fears, especially when these worries are irrational. For example, the rise in the number of refugees in America has led many to blame these migrants for unemployment, but unemployment in America has in fact been at an all-time low. As such, proper governance is needed to make people more aware of their incumbent problems, while ensuring proper utilization of its resources. When countries do not make use of their resources properly, the shortage of such resources is bound to cause unhappiness. Furthermore, the root cause of the refugee problem is terrorism, which is also caused by poor governance. Poor governance has also allowed for the growth and spread of these extremist ideas, especially within the home countries of terrorist groups. While technology can provide stronger weapons and better surveillance, it does not solve the root cause of the issue. ISIS was a result of poor governance in Syria, along with the interference of the US and Russian governments. Killing more insurgents with better weapons only gives the rest a reason to fight harder, and convince others to join their cause. As a Middle Eastern leader once said in a UN speech, the world has to choose between an olive branch or a freedom fighter's gun. Governments with proper governance have to solve this problem they created; technology will only worsen the situation.

With that said, there are problems that only technology can fix, due to the sheer ability of current science to solve these problems. For instance, the problem of diseases, especially currently

incurable ones like cancer or HIV, require the furthering of technology to provide the solution. However, this does not mean that proper governance has no part to play, as the appropriate amount of funding by governments still has to be channelled to these areas for research, while the appropriate policies have to be taken to encourage more young talent to enter such industries. Hence, while some problems have to be solved by technology, governance still maintains an important role in helping to solve these problems.

In conclusion, many of today's problems can be answered by governance rather than technology. This could have been a result of technology's rapid advancement, which has expediently solved the many problem we faced in the past, leaving us with social problems that require government intervention. With that said, the fact is that these two are not mutually exclusive; almost all problems require the involvement of both governance and technology. Areas exclusive to technology and science need the government to channel funds and resources. While most of the world's problems today are social problems, governments need to utilize technology to carry out proper and appropriate governance to create long-lasting solutions.

Comments:

Good points raised but some paragraphs were too long.

“Governance, not technology, is the answer to many of the problems faced by the world today.” What is your view?

By Tan Chuin Wei (16S42)

From the epochs of history to the Industrial Revolution and until this very day, Man and Machine have grown quite intimate. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle, we have had great political innovations that have evolved and been refined through the years. We have had democracy, communism, liberalism, conservatism, fascism and Realpolitik. Yet, no matter the political solutions that have been tried and tested or how well a government has managed its polity, we are still left with a panoply of problems that our forebears have struggled with. Wars are still raging in several parts of the world, people are still dying from destitution and starvation and natural disasters still ravage through cities, leaving death and destruction in its wake. Perhaps it is high time that we look away from the realm of ineffective bureaucratic processes and fruitless debates, and instead seek technological and scientific solutions that are grounded with empiricism. Yet, technology too may be ineffective, for how would an inanimate creation of steel know what to do without the guidance of the flesh and bones of our political institutions? To resolve such a dilemma, it is imperative to realise that it is a false dichotomy, for we need both the guidance of Man and the might of Machine to truly eliminate the residual problems of the past and pressing issues of the present, so that we can advance towards a more blissful future.

However, it is understandable why some might see governance as the way to go instead of technology, since our political solutions have been with us for epochs and mankind has refined them such that they could be more superior to our relatively infantile technology. This is epitomised by the political innovation of diplomacy, which has been used since the days of empires and civilisations. Today, we can still use it to come to peaceful settlements over international disputes, be it when Malaysia and Singapore settled the case of Pedra Branca or when Malaysia and Indonesia resolved the contention of ownership of Sipadan and Ligitan. Even today, diplomatic steps are being taken by the countries involved in the South China Sea disputes to protect their national interests without bloodshed. No technological solution comes to mind for such disputes, perhaps because they do not exist yet, and we have to rely on these more refined political techniques to maintain peace. Furthermore, we can see how crude our technology can be in such political problems in the case of the American and Russian bombings in Aleppo. While both sides may claim to be bombing hostiles such as ISIS members of the rebels, we see news of civilians being bombed and trampled upon in the proxy war of these two military giants. Instead of relying more on peaceful political discussions, these giants choose to use their crude missile technology, causing more death and destruction in the process and perhaps potentially radicalising more Syrians with the bombings. There is hence a legitimate case for favouring good governance over technology as the panacea to our problems, for our political tools are far sharper than our blunter technological measures.

Furthermore, the case for governance over technology, for Man over Machine, is strengthened when one observes that a large proportion of our problems today are man-made and clearly a solution by Man, for Man is needed to tackle the problems by its roots. Take for example the man-made famines that ravaged Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia, threatening the lives of 20 million people. Such an atrocity was committed due to the fragile state of politics, with the governments using the excuse of “starving the rebels” to justify such a gross violation of basic human rights. Technology has given us fertilisers and high-yielding varieties, advanced agricultural infrastructure or at least transportation technology to transport food from overseas for the starving people, yet these people are still starving and it is clear that a political solution is needed to stabilise the country. With

proper governance can such unfortunate man-made circumstances be overcome. Another issue today is terrorism. What are the technological solutions we are employing today in the war against terrorism? The National Security Agency's mass surveillance program, the installation of more closed-circuit televisions in most countries, and more advanced military technology (or rather more deadly missile that occasionally hits the civilian-filled hospitals of Syria). How well have they worked out? Clearly the Paris bombings, London bombings, attacks on Belgium and many other acts of terror are still being executed regardless of these measures being taken. Perhaps it is not by guns and steel, but rather a human hand holding an olive branch that is needed. Such a human approach would arguably be much better at resolving intrinsically human conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict or the various separatism problems all over the world, be it the Moros in Southern Philippines or the Crimeans in Ukraine. The idiosyncratically human nature of such problems necessitate a human solution, for it is much easier to strike a deal with a man in a suit than with the barrel of a gun.

Yet, there are obviously problems where government solutions have failed, and Machine seems to be the only hope. This is especially true with natural disasters or the spread of diseases. Taking a closer look at diseases, no matter the kind of government response, diseases will still spread at a rate that is unpredictable to them during epidemics. How ready a government is for such instances are more to do with the current state of medical technology and research capabilities rather than government policy. Of course, one can say that the government's contingency plans and how well government policy prepares for such outbreaks do make a difference, but arguably even the most prepared country can get hit hard in spite of the contingency measures. Be it bird flu, SARS or H1N1, medical equipment and facilities matter more than government policy, for the government can only mitigate the spreading, but it is the technological tools that allow us to cure or eliminate the disease, be it by manufacturing a vaccine or using our medical technology to research into how to weaken the disease. Besides that, there are natural famines occurring from drought or climate change in parts of rural Africa and China. Our best bet is on the drought-resistant genetically-modified crops or advanced agricultural techniques that require the use of technology. Facing the threat of the fluctuating market for food, Singapore has even sought to reduce reliance on imported produce, and attempt new techniques such as vertical farming to face the increasingly volatile world economy. Man is helpless against the forces of nature or even market forces. As statesmen can only do so much in policy-making, there is a case too for desiring a technological solution over a political one.

'Man or Machine?' seems to be our dichotomy, but we must realise that it is a false one. In reality, it is difficult to isolate the two measures, and more often than not they complement each other to solve our modern day problems. For instance, the economic problems we face today could potentially be solved via the integration of government policy and computational technology. At this stage, about half of American economists expected the 2008 Financial Crisis to occur, which is no better than a layman's guess. Perhaps one day, computational technology might become advanced enough to foresee such economic upheavals, and an efficient government with such vital information can take preemptive measures to mitigate such crises. This may sound speculative, but it is not difficult to see how technology goes hand in hand with government policy. Take for instance our current solutions to environmental problems. Clearly, we require government legislation to encourage sustainable practices, such as when the Penang state government of Malaysia passed the 'No Plastic Bag Day' policy to reduce the usage of plastic bags, or when Singapore replaced her dependence on coal with natural gas in the 1990s. At the same time, we cannot tackle such environmental issues without technology to monitor carbon dioxide emissions, water filtration systems, waste disposal technology and many more. It is only when the human hand of the

government twists the steel handles of Machine that effective measures can be taken to face the challenges of today.

The fates of Man and Machine are increasingly intertwined as we progress into the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I believe that an integration of governance and technology is the answer to our current problems, and either one alone would be insufficient. It is only when flesh and bones meet steel and circuitry, when Man and his metal creations work together, that a real change can be made to the world.

Comments:

Some of your points gloss over the use of technological solutions and seem rather one-sided. You need to avoid assuming the truth of the conclusion in your argument premise.

Are disruptions brought about by technology necessarily bad?

By Chloe Tan (16S63)

Christian Lous Lange, a famous political scientist, once said "Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master". The potential that technology has in revolutionising the way we live is indubitable, but every Eden has its serpent, and technology also holds the potential to bring about major disruptions in our lives, causing unhappiness and discontent to arise. Indeed, the widening income inequality in the world can be attributed to how new inventions in the world have cause traditional 9 to 5 jobs to become obsolete. However, I still contend that these hiccups are not as catastrophic as we make them out to be, for I believe that society has put in place sufficient measures to mitigate these disruptions and will eventually take these disruptions into our stride.

Before I delve into the issue further, it is perhaps wise to first consider how technological advancements have upended traditional jobs in the economy, radically altering the numerous occupations we once thought would never grow obsolete. What makes these disruptions so formidable is the fact that it only affects a selected group of people, thereby exacerbating the rift between different stratas in society. One example would be how the mobile phone app Uber introduced an unorthodox concept that had never been thought to be possible. Instead of flagging down taxis plying the roads, one could now simply just hail a private car at the convenience of a tap on the mobile phone. While consumers celebrate and rejoice over this blessing, tensions run high in the background as taxi drivers bemoan the loss of customers and the loss of income. The situation became so dire that protests against Uber drivers did not just take place in one country, but in numerous countries, including Mexico and Malaysia. The world was thrown into chaos over a small mobile phone app - such is the power of technology. The introduction of self driving cars by Tesla and Google also had a similar effect on the economy, raising worries that bus drivers, taxi drivers and chauffeurs alike would blink out of existence. As such, the advent of such innovative and maverick technology has caused much distress to the world, making it seem as if technology has been nothing but a thorn in one's flesh.

Be that as it may, I believe that we should not adopt such a defeatist view of technology. After all, adequate measures have been implemented to mitigate these repercussions of the new technology so that we may better enjoy the benefits brought about by it. If society is able to carefully control the backlash of the technology, these disruptions will no longer be a problem. In Singapore, the National Taxi Association has conducted dialogue sessions with taxi drivers who are disconcerted about the new ride-hailing technologies. Through the dialogues, the authorities are better able to grasp the challenges faced by these drivers so that they may come up with policies and measures to help these drivers overcome the obstacles standing in their way. Furthermore, the US government has also acknowledged the havoc that self driving cars could potentially bring upon the country and has dully only permitted these self driving cars in certain states such as Florida. There are also careful strategies drawn up to integrate these self driving cars slowly into the economy, so that the change will not be as abrupt and sudden to both the world and the economy. As long as the pace of such innovations do not spiral out of control, I believe that the disruptions caused are not as severe or detrimental to society as it seems because we are able to control these disruptions, we will be able to reap the benefits that the technology was designed to bring about.

Moreover, technological disruptions have plagued society for a long time now, and yet each time, we have been able to adapt to these disruptions slowly but surely, emerging as victors who triumphed over the hard times. Such successes in the past clearly point to the conclusion that society will continue to be protean in confronting changes taking place in society today. Surely we will be able to replicate the victories of the past. When Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) were introduced into the food industry a few years back, people around the globe inveighed against such a development. Arguments such as the safety of the food for consumption or messing with the natural order of life were thrown back and forth. Eventually, the furore died down and today, GMOs such as Golden Rice which is infused with Vitamin A have mostly been recognised by the international community for the role it plays in reducing malnutrition in Africa. Or take for example how the mobile phone industry that is so ubiquitous today did not even exist until a decade or two ago. How we have integrated such technology into our daily lives, to the point where many would be unable to live without their mobile phones, point to how humans can and will adapt quite seamlessly when forced to adapt to disruptions. Therefore, there is hardly any cause for concern that the upheavals caused by technology are enemies of mankind; we forget that time and again, we have won the battle against technology, and are likely to do so again.

I would even go so far as to say that these disruptions are actually good for society. This may seem counterintuitive for some: after all, how is losing a job a good thing? It is not, but the principle underlying all these disruptions is. Such technology, along with its disruptions, is only brought about by society's desire for self improvement and advancement of the human race. Scientists fervently conduct research and entrepreneurs assiduously create new inventions with the welfare of society in mind. Technology such as CRISPR, which allows scientists and doctors to modify the genes of an unborn baby, has no doubt become a bone of contention, with many Christian groups protesting against its advent. However, the creation of this was governed by the desire to eradicate diseases and illnesses in unborn babies, so that they would not have to suffer the debilitating effects of such illnesses. Similarly, the first plane to be fully powered by solar energy, Solar Impulse, was also designed to enable humans to travel in a way that would not create such a large carbon footprint. We are often too busy bemoaning the negative effects of these disruptions that we tend to forget what these disruptions actually signify: the spirit of advancement and self improvement. It will be more worrying if a day comes when there are no disruptions to the fabric of society, as this would mean that we have become a moribund world never to improve again. Hence, I believe that if these disruptions are an indicator of human's spirit for self improvement, then these disruptions are far from being bad.

To conclude, I would like to contend that it is time for us to adopt a different lens in viewing the disruptions brought about by innovations and new technology. Sure, these disruptions may cause unease and discomfort to us in the short term, and may even seem incessant. However, if these disruptions are the price to pay to ensure that humanity still has not lost their drive in moving forward, then so be it.

Comments:

A sensible take on the issue. A pleasure to read. Just a note of caution - too much time and space devoted to the disruptions of jobs/cars

Should plastic surgery be discouraged?

By Jessica Yu (17S31)

With technology rapidly advancing, many new measures and ways to improve lives of different people are being discovered, tried and tested. One of the most popular yet controversial topics is plastic surgery. While some people see it as a way to forcefully change what is originally given to them, others see it as a channel for which it provides hope to those who need it. Personally, I agree with the latter that plastic surgery does more than merely changing how one looks for cosmetic reasons, and its benefits far outweighs its cons. Hence, I do not agree that plastic surgery should be discouraged, as it can greatly improve one's life medically, indirectly improve an economical status of a country, and improve the individual's self-esteem.

Plastic surgery can be an option for people who were born with abnormalities, which may be detrimental to their health. For example, there are many cases of people who were born with distorted features such as cleft lips, disjoined nose and the like. Some of these abnormalities could possibly interfere with their daily activities, making it difficult for them, such as having trouble eating with a cleft lip and difficulty breathing normally with a disjoined nose. These features not only get in the way of life, they also indubitably separate them from people with normal features, causing them to feel outcast and marginalised just because of their different appearance. This may eventually lead to them having low self-esteem, and should it be serious enough, it may even cause other psychological problems like depression. Plastic surgery is then an option for them to consider, provided they are able to afford it, and this will allow them to live life just like everyone else and fit in well with society. That being said, there are definitely many risks that comes with any surgery and plastic surgery is no exception. One should still consider the success rates of the surgery before employing it, since there are possibilities of them getting worse than before, and may even affect their lives even more adversely. Thus, although plastic surgery comes with risks, it still should not be discouraged for those born with defects and abnormalities, and should be considered as a choice for them to improve their lives.

Plastic surgery also provides countries with businesses which boost their economic growth. It is considered by many to be one of the things which only the rich can afford due to their cost. For example, to the residents in Thailand, it is considered as one of the things only the upper strata of society can afford, while foreigners from more developed countries may think otherwise. Due to this, many people who are looking for a minor plastic surgery turn to countries like Thailand, Vietnam and the like to achieve their desired looks. Indirectly, this boosts the businesses in these countries, since many people from other parts of the world visit their nations for this purpose. On the other hand, more developed countries like Korea are known through the media for their expertise in plastic surgery. Provided they are able to afford such a luxury, visitors plan Korea as a destination where they can get their desired look with a high success rate. Once again, countries like Korea thus venture into expanding businesses based off plastic surgery, boosting their economic growth. Hence, plastic surgery should not be discouraged as it is an option countries can consider when trying to boost economic growth.

Plastic surgery also provides the individual with hope of a new life. While many are blessed with stunning, if not average to pleasant looking faces, there are still many other less fortunate people who have to face the mirror, only to turn around with a low esteem. This is especially prevalent in teenagers, who have a tough time trying to fit in with the world where every other

person hits a rating of eight to nine on the “good-looking scale”, while he perceives himself as a low three to four. Undoubtedly, many critics would argue that “looks do not matter but the heart does”, “he’s just over-thinking, he is not that bad”, or even “just live with what nature gives you”, but they do not see the possible long-term consequences that “just live with it” advice could bring. Teenagers are easily influenced and affected by their peers and social media, and it is common for them to harp on something they do not find right about themselves. Some of them may even have peers who discriminate against them for their supposedly “poor looks” and marginalise them. This could lead to dire consequences, should the teenagers find it easier to end their lives rather than continue trying to fit in with no avail. However, this consequence would probably not happen with the option of plastic surgery, given that it is within their means. If simple plastic surgeries, such as orthodontic procedures to straighten their possibly crooked teeth and improve their smile, also known as braces, could help lift their spirits and self-esteem up, this is definitely worth it. For aspiring actors and actresses who are afraid to pursue their dreams because of their appearance, this could also be a way out for them, and they could gain confidence more easily and portray themselves better with some plastic surgery procedures. Yet, money is still the biggest and chief deciding factor of whether they should embark on this. Nonetheless, plastic surgery is still a good option to boost an individual’s confidence and help them live a better, more fulfilling life, and thus should not be discouraged.

Despite the above-mentioned boons that plastic surgery can bring, there are also many banes of it. The risks that it brings are irreversible, and one tiny mistake on the surgeon’s part could lead to disastrous results. Anyone considering plastic surgery should be able to bear the brunt of this as well. Other concerns are the use of plastic surgery for controversial reasons, such as changing one’s gender. One should consider also the religious issue behind the use of plastic surgery to alter one’s god-given looks. Thus, although I disagree that plastic surgery should be discouraged, I feel that the limitations of it are worth considering before one embarks on this path.

Comments:

I’m impressed. Fluid piece of work that’s well thought out. Support and analysis were strong initially but becomes less persuasive towards the end. Seems you ran out of time and simply lumped your remaining ideas in the conclusion. Very good! Keep it up!

Miscellaneous

"His is the precept by which I have lived: Prepare for the worst: expect the best: and take what comes."

Hannah Arendt

"Laziness may appear attractive, but work gives satisfaction."

Anne Frank

"In different places, the same world is a hell, and a heaven."

J. B. Priestley

!!

Is the drive to be better always desirable?

By Isabelle Leow Jay Min (16S53)

Improvement, development and progression have always been goals of humanity. As humans, we always feel that doing better is a good thing, and have taken many measures to achieve that. Hence, having the drive to be better is naturally seen as desirable and something we should all possess. While I believe that this drive is essential for oneself and for the development of the world, I feel that it is not always desirable due to the unintended consequences it may bring when one is too fixated on being better.

Of course, without this drive to be better, our world would not have been as technologically advanced as it is today. For these spectacular inventions, we can credit people such as the Wright Brothers, Alan Turing and Thomas Edison who displayed resilience and perseverance in the face of adversities. The Wright Brothers, who invented the first airplane, were told by countless numbers of people that what they wanted to create was fundamentally impossible. However, they did not give up and eventually succeeded. Alan Turing spent many days and nights in order to break the Enigma code during World War II even though there were millions of arbitrary combinations. This resulted in him saving millions of lives. And we all know Thomas Edison's famous quote, "I have not failed. I have just discovered ten thousand ways that do not work." All these people have something in common - that is the drive to do better. They formed the stepping stones that guided our world forward toward reaching the high levels of technology we now have, from which we have reaped endless benefits, due to their efforts. Therefore, the drive to do better is desirable as it helps us humans achieve amazing feats and reach beyond what we thought were our limits.

However, the world is made up of different shades of grey; it is not black and white. Hence, the absolute "always" does not hold. Unfortunately, the drive to do better can sometimes lead to unintended consequences when people get too fixated on improving. These consequences can be damaging and bring about harm to society, which counters the initial intention of doing better. A prevalent problem of this is faced by many governments in this world, as they strive for economic growth. In theory, the benefits of economic growth are always desired as they ensure higher levels of income and a better standard of living. Hence, governments always prioritise economic growth due to its many advantages. This, however, can result in them neglecting other aspects of the country such as citizens from low income groups. As the economy grows, those enjoying the benefits are naturally the rich as they are the ones who own companies and businesses, while the low income groups receive wages that remain depressed and stagnant. As a result, there is a widening income gap which leads to a worsening income inequality. A country that faces this problem is Singapore. Singapore is said by many to have progressed from "a third world country to a first world country". While this may be true, Singapore has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world. This is a result of the trade-off between taking care of the poor and striving for economic growth. Thus, at times, the desire to do better can result in narrow mindedness and eventually a failure to consider a situation holistically, which can bring about negative impacts.

The drive to do better can also cause people to go astray and breach their morals. This happens when the drive is so strong that it overpowers people's conscience, leading to them prioritise the result of improvement over what is morally correct. This is a common occurrence in competitive sports.

Through the many years of competitive sports, there have always been cases of doping and match fixing in order for sportsmen to achieve the goals they desire. This totally goes against the Athletes' Oath that every sportsman takes, in which they vow to always play fair regardless of the outcome of their competitions. By taking illegal drugs to boost their performance or bribing an opposing team to win, these sportsmen are basically flouting the fundamentals of sportsmanship. Some examples are Lance Armstrong, who took performance enhancing drugs when he competed in the Tour de France, and the Russian women's swim team who were banned from the 2016 Summer Olympics. This also applies to other aspects of life apart from sports. Students who desperately want to improve on their academics may cheat during examinations, and people who wish to get rich can end up embezzling their company's funds. Hence, if the drive to do better is so prominent that it clouds one's moral compass, it can cause one to commit unforgivable acts, even ones that go against the law.

"It is not about the end result but the journey." This is a well-known saying that addresses this problem appropriately. Whether the drive to do better is good or not all boils down to where that drive originated from. If one's drive arises merely from achieving the end result, one is more likely to be blinded by the desire to succeed, making one more vulnerable to being led astray and failing to take into account the bigger picture. On the other hand, if one is able to learn from the process of improvement and accept that life is not smooth sailing, one will not succumb to immoral acts just to reach one's goals. At the end of the day, we must not let the concept of ideals and perfection get in our way of being "good". Nobody is perfect and hence if we learn to be satisfied with what we already have instead of beating ourselves up over certain flaws, we will be able to enjoy the process of doing and being better, by not letting the drive to be better make us resort to underhanded means that may potentially harm others and even ourselves.

Comments:

Generally well-written. Could have analysed/developed some of your points a bit more though. Good use of words and phrases. Perhaps you could have given another example of how unintended consequences may arise from the drive to do better besides the impact on the economy.

Checked



Is the drive to be better always desirable?

By David Cuison Dimaano (16S62)

"Be a better version of yourself," said Cristiano Ronaldo, after winning his second Ballon d'Or, football's most coveted individual award. We live in a world where our success is fuelled by the desire to outdo ourselves and others, in the hope of emerging at the front of this social rat-race. Granted, always trying to improve can bring negative consequences, but with proper actions against them, such undesirables can be mitigated. Hence, I believe that the drive to be better is always desirable.

Proponents of the counter argument may postulate that the drive to be better causes tension between parties, strained relationships and a negative effect overall. This was evident in the 1960s when the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were trying to be better than the other by being the first nation to acquire nuclear power. The result of these two countries being embroiled in such a conflict nearly led to a nuclear war which could have probably wiped out half the population of the Earth. More recently, countries such as Iran and North Korea are trying to be better militarily equipped than others and have acquired nuclear arsenal as well. With the wrong intention, having such powerful nuclear weapons is worrying as one can never be sure when these volatile nations will "pull the trigger" and potentially spark another nuclear crisis. Thus, in such situations, the drive to outdo other countries' firepower may not be desirable, especially if the nation that acquires such firepower has unclear intentions.

Furthermore, though the will to be better cannot be faulted, there are instances when too strong a desire clouds our judgement, taints our moral fabric and besmirches the tapestry of mankind. A perfect example is Lance Armstrong, seven-time Tour de France "winner". Lance Armstrong was an exceptional cyclist. Despite suffering from cancer, he fought hard and beat all the odds stacked against him to win seven consecutive titles during his career. He was globally regarded as a hero as he exemplified true sportsmanship by never giving up on his dreams and eventually achieving them. However, urine samples and a live broadcast of his confession confirmed that in his quest to be better, he used performance-enhancing-drugs (PEDs). This action disappointed many people worldwide because their idol had been reduced to nothing but a liar and cheat. Early this year, Jamaican sprinter Nesta Carter was stripped of his 2008 Beijing Olympic Games gold medal in the 4x100 relay because he too, had used PEDs. Instances like these show that the desire to do better and be better can make people engage in methods frowned upon by society, affecting their reputation and leaving a bad impact on society.

However, despite the fact that the desire to be better tarnishes reputations and leaves the world in a state of unease, we must also be cognizant of the benefits that wanting to be better entails. The drive to be better gives one motivation to innovate and positively impact ourselves and the people around us. Take Steve Jobs for example. When he was seventeen, he looked in the mirror and told himself, "If what I want to do today is not something I want to do, then I must change something". He followed this maxim to be a better version of himself and subsequently founded Apple Incorporated, the world's leading information technology firm, which ranked among the top ten in Forbes "top 2000 companies" list this year. Jobs improved himself by reading up on topics such as how industries function and how the stock markets operate. Needless to say, he made significant financial gains from this venture. The Apple products we use today such as iPhones, iPods, iPads and iMacs also make our lives better and more convenient as they aid us in everyday tasks,

from sending emails to picking up groceries. Thus, the will to be better is always desirable, especially if the effects of improving oneself rub off on those around, and society benefits as a whole.

Also, the positive impacts of having the drive to do better can be felt closer to home. Singapore's educational system is one that is rigorous and aims to develop each student holistically. As a result, students have to have at least one co-curricular activity (CCA) and must also involve themselves in community service in the form of Values-In-Action (VIA) activities. Some students further develop themselves by going for external tuition classes or volunteering at events such as the National Day Parade, in a bid to outdo their peers with better and more diversified paper qualifications. This constant competition makes society as a whole more knowledgeable and more productive, thus raising our living standards. The results of students' intentions to be better is evident when Singaporean students emerge among the top in worldwide mathematics and science competitions. Having such achievements opens the door to many opportunities later on in life, justifying the drive to be better. Aside from the education system, the government also takes the initiative to retrain workers and help them improve their skill sets so that they do not become obsolete and can continue working and earning a living. Through the acquisition of new skills, one is less susceptible to labour immobility and can take up jobs that perhaps pay better, leading to an improved quality of life. Therefore, the desire to be better is always desirable because having such an outlook on life can improve one's life vastly.

To synthesize, though the drive to be better is not always desirable as it can potentially tear the world apart and make people do whatever it takes - be it right or wrong- to emerge victorious, we must remind ourselves that steps can be taken to alleviate such concerns. This can be seen by how on a separate occasion, the USA engaged in "ping-pong politics" to defuse a similar nuclear war with China. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) also banned Russian athletes from competing in last year's Olympic Games because they too, like Armstrong and Carter, had abused PEDs. We should focus on the good aspects that wanting to be better brings. Having the drive to be better is desirable because adopting such an attitude not only improves our lives but also those of the people around us. We live as individuals but as part of one human race, we should all possess the drive to be better, not just for the good of ourselves, but for the good of mankind.

Comments:

Some good points and there was analysis of the issues involved. However, a little inconsistent at times, e.g. the paragraph about CCAs and SG could have been more effective. Fluent use of language. Stand is made clear at the start of every paragraph. Many relevant and good examples about the issue as well.

"Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is war minus the shooting." Comment.

By Stesha Low Lin Hui (16S32)

Sport plays an integral part in our lives, be it as a form of relaxation and for the purpose of leisure or as a means to display one's skills and talent on the national, or even international level. More often than not, sport is for the purpose of the latter, and it has even reached the extent whereby sport is taken so seriously that people are willing to simply throw away the real value of sport and the ethics that govern it, mainly honesty and fairness. Instead, sportsmen are resorting to unethical means in order to gain an advantage over their opponent and emerge victorious from the battle. Victory itself is something highly sought after in the world of sport as it allows those who emerge victorious to exert dominance over others, and to be seen as superior. Hence, I agree to a large extent that there is no fair play in serious sport, and that it is similar to war minus the shooting as sportsmen go out on a 'battlefield' to play their respective sport with only one side emerging victorious at the end.

Firstly, in today's modern world where growth is driven by technological advancements, sport will inevitably be impacted by these advancements as well, in the form of drugs which can be used to boost an athlete's performance in his or her respective sport. The increasing use of drugs in sport is due to the high stakes involved in serious sport, so much so that athletes have to perform exceptionally well in order to reap the financial benefits that come along with it, such as sponsorships from sports giants like Nike and Adidas. As a result, some athletes are willing to resort to all means in order to perform better and ensure that their stakes are not lost, with the main objectives of winning in their mind. For instance, Maria Sharapova, a world renowned tennis player, was caught for substance abuse in 2015 which resulted in her being banned from the sport and anything related to it for a period of time. As a result, she had to take a backseat in her tennis career and lose large sponsorship deals from Porsche and Tag Heuer, which is a big setback since she had earned \$16.5 millions in sponsorship deals in 2014. This shows how sport has become so serious and competitive that fairness no longer has a place in it, and what is even worse is that athletes will resort to such unethical means to win. Hence, serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and it is similar to a war minus the shooting.

Secondly, athletes take their respective sports so seriously that they become over competitive, to the extent that they ignore the welfare of their competitors and are willing to break rules and regulations in order to win, which undermines the value of honesty in sports. One such incident was when Nancy Kerrigan, a former American figure skater was attacked after a practice session during the 1994 United States Figure Skating Championships in Detroit. After much investigation, it was discovered that the people behind this incident were Jeff Gillooly and Shawn Eckhardt, who were the ex-husband and bodyguard of Kerrigan's long time rival and team mate, Tonya Harding. They had hired Stant to break Kerrigan's right leg so that she would be unable to compete at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, making way for Harding to win. Fortunately, her leg was only bruised, not broken, but the injury forced her to withdraw from the national championships. This incident shows the extent to which some athletes and their supporters are willing to go - intentionally harming and injuring their competitors in order to gain an edge despite the rules and regulations put in place by sporting bodies. Hence, this shows that serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and it is similar to war minus the shooting.

Lastly, when sport is carried out on national and international levels, when countries from all over the world send their athletes to a host country to participate in a sporting competition. The differences in their cultural background or political ideology can result in tension and conflict between athletes. It is almost as though the athletes view each other as enemies like in a war, and simply overlook the spirit of sportsmanship where discrimination and hostility should play no part. One such example is when an Egyptian Judoka refused to shake the hand of his Israeli opponent after a Judoka competition in 2016, showing how some athletes take their sport so seriously that they allow cultural and political differences to cloud their view of what sport truly means. Such instances show how athletes behave as though they are 'fighting on a battlefield' similar to what happens in a war which breaks out due to a clash in ideologies between countries. Hence, serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and is similar to war without the shooting.

However, some detractors may argue that most athletes in today's world play sports for the love of it and because of their strong passion for their respective sport. These athletes value the importance of honesty, fair play and sportsmanship and will not resort to unethical means in order to achieve victory. Instead, they respect each other as opponents and train hard, putting in immeasurable amounts of time in order to excel in their sport and emerge champions. A notable example is United States swimmer Michael Phelps who has earned more than 20 Olympics gold medals in all the years he has competed in swimming events. His outstanding achievement was a result of him training hard to always consistently strive to improve himself, and while participating in competitions, had always exemplified fair play. In addition, it is also evident that he understood the importance of sportsmanship - during the 2016 Rio Olympics when he lost to Joseph Schooling of Singapore in the 100 metres butterfly event, which came as a shock to many, he went up to Joseph Schooling right after the event to give him a pat on the back and to congratulate him. Hence, in such instances, athletes are seen to value the importance of fair play while at the same time take their sports seriously; they certainly do not behave as though they are opponents engaged in a war without the shooting.

In a nutshell, I agree to a large extent that serious sport has nothing to do with fair play and it is similar to a war without the shooting. Although I do acknowledge the fact that this is not the case for many sports and their sportsmen, just a handful of athletes who engage in such mindset and behavior is sufficient to ruin the reputation of all sportsmen and how sport is viewed in the world today.

Comments:

The discussion connects the two parts of the question most of the time, and this is an important part of the argument. Relevant examples are provided and this is also important in doing well especially when they connect to the point. More examples to show the animosity involved in competition and stronger emphasis on the high stakes involved e.g the prize money, the honour and glory accorded to both athletes and the nations they represent would be good. It might be more appropriate to take the stand that to a large extent, sport is not like war minus the shooting, since you concluded that it is only a handful of athletes who engage in this.

A Student's Guide to Essay Writing

The guide below is by no means definitive. Rather, if you are the type to study five minutes before your GP exam, keep these points in mind.

The introduction

- Have a hook at the start. A quote, anecdote, anything. Teachers, like us, don't like to read boring stuff, too.
- You should define or explain key terms.
- The issue at hand must be introduced as the heart of your discussion.
- Don't use more words than needed. Present your stand and arguments clearly.

The body

- Writing the body of an essay is like trying to eat a banana - PEEL carefully. Point, Elaboration, Example, Link (for the uninitiated). As all these components are interlinked, you need to show clear connections, e.g. between Elaboration and Example.
- Your paragraphs shouldn't be example-driven, but driven rather by your arguments and points.
- Check that you are coherent throughout so you don't slip up, or sound silly because you keep contradicting yourself.
- It's not always a history essay, so do have current and relevant examples.
- If you're lacking in scope, think of SPECTRAM (Social, Political, Economic, Cultural, Technological, Race & Religion, Aesthetic, Moral).
- Express what you want to convey, nothing more or less. Don't drag, or your essay will be a drag to read.
- For the romantically inclined, remember "KISS". It means "keep it short & simple."
"Keep it short, stupid!" works as well.

The conclusion

- To continue with my fruit analogy, the conclusion is like the cherry on top of a good essay - which will hopefully be yours. Don't neglect it.
- Restate your stand concisely. Please don't copy and paste your thesis statement.
- Don't introduce new content in your conclusion - that belongs to your content paragraphs.
- Where applicable, provide an insight into the issue at hand. Remember, though, that it is infinitely better to end normally, than to cough out a half-baked opinion.

"The life sentence is a better alternative to the death sentence." Do you agree?

By Lim Jia Rong (16A11)

In the year 2011, an African-American man was released from incarceration in New York State after serving 27 years of a life sentence that was eventually commuted, given US\$4 million by the state government as reparations for holding him guilty for crimes he did not commit: rape and murder. Testimony and internal investigations later revealed that this man's hasty conviction was premised upon alleged racial prejudice and coercion by the authorities on the detained suspect to yield a confession. Perhaps thankfully, while his "crime" did permit the courts to sentence him to capital punishment, he was given a life sentence, a sentence which could be commuted. Yet, every year, there are many others who, due to the miscarriage of justice, are wrongfully executed; this simply is not just and illustrates only one of the many reasons why capital punishment is fundamentally flawed. In my opinion, the life sentence is a better alternative to the death sentence, as it can be reversed in light of new developments in the case, it is economically sound and socially productive and perhaps most significantly, it allows the convicted to comprehend the severity of his or her deeds.

Firstly, capital punishment is irreversible, while the life sentence can be commuted. Simply put, after the death sentence has been carried out and the condemned is later revealed to be wrongfully convicted, the court is unable to rectify this miscarriage of justice, except to perhaps confer upon him/her a pardon and offer his or her next-of-kin reparations, a pittance compared to the sorrow and trauma inflicted upon his or her loved ones by a judiciary meant to enforce justice instead of perpetuating injustice. Periodically, law enforcement would adopt more advanced technologies or methodologies, enhancing their competency in forensics, interrogation and data analysis. With these constant developments, it is possible for law enforcement to re-evaluate cases thought to be closed or cold and deliver more accurate and just rulings thereafter. Similarly, as time goes on, more evidence in the form of confessions may materialise, with deathbed confessions to crimes thought to be accounted for sporadically surfacing across the world. Yet, due to the eternal nature of the death penalty, nothing can be done about it. Furthermore, with the passage of time, changes in public opinion, social attitudes and governing bodies may lead to the repealing or modification of

• *Interesting hook. Good that his example is already supporting his yet-to-be articulated stance*

• *Clear stand. 3 main points to be argued are summarised in this line*

• *Use of most significantly signposts the most important point to be discussed*

legislation deemed unconstitutional or fundamentally flawed; should those sentenced to life imprisonment been convicted due to these now-defunct laws, their sentences may then be re-evaluated by the judiciary, ensuring true justice. Time after time, archaic laws are challenged and struck down by constitutional experts and civil rights activists. Take the example of Yong Vui Kong, a Malaysian-Chinese youth detained by Singaporean authorities for the trafficking of 47 grams of heroin, a crime which warranted a mandatory death sentencing in the city-state. Yet, after a gruelling four year legal fiasco, the statute which called for mandatory death sentencing for the possession of over 15g of heroin,, the Misuse of Drugs Act, was found unconstitutional and revised. Vui Kong, formerly sentenced to hang (and would have hanged if it were not for the constitutional challenge presented by human rights lawyer M. Ravi), had his sentence reduced to a life sentence. If it were not for the constitutional challenge presented and the striking down of the mandatory death sentence, Vui Kong would have certainly been executed unconstitutionally and unjustly.

• *Ties back from example to main arguments*

In addition, life sentencing is a more economical and socially constructive alternative to the death penalty. In most countries, be it developing or developed, convicts are employed as physical and unskilled labour by the state, typically at wage rates many times under the prevailing rate on the labour market. This is justified by the fact that these inmates are unable to seek gainful employment while incarcerated, and would turn to crime within the prison compound in order to overcome boredom and expend their excess energy. Perhaps more importantly, these convicts are in a sense making reparations to society, while adding value to a society they had previously taken value from through their offences. Indeed, such systems of corrective labour are in place in nations such as the PRC (where it is referred to as laogai, literally "labour change"), Russia and the United States (where clothes hangers and military uniforms are manufactured). Proponents of the death penalty may argue that a life sentence is more economically burdensome on the taxpayer, due to the need for the state to provide for the would-be condemned's sustenance and basic healthcare, though this does not hold true. Not only would the financial gains from the convict's labour offset at least part of the cost of keeping him or her alive, death penalties are costlier to enact in some countries. In America for instance, it is estimated that on average, a death penalty costs a state US\$30,000 to enact due to a variety of reasons. Firstly, in the majority of the 31 states that does enforce capital punishment, lethal injection is relied on as the primary execution method. Yet the cost of this lethal injection is extremely high, the three-part cocktail costing up to a

• *Clear transition to examining and refuting arguments against his view*

thousand dollars to administer due to the onerous health check-ups legally-mandated prior to execution. Furthermore, should the death sentence be deemed to be a miscarriage later on, the reparations (and legal proceedings due to the condemned's family's litigation) paid out by the state could be in the millions, dwarfing the cost of merely keeping a convict alive. Perhaps most ironic is the fact that in America, the condemned are held in maximum security penitentiaries with no provisions for hard labour, and their terms on these penitentiaries are indefinite due to the possibility of the convict iteratively making appeals to the court, dragging on his or her death sentence for years. This was exacerbated by the fact that in 2011 the European Union ceased the export of sodium thiopental (a key component in the lethal injection) to the USA on human rights grounds, stalling executions for years as the condemned resided in their cells without engaging in corrective labour while wasting taxpayer funds undergoing legally-mandated health check-ups on a regular basis. Thus, the death penalty may not be the more economically viable option between the two, being heavily subject to the manner in which either sentence is carried out in the country.

Furthermore, the life sentence allows inmates to truly comprehend the severity and immorality of the crimes they have committed and as such allowing them to develop as individuals, while the death sentence does so less effectively. When inmates are sentenced to life, the sheer amount of time they are given to reflect on their misdeeds is enormous, with countless hours available for them to languish in their cells. They have full knowledge that they forfeited large segments of the human experience, such as marriage, retirement, travel, raising children, and having a career. Not only would this serve as punishment which is arguably more gruelling than death, it would also exert psychological pressure on the inmate to come to terms with his or her decisions and misdeeds, to repent and make amends. In nations such as the United Kingdom and United States, religiosity in correctional facilities is higher than that of the general population, a sign that the convicted have at least tenuously repented and sought forgiveness from both the higher powers and the society they were once a part of. After all, justice seeks to be corrective, and such an approach towards life sentencing indeed allows inmates to reflect, develop as individuals and make amends to society through their labour or their participation or even formulation of programmes aimed at reducing crime or recidivism in a society. On the other hand, the death sentence drastically shortens the time the convicted has to reflect on his or her actions, leading many of the condemned to remain indignant and spiteful even as they approach the gallows. Not only may this lead to

• *Apt use of criminal jargon*

• *Interesting example used; choice of broad statistics rather than anecdotes is good*

• *Argues not just for his point, but offers counterargument as well for opposing viewpoint*

• *Contentious assertion as it is an absolute and almost accusatory statement*

• *Nice ending with a*

<p>anguish and feelings of further injustice on the part of the victims and/or their families, it also shows how the condemned does not feel guilty about their actions. In a sense, they died without having the ghost of their crimes haunting them.</p> <p>In conclusion, the life sentence is a better alternative to the death sentence, not just due to moral or philosophical considerations, but on practical, economic and social grounds. This is perhaps best epitomised in a quote from 19th century ideologue and death penalty opponent Karl Marx, who said "What use does society have for another corpse, when the convicted could labour in service of society".</p> <p>Comments:</p> <p><i>Perhaps the ethical viewpoint of prison labour could be further discussed to add depth to your discussion. Generally well thought out essay with evidence to substantiate main points, and appropriate use of relevant jargon and dramatic license to add accuracy and flair. However, a specific example could have been given for the last point. Examples are detailed and serve to reinforce the points earlier made in each paragraph. Starts and ends memorably.</i></p>	<p><i>relevant quote</i></p>
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Examine the view that a country should protect its own citizens first.

By Teow Junhao (16S51)

In recent years, countries have been turning increasingly inward, as we see political parties championing for 'citizens first' and anti-immigration movements gaining momentum. This is especially exemplified by the European countries of Britain and Germany, and even the United States, which has been traditionally viewed as one of the most open countries in the world. With the uneven effects globalisation has on different groups of people, citizens of many countries have been calling for their governments to protect their people first. Protecting the people can refer to safeguarding their safety and welfare, preserving their way of life, or protecting them from punishments in foreign countries. However, while countries should definitely protect their people first whenever possible, there are exceptions to this, such as when doing so hurts the welfare of a larger community.

The fundamental role of a country is that of a home to its citizens, a safe haven where its people can always seek refuge in times of trouble. Furthermore, it is the basic responsibility of a country to ensure the safety of its people. This would provide everyone in the world with basic security, as everyone could rely on their country of origin to keep them safe. For instance, when Singaporeans experience natural disasters while abroad, the first thought on their minds is to get home safely. This is further illustrated by the fact that countries tend to have their embassies in many different other countries, through which they can provide consular support when necessary. Embassies play the predominant role of assisting citizens of the respective countries they represent, in protecting the interests of their citizens. Besides such functions an embassy performs, it plays an additional, minor role in providing consular assistance like sending medical and financial aid to the people of other countries. In addition, citizens residing in their own country expect to be able to live in a safe environment. This is why countries tend to prioritise internal security and defence over international collaboration. A country can only provide help to other nations when its citizens' interest are protected. Hence, countries have the fundamental responsibility of protecting their citizens first.

Unfortunately, this issue is not a black-and-white one; it gets complicated when there are both locals and foreigners within the

- Gives a factual background to the topic and explains how the question is relevant now

- Identifies the issue and provides definition of the topic in question

- Plan of essay could be clearer by stating points to be debated in introduction

- Clear signal of counter-argument

geographical boundaries of a country. Such is the case in modern societies, with the endless stream of people across borders. Nevertheless, a country should protect the welfare of its own citizens first. This helps the government to get the political support it needs to continue leading the country. The mandate, which political leaders get through elections from the people, comes with a responsibility - to safeguard the interests of their people and their voters first. When political leaders do not put in sufficient effort to protect the interests of the people first, their popularity plunges and they are at risk of losing their grip on power. This issue has been reflected in new popularity polls of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who leads the pro-immigration Christian Democratic Union (CDU), where support for the CDU fell under the 30% mark for the first time in history. On the other hand, the anti-immigration, anti-refugee Alternative for Germany (AfD) party garnered an unprecedented percentage of vote share after campaigning to protect Germans' welfare first in the 2016 Berlin State elections. The defeat of CDU, according to political analysts, was in large part due to the Chancellor's refusal to cease her open-door policy for refugees. The Germans, who were already struggling with weakening physical infrastructure and dwindling standards in transportation services, now had to contend with overcrowding too, as over seventy thousand refugees were relocated to Berlin alone. This clearly shows the need for a country to protect its citizens' welfare before making provisions for foreigners. Therefore, protecting citizens' interests first is important, as it helps the government to secure political support.

However, it would be too naive a view to think that a country should always protect its citizens first. As with other areas of governance, nothing is absolute, and there are always exceptions. Countries should not protect their own citizens first, if doing so hurts the interests of the broader community in the region, as they are also obliged to be responsible players on the global stage. For instance, it is wrong for countries like Indonesia to shield their citizens from legal persecution if those citizens cause environmental troubles, such as chronic haze, to neighbouring regions. Companies in Indonesia use the cheap yet unsustainable slash-and-burn method to destroy large patches of forests annually, to fulfill their profit motive. This had not only led to health problems for the citizens of neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, but also economic consequences around the world, due to the ripple effects arising from economic losses in international financial hubs like Singapore. In a bid to protect some of its citizens, Indonesia has refused to disclose the identities of the local directors and companies who have contributed to the burning of forests, resulting in haze which

- *Topic sentence should be at the start to be clearer*

- *Use of signposting to indicate change in stand*

- *Example of Indonesia is relevant and well explained*

<p>has plagued the region for years. In such a case, a nation should protect the interests of the larger community in the region, which has been suffering due to the actions of a few citizens. In addition to safeguarding the interests of the broader community, countries should also give great consideration to the interests of society as a whole. An example of this would be the case of a Canadian who robbed the Standard Chartered Bank in Holland Village a few months ago. Despite the Canadian's government obligation to protect its citizens from persecution in foreign countries, it should not do so in this situation. Respecting the rule of law in a sovereign state like Singapore is of a greater importance than protecting their own citizen. Thus, countries should not protect their own citizens first, if doing so harms the welfare of the broader community of nations as a whole.</p> <p>In conclusion, I feel that a country should protect its citizens first. However, countries should be flexible, and assess the trade-offs in each unique situation before doing so. A country should not trade the welfare of the larger regional community or of society in exchange for the protection of a few of its citizens. The interests of its own citizens should not blind the country to the welfare of the wider community. In other words, while a country should protect its citizens first, it must recognize that it does not exist in a bubble, and should consider the interests of other nations, exemplifying the mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and the rule of law that exists.</p> <p>Comments: <i>Good, clear introduction. However, beware of example-driven arguments for the first topic sentence. In general, there are some insightful ideas with a good understanding of the issues at hand. A comfortable read that flows nicely. Answers the question and issue. Easy to read and understand. Sophisticated examples that show understanding and awareness of global current affairs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Example is unclear. i.e. did Canada protect its citizen? Avoid speculative examples</i> • <i>Begins conclusion by reiterating stand to tie up arguments above</i> • <i>Good call-to-action</i>
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